

Exception to the Line

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Exception to the Line

by [Cronebutcute](#)

Summary

Draco Malfoy has never been redeemed. He's simply been patient.

Hermione Granger ruined his chances of being the top of their class, outshone him at every turn, and then—like the perfect, insufferable angel she was—saved his family from Azkaban. She was a Mudblood, and she was better than him. That contradiction marked him forever.

For the past seven years, he has played the long game. He became respectable in her eyes, carved out a role for himself at the DMLE, and slowly, carefully, made himself indispensable. He became her confidant, her best friend. He cultivated every part of their friendship—curated what she needed, what she liked, what she deserved.

Because Hermione is exceptional. She's brilliant, sharp, devastatingly capable. And no one around her—not her fiancé, not her friends—ever made her feel like she was more than a burden to forgive or a standard to resent.

Draco doesn't just see her. He feeds the pride she's always been told to swallow. And he'll do whatever it takes to bring her into the world where she belongs—his world.

Because she deserves better.

And she deserves him.

Chapter 1: The best friend

Chapter Summary

The townhouse was only a few blocks away, tucked between pristine façades in a row of white-fronted townhomes like girls in a church pew. When they stepped inside, the lights rose softly in greeting.

It was warm. Spacious. Pale stone floors, high windows, shelves of Muggle records, and a grand piano he only played when she insisted. Above the mantle, a single painting—a storm of red and copper she once stood in front of for ten full minutes at a gallery in Notting Hill.

She toed off her shoes as soon as they were inside.

Draco followed her into the sitting room and flicked his wand. A bottle of wine and two glasses floated over from the kitchen.

“I’m sorry I owled you,” she said, voice low. “I shouldn’t have. I didn’t want to make this your problem.”

He turned sharply. “Please don’t say that.”

Chapter Notes

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

The restaurant was small, tucked between a florist and a perfumery in one of the quieter corners of Belgravia. From the street, it looked like a high-end slice of France—warm golden light, gleaming crystal glassware, a discreet staff who knew better than to ask for names. Half the patrons were pretending to be things they weren’t.

Draco had arrived twenty minutes early.

He always did, when it was her.

The maître d’ had seated him in a private alcove where delicate glass panels could be drawn, though he’d left them open for now. The white tablecloth was pristine, his wine untouched. The menu sat on the side, ignored—he already knew what she’d order, anyway.

He shifted in his chair, tugged at the cuff of his sleeve, and then stilled. Nervous energy curled tight in his chest, despite the fact that everything—everything—had gone according to plan.

This was the endgame. Years of careful work, deliberate choices. Becoming an advisor for the DMLE. Offering help during her creature rights proposals. Becoming her *friend*. Becoming the only one who *listened to her*.

All of it pointed to *this*.

To the townhome just down the street—an extravagant pied-à-terre he claimed was an old family investment but it had been purchased solely because she loved the opera, and he loved going with her. Several of his pure-blood acquaintances loved Puccini. And it wasn’t unusual for old families to be a Patron of the English national ballet, It was unusual to actually love it.

But she did. And she’d come with him, again and again. Laughed with him, eaten with him, talked about things that mattered to her.

Emotionally, at least, they’d already crossed every line.

Tonight, she’d cross the final one.

Unless she’s figured it out.

He swallowed hard, adjusted his watch for the fifth time. That gnawing voice—arrogant, treacherous—reminded him she was brilliant. She had *always* been brilliant. What if she traced back the breadcrumb trail and saw the manipulations for what they were?

What if she walked in furious?

What if she didn't walk in at all?

The seconds dragged. His mind chased scenarios, replayed conversations, reanalyzed expressions he had been so careful hadn't he?.

Then the door opened.

Hermione stepped inside, the maître d' nodding and moving to greet her, but Draco already knew—it had worked. He rose to his feet before she even turned toward the alcove.

Her eyes were swollen. Red-rimmed.

Draco's breath caught.

Oh, thank Salazar.

She'd found out. It had worked.

She looked like the world had broken under her feet—and still, she carried herself like it hadn't. Her shoulders were high. Her chin was set. She was unraveling, but she was determined to do it with dignity.

He adored her for that.

He stepped forward. "Hermione."

Her eyes lifted to his.

She didn't speak.

He pulled her chair open and gestured toward the seat. "Come sit. You don't have to—say anything yet."

She hesitated just a moment longer. Then she sat, and for the first time that afternoon, Draco let himself breathe—

She might finally be ready to be his.

He waited until she was seated and her wineglass was full, the waiter gone. The moment he did, her shoulders dropped.

She didn't cry.

Of course she didn't. She'd done that already, somewhere alone, somewhere she thought no one would see. What was left now was the sharp edge of devastation, the kind that made her words come out brittle and glass-thin.

"I'm sorry," she said, staring at the wineglass. "I shouldn't have come. I know this isn't—this isn't fair to you."

Draco reached for her pale hand. "Don't be ridiculous. I told you—anytime, for anything."

She didn't lift wineglass. Just curled her fingers around the stem, as though it might steady her.

"They're having a baby," she said softly.

Draco went still.

She wasn't looking at him. Her voice came slow, like her mouth had to force each word forward against some inner resistance.

"Ron and Padma. She's pregnant."

Draco inhaled through his nose, just loudly enough. *There it is.*

"She told me this morning," Hermione continued. "Apparently they weren't going to keep it. Or they weren't going to *stay together*. Or—I don't even know. She said she didn't want to hurt me. And that—Ron didn't want me to find out this way, but I knew she was pregnant she had all the symptoms."

Her lips twisted. "I don't know what that means. What way did he *want* me to find out? Through a letter? Over breakfast? At the baby shower?"

Draco's stomach twisted. He felt lightheaded, which was absurd—he'd orchestrated this moment. But hearing it out loud, in her voice, with her face looking like that—

"I'm so sorry, Hermione," he said, and it wasn't even a lie.

"I feel like I'm losing my mind," she said. "Everyone keeps telling me this *isn't them*. That there *has* to be an explanation. But this *is* them. This is *exactly* who they are."

She looked up at him finally. Her eyes were red and raw.

"You told me. You *warned* me. I just—I didn't want to believe it."

Draco's hands clenched in his lap beneath the tablecloth. A sharp ache bloomed behind his ribs.

"I wasn't right," he said quickly. "I mean—I never wanted to be right."

But she shook her head. "You *were*. You saw them for who they really are, and I—I just kept thinking that loyalty meant giving people endless chances."

He swallowed hard.

You were never right. You made it right.

It had taken months. Subtle spells and shifted schedules. Whispered rumors, misdirected owls. A potion to Padma's tea—only once. Just enough to help things along. Just enough to leave no trace. The fertility tincture had been slid into Ron's afternoon tea by an elf who wasn't even aware of the nature of it. None of it was criminal, not really. Not technically.

It was just... strategic.

"You don't deserve this," he said, because it was true.

Hermione exhaled, shaky. "They said they weren't going to *be together*. That they were going to try to *make it up* to me. Like—like I'm supposed to be *grateful*. Like I should thank them for staying apart while raising their child."

Her voice cracked. "And I couldn't even be angry. I just—thought about Molly. About the baby. I thought—I *can't take this away from them*. I can't punish a child for this. I can't keep a grandmother from her grandchild."

Her hand finally lifted the glass. She drank like someone who didn't taste it at all.

"I hate that I still care," she whispered.

Draco reached across the table, his fingers brushing hers. "Of course you care. You're not like them."

"No," she said, and this time the bitterness curled up with it. "No, I'm not. I'm the one who's always understanding. And now they're going to have every single thing I wanted—and I'm the one left behind."

Her voice dropped. "And Harry—Harry doesn't want anything to break. He doesn't *want* to believe it. He kept saying there must be a misunderstanding. That it wasn't *intentional*. That Ron still *loves* me."

She laughed, sharp and disbelieving.

"He can't pick a side. He never could. So I had to pick *mine*."

Draco leaned forward.

"I'm on your side."

Hermione looked at him, and there was something fractured and searching in her expression. She looked like someone who hadn't been believed in for a long time.

"You're better than any of them," he said quietly.

She said nothing. Her fingers trembled.

Draco watched her drain the wineglass and set it down with careful precision, her fingers just starting to tremble.

He signaled the maître d' with a flick of his hand. "We're not staying."

Hermione blinked up at him. "What?"

"We'll have it delivered," he said, already rising. The maître d' appeared at his side like clockwork. "Didier, send everything to the townhouse. We're walking. Just have the garçon bring it to the downstairs entrance."

"Draco—"

"No," he said gently but firmly. "We're not doing this in public. You deserve better, doll."

She opened her mouth to protest, but he cut her off before she could start. "Please. Just—this once, listen to me."

She looked at the untouched starter on the table. Her shoulders sagged.

"All right," she murmured.

The townhouse was only a few blocks away, tucked between pristine façades in a row of white-fronted townhomes like girls in a church pew. When they stepped inside, the lights rose softly in greeting.

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He turned sharply. "Please don't say that."

She blinked at him.

"You've done more for me than anyone ever had to," he said. "You saved my entire family. No one would've blamed you if you hadn't. The least I can do is be here while your relationship falls apart."

"Draco—"

"Let me be a good little ferret and actually fix something for once," he said, pressing a wineglass into her hand. "It's not a trial testimony, but I don't think you'll need one this time."

Hermione let out a rough laugh. "Don't count on it. I might eventually."

He smiled. “Noted.”

She didn’t cry, but her eyes shone again.

“You’re staying here tonight,” he said. “You’re going to the blue bedroom—the one you like—and you’re going to sleep.”

“I can’t—”

“Yes, you can. I have dreamless sleep, brewed it myself.” He lifted a hand before she could argue. “You’re taking the blue room. Non-negotiable.”

Her lips parted in surprise.

“And while you’re in there,” he continued, “I’m sending elves to collect everything from your flat. Your books. Your clothes. Your favorite kettle. That hideous blanket with the otters on it—everything that’s yours.”

She let out a quiet, half-horrified laugh. “You can’t just—”

“I can. And I will. And you are not going to argue.”

Her eyes narrowed. “You’re not my keeper.”

“No,” he said, utterly calm. “I’m your friend. Your best friend. The one who sat through that *truly* awful production of *Carmen* because you liked it. Yes, I’m calling that one.”

She stilled.

“You don’t need to work right now,” he added. “You’ve got, what—eight months of unused vacation?”

Hermione flushed. “Seven.”

“Even better. So you’ll write to Healer Rownna Greaves—” he smirked when she flinched “—and take two months off. Starting now.”

“That’s absurd.”

“And when all your things are here,” Draco said smoothly, “we’re going to the Adriatic Sea.”

She stared. “Draco.”

“You need rest. Distance. Perspective.”

“I can’t go on holiday for two months!”

“Why not?”

“I have patients! A job. A life I can’t just—vanish from.”

“Yes, you can. And frankly, you should.”

She let out a strangled laugh. “I’m not some heiress you can sweep away to your summer estate.”

“No,” he said, “you’re something rarer. A brilliant witch with at least ten private practice offers waiting. And a best friend who happens to be fabulously rich and currently underemployed. With a house on the coast. And no higher priority than getting you to breathe again.”

Her mouth opened. Closed.

He stepped closer, voice soft now. “Let me do this. Just once.”

A long, quiet breath passed between them. Then she dropped her gaze.

“Fine,” she whispered. “Just... don’t get in a fight, all right?”

Draco smiled. “Absolutely no promises.”

It took him a couple of hours to be sure comfortable enough that she was asleep and she would not wake up but He had work to do

Draco stepped into the flat. Hermione’s wand let him through the wards without resistance—the magic recognizing his hand as if it had been hers.

He was dressed in sleek black robes, a little too fine for the occasion. (Yes, he had changed for this.) Three house-elves flanked him, already moving with sharp precision. Books, potions, clothing—tagged with a flick of his fingers and levitated into neatly charmed trunks.

A minute later, the Floo flared.

Harry was pacing. Ginny stood by the window, arms crossed, her expression like a brewing storm. Fred and George were perched on the arm of the sofa, far more serious than usual.

When Harry saw him, his hand shot to his wand. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Draco lifted a brow and reached calmly into his coat. He held up Hermione’s wand.

“She sent me to collect her things.”

George nudged Fred. “This is going to be fun.”

Harry stepped forward. “You can’t just take everything—”

“I can. And I will.” Draco turned slightly. “Start with the bedroom,” he told the elves. “Anything with her magic, anything that smells like her, anything she’s touched in the last year. All of it.”

“You don’t get to decide—” Ginny started.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Draco cut in, voice sharp. "I thought you were her friends. Am I mistaken?"

Ginny's mouth opened, stunned.

"Of course you're on your brother's side," Draco continued, silken with contempt. "Can't let the family look bad. Even when one of you knocks up another one's best friend."

Ginny flushed, furious. "That's not fair—"

"It's *entirely* fair," Draco snapped. "Ron fucked her friend. At the hospital. Where Hermione works. Where she *trained* Padma. And you all expect her to—what? Forgive them?"

Fred and George didn't say a word.

Harry's jaw tightened. "We didn't say that."

"No?" Draco turned, voice cold. "Then what did you say, Potter?"

Harry hesitated. "I said... we should talk. That there must be some kind of explanation."

Draco gave a short, bitter laugh. "There was. He cheated. Padma's pregnant. Do you know what they offered her?"

He didn't wait for a response.

"They offered to end the pregnancy. Or to raise the child separately. Just to make Hermione feel better. Like that's mercy. Like they're doing *her* a favor. So she could choose—terminate it, or let the kid grow up in a fractured home while she clung to the scraps of a broken engagement."

George exhaled through his nose, like he didn't know whether to laugh or swear.

"She was supposed to *choose* that," Draco went on. "And what—be grateful?"

Ginny opened her mouth again. "She's just—she's blowing it out of proportion. It's not—"

"*Blowing it out of proportion?*"

Draco turned to her. Something in his face went cold and flat.

"Her fiancé. Slept with one of her closest friends. At her workplace. And you think *Hermione's* the one overreacting?"

Ginny crossed her arms tighter. But her face went pale.

"She isn't making *enough* drama," Draco said viciously. "She didn't hex him. She didn't destroy the flat. She didn't tell your mother. She just left. Quietly. And gave *me* her wand so she wouldn't have to be the villain *again*."

Harry's fists clenched.

“She doesn’t want to talk to any of you,” Draco finished. “Not until she feels better. Or until you stop being selfish. And frankly, I don’t see either happening anytime soon.”

“You think you’re helping her?” Harry asked, voice rising. “You think you’re better for her?”

“I know I’ve been a better friend to her this week than any of you.”

“This is a misunderstanding,” Harry growled.

“Oh, of course.” Draco’s tone went razor-thin. “Hermione Granger—the brightest witch of her age—must be *confused*.”

“You’re twisting it.”

Draco stepped forward. Close enough to make Harry tense.

“What are you going to do, Potter?” he asked, voice quiet and lethal. “Curse me? Go on.”

Harry’s hand twitched near his wand.

“Do it,” Draco said. “Give her one more reason to see how little you’ve changed.”

Fred finally stood, hands up. “Alright. Everyone take a fucking breath.”

Draco turned to the elves. “Take the last trunk to the bedroom. We’re leaving in five minutes.”

No one moved to stop him.

Ginny’s voice cracked through the room like a curse.

“Oh, come on, Draco. We all know she’s been fucking you.”

Silence.

Harry turned sharply. Fred straightened, startled. George’s expression twisted in disbelief.

“Jesus, Ginny,” Fred muttered. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Don’t be disgusting,” George said, sharper.

Draco didn’t move.

When he spoke, his voice was calm—but sharp enough to slice glass.

“No.”

Ginny let out a bitter laugh. “Don’t act innocent. Everyone’s seen it—your stupid little outings. The dancing and singing Muggles. You think we didn’t notice how she only ever

wants to go with *you*? ”

Draco’s jaw tightened. “You mean the things none of you ever gave a damn about? ”

“Oh, please—”

“No, really.” His voice cut clean. “She asked Harry. She asked Ron. She asked *you*, Ginny. Again and again. And every single time, she got some variation of: *that’s boring, that’s not my thing, why don’t you go with Malfoy if you love it so much?* ”

Ginny’s face darkened. “She didn’t beg—”

“She *begged*, ” Draco said, louder now. “She begged you lot to care. And you rolled your eyes. You mocked her. You called her pretentious for wanting anything more than a pint and a Quidditch match.”

He took a step forward. Not threatening—just enough to make his presence impossible to ignore.

“You’re poorly read. You’re undereducated. You’re from a completely different class of people than she is—and she *put up with it*. She *lowered herself* every day. And when she asked—*kindly*—for things that might have made you better, you mocked her for that, too.”

Ginny’s arms stayed crossed, but her flush deepened.

Draco’s voice dropped again. Cold. Final. “So yes. We went to the ballet. We went to the opera. We went to lectures and gallery openings and bookstores with entire floors dedicated to topics she couldn’t *stop* thinking about. Because I *enjoyed* it. Because none of you *ever* made yourselves available to her.”

Silence.

“And for the record, ” he said softly, “she’s my best friend.”

Ginny scoffed, but it had no force.

“She didn’t choose me *instead* of you, ” Draco added. “She chose me because you were never there for her.”

He turned, slowly, to Harry—who hadn’t said a word. Who was staring at the floor like he’d been hit.

“That says more about all of you, ” Draco said, “than it does about me.”

He walked to the door without looking back.

The elves followed.

Hello, yes I don't know why I start this one if I have the other one unfinished and yet another one that is to be posted, any way please enjoy but mind the tags, I don't know where I'm going but it's Toxic

Chapter 2: The birthday wish

Chapter Summary

She stormed through the open doors to the balcony, shoulders set and spine rigid. Draco sighed.

He didn't follow right away.

When he did, the air had cooled. Hermione stood at the balustrade, the gold in her gown catching the afternoon light.

"You look like a ghost from Rome," he said quietly playing with the sash of her dress. She didn't turn around.

He stepped behind her, just close enough for the warmth of his body to reach hers.

"You're impossible," she said.

"And you," he said, voice gentle now, "are ruining your own birthday."

She exhaled, shaky. "I'm sorry."

Chapter Notes

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

Midnight 16, September, 2005

The fire crackled in the black marble hearth, casting golden flickers over the crystal decanter Lucius had already poured from. The study smelled of bergamot and old smoke, the air still heavy with midnight.

He didn't look surprised to find Draco already there.

His son was standing when he arrived—hands behind his back, pacing once along the length of the desk, too restless to sit, too taut with satisfaction to disguise it.

Lucius closed the door behind him.

“You know,” he said mildly, “there was a time when dramatic nocturnal visits implied duels or debts. Not... plain good news.”

Draco finally sat, but it was the stillness of a man who didn't know what else to do with his hands. He looked wired. Intent. The silver in his eyes sharp enough to split glass.

“She's asleep. In Belgravia.”

Lucius poured him a drink with unhurried elegance. “Are you leaving soon?”

“We leave at dawn. Villa Vila is ready.”

Lucius nodded. “Good. The sea air will do her good. She looks thin.”

“She forgets to eat when she's stressed,” Draco murmured.

“And you will take better care of her” Lucius noted, then turned toward the fire. “Tell me, did she cry?”

“No.”

Lucius gave a pleased hum. “Even better.”

Draco didn't respond. His fingers tapped once on the arm of the chair.

Lucius took a sip of brandy, then glanced sidelong at his son. “So. You did it.”

Draco exhaled, almost a laugh. “I told you I would.”

“I never doubted you'd destroy the engagement,” Lucius said with faint, satisfied cruelty. “But the friendships? That was more ambitious.”

Draco's smile was thin. "They did it themselves. I just... added pressure."

Lucius chuckled. "You always did prefer long games. Delightful, really. The Weasley boy's weakness was always written in him. Smaller men crave praise. Strong men don't need it."

Draco's jaw flexed, but he said nothing.

"And how's our Hermione?"

"She's Angry," Draco said. "But not sad. Mostly angry about being humiliated like that. It's better that way."

"Grief leaves openings," Lucius agreed. "Anger closes doors."

Draco nodded.

Lucius crossed the room to the cabinet behind his desk. He unlocked the lower drawer and retrieved a green velvet case, the Black family seal embossed faintly in gold.

He set it before Draco without a word.

Draco opened it slowly.

Inside was a bracelet of fine gold, delicately woven, its pattern intricate and alive, like dragonhide rendered into lace. It shimmered with old, expensive magic.

His breath caught.

"I remember this," he said. "Grand-mère Black wore it to my first Winter Ball. I couldn't stop staring."

Lucius's mouth curled. "You asked if it was dragon skin."

"She said she would save it for me."

"She did," Lucius confirmed. "Your mother retrieved it from the vault two years ago."

Draco's fingers hovered above the bracelet, reverent. "She'll love it."

"She should," Lucius said. "It's been worn by only three women. It's not meant for just anyone."

"She's not just anyone."

"No," Lucius agreed. "She's exceptional. The press will keep their mouths shut."

Draco looked up.

Lucius waved a hand. "I'll manage it. Nothing in the papers until you return. If they ask, you're abroad consulting. No comment on the Weasley affair."

Draco nodded once. “I’ll owl you from the coast.”

Lucius raised his glass. “Do.”

He paused, watching the firelight flicker across the gold in his son’s hands.

“You’ve done well,” he said. “I underestimated how long you were willing to wait.”

Draco’s smile was faint, but his eyes gleamed. “You always said patience was a Malfoy virtue.”

Lucius took another slow sip. “And it is.”

18, September, 2005

Villa Vila overlooked the sea like it had been carved out of light and stone. Pale walls, blue shutters, languid laurels. The air was thick with salt and rosemary and the soft hiss of distant waves against the cliffs. From the terrace, you could see the old city of Dubrovnik—orange rooftops tucked inside ancient white stone walls, the horizon painted in ribbons of sun and sea.

Hermione was barefoot, legs dangling over the edge of the cushioned lounge chair, a book splayed forgotten across her lap. Her hair was wild from the wind, and there was a smudge of something—sunblock? honey?—at the corner of her mouth.

Draco walked out of the villa holding two glasses of chilled pear wine and handed one to her. She accepted it without looking, eyes half-closed, skin warm with sun.

“Did I tell you,” she said lazily, “that I think I’m going to die here?”

Draco leaned against the railing beside her. “You say that every time I feed you on a balcony.”

“Well, this time I mean it.”

He smirked and took a sip. “Should I cancel the spa appointment, then?”

Hermione groaned. “No, Merlin, don’t. It’s the only reason I agreed to wake up before noon.”

A silence stretched between them, soft and easy. It had been like that for days now—slow mornings, long walks, private swims in enchanted coves, dinners under stars. They hadn’t talked about London. Not really. She hadn’t asked how he’d packed her life into trunks or what Harry had said. He hadn’t told her how much effort it took to keep her name out of the Prophet.

But it hung in the air. Quiet. Waiting.

“I keep thinking I should feel worse,” she said suddenly. “About everything.”

Draco didn’t look at her. “You don’t.”

"No," she said. "I don't. I thought I'd be angry forever. Or humiliated. Or just..." She sighed. "Shattered."

"You were," he said gently. "You just didn't stay that way."

Hermione tilted her head back. The Adriatic wind brushed her cheeks. "I keep remembering things. Bad things. Then I remember that I'm here. With you. And I laugh. And it feels *wrong*."

Draco turned to her, calm and all smile. "It's because you don't remember how to be selfish, doll,"

Hermione looked at him with sharp eyes, and took his wine from his hand and drank it in 2 careful sips.

"but dot worry is coming back to you, You are after all just like me an only child, its on our upbringing."

Hermione studied him. "You might be right Mr. Malfoy."

"Because it's true."

"No." Her voice lowered. "You say it so I don't start feeling *pity* for them."

Draco's lips twitched. "And is it working?"

She laughed—soft and reluctant. "Unfortunately."

He took her hand, just briefly, and then released it. "They are a pitiful bunch true, they just have taken so much of your time, we have better things to do with your time."

"We do hu?"

He gave her a lazy shrug. "Until you find someone better."

She looked at him, one brow raised.

"Which," he added, "is going to be a challenge. I'm told I'm insufferably charming and very, very rich."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You forgot petty."

"Oh, that too."

They both smiled. There was a moment—quiet, suspended—where the sea breathed with them, and the city glittered below like a spell.

Then she said, "I don't think I want to go back. Not yet."

"You don't have to."

"I know. That's what scares me."

Draco looked at her then—really looked at her. “Then let me keep taking care of things. Just until you’re ready.”

She didn’t answer right away. But she didn’t say no.

Instead, she raised her glass, clinked it gently against his.

“To petty billionaires who know how to pick a villa,” she murmured.

“To the smartest woman I know finally learning,” he replied.

19 september, 2005

The dress came in a velvet box the color of old parchment. Inside, nestled against cream tissue, was a white Dior gown—light as air, embroidered with gold.

It had a square neckline and a flowing silhouette that fell just above her ankles. The sleeves were short and puffed, the sash caught at the shoulder with a delicate clasp shaped like a sprig of olive branch.

Hermione had gasped. “Draco—this is...”

He leaned against the doorframe, arms folded. “It reminded me of those books you reread all the time. The ones with the heroines that need to marry money and the awkward men—with money—who fall in love with them.”

She touched the silk reverently. “It looks like something from a painting.”

“My great-grandmother would’ve approved.”

Hermione smiled. “She had taste.”

Draco’s smirk was subtle, but real. “She did.”

Lunch was set on the terrace under gauzy shade. The sun was warm. The sea glittered. The breeze played with the hem of her gown.

They were halfway through grilled seabass and chilled wine when Hermione reached for the stack of parchment she’d left beside her plate.

“I was hoping I could send a note,” she said lightly. “Just to Harry. Or Ginny.”

Draco didn’t look up from pouring the wine. “No.”

She blinked. “Excuse me?”

“My owl’s tired. She just got back from Zagreb. Can’t fly that far today.”

Hermione stared. “Are you serious?”

He looked up, cool. “Very.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“She flew overnight. You don’t care about owls anymore?”

“Don’t be condescending.”

“Then don’t ask to ruin your birthday with people who haven’t earned the right to hear from you.”

Her voice went sharp. “They’re my *friends*.”

Draco set the bottle down. “Were.”

She shoved her chair back. The legs scraped the stone. “I can’t do this.”

She walked barefoot across the tile, the silk of her Dior dress swaying like sea foam. She stormed through the open doors to the balcony, shoulders set and spine rigid.

Draco sighed.

He didn’t follow right away.

When he did, the air had cooled. Hermione stood at the balustrade, the gold in her gown catching the afternoon light.

“You look like a ghost from Rome,” he said quietly playing with the sash of her dress.

She didn’t turn around.

He stepped behind her, just close enough for the warmth of his body to reach hers.

“You’re impossible,” she said.

“And you,” he said, voice gentle now, “are ruining your own birthday.”

She exhaled, shaky. “I’m sorry.”

He blinked. “What?”

“I’m sorry for being difficult.”

He allowed a smile. “I’m glad you are.”

She looked over her shoulder. “Glad?”

“You’re always so forgiving and reasonable. It’s good to see you be a brat. Means you’re finally thinking of only you, even when poor Athena is exhausted.”

Hermione’s mouth twitched. “Athena can rest, My friends will be fine.”

Draco nodded. “I know.”

She hesitated. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For not letting me ruin my birthday.”

Later that evening, after she’d curled on the sofa with a book she hadn’t really been reading, Draco returned from the kitchen with a delicate square of custard and cream on a porcelain plate.

Her skin, already golden from just a few days beneath the Adriatic sun, prickled with a kind of slow, radiant warmth as she looked up.

He looked effortlessly smug. Barefoot, sleeves rolled to the elbows, his dark mark visible, a thing he was only comfortable with her and few other, hair mussed. Gorgeous and quietly pleased with himself—as if the world had unfolded exactly as he meant it to.

She blinked. “What is that?”

“Kremšnita.”

She sat up. “You made poor Athena carry those from Zagreb—”

“I sent her yesterday.”

Her brows lifted. “You sent your owl all the way to Zagreb for cake?”

“It’s the best there is,” he said simply, setting the plate on the table before her. “And it’s your birthday.”

She stared at the pastry. Then at him.

There was a sudden tightness in her chest—guilt, maybe, sharp and fleeting. He’d just wanted to surprise her. And she’d gone storming off, convinced he was being a controlling prat her life.

He was—sometimes. But not this time.

She studied him for a beat longer, this complicated man who played arrogant annoying aristocrat—but who, here in this sunlit villa, brought her cake and always made her feel special.

She swallowed the lump in her throat.

“You’re ridiculous.”

“Possibly.”

She smiled despite herself. “I do love Kremšnita.”

“And you almost missed it.”

She picked up the delicate silver fork and took a small bite, the layers of vanilla custard and flaky pastry dissolving on her tongue.

Before she could take a second bite, Draco flicked his wand with a subtle twist.

A single gold candle appeared atop the slice of Kremšnita, slender and burning with a soft flame that shimmered like a star.

Hermione blinked. “What is that?”

“A candle,” Draco said, as if it were obvious.

“I can see that.”

“Then you know what to do.” His tone was light, but there was something serious in his eyes.

Hermione looked at the flame. The air shifted slightly, the scent of vanilla and candlewax mingling with the sea breeze from the open windows.

Draco leaned a little closer. “Wish for something.”

She hesitated, fork poised, eyes fixed on the flickering gold.

What could she wish for?

There was nothing she wanted—not right now. Not in this villa. Not in this moment with him.

So she wished for more of this.

Just this.

Another birthday like this.

She leaned in and blew out the candle.

The flame vanished like a whisper.

Draco said nothing, but he smiled in that quiet way he always did when he’d given her exactly what she never asked for.

And finally, she took another bite.

The record player, enchanted to play only what the listener’s mood demanded, crackled to life sometime after dusk.

She’d hummed some half-forgotten melody—something old, nostalgic—and the villa, like a loyal old friend, remembered. The vinyl shifted, caught the tune, and played it back with a faint hiss of magic and dust.

Draco extended his hand.

The candlelight from the table behind him traced golden shadows across his face.

“Dance with me.”

She hesitated.

But the floor was smooth beneath her bare feet, and the night air smelled like salt. The lights of distant villas blinked across the coastline. The waves below whispered like a lullaby. She was still barefoot. Still in her ridiculous, beautiful silk dress.

She took his hand.

They danced—slow and swaying. His hand at her waist, hers resting against his chest. The music circled around them, soft and delicate, and so did they.

He held her a little too long.

She didn’t pull away.

When the record stuttered to silence, they kept moving, caught in the same rhythm.

Hermione leaned her cheek against his chest.

Draco lowered his mouth to her ear.

And he began to sing.

Not with irony. Not with dramatics.

But low.

And warm.

“Happy birthday to you,” he murmured, the notes husky and quiet, carried on his breath.

“Happy birthday to you...”

His lips didn’t quite touch her ear, but she could feel the vibration of every syllable in the space between them.

“Happy birthday, dear Hermione...”

She closed her eyes.

His hand tightened ever so slightly at her back.

“Happy birthday to you.”

Her breath caught.

And then they both burst into laughter—giddy, wine-drunk, unreasonably happy.

Her curls tickled his jaw. He didn't care.

In that moment, Draco thought—*this* is what happiness is.

Just *her*.

In silk.

In his arms.

his.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this chapter left you with the same warm, giddy feeling I had while writing it. Ever since I was a very young girl, I've been in love with the Adriatic Sea—thanks to a snippet I once read about a princess with a castle on a cliff that felt like the prow of a ship. That dreamlike, fairytale feeling is what I hoped to capture here.

If you've never heard of the Adriatic, I urge you to look it up—it's one of those places that truly looks like it slipped out of a storybook.

The next chapter will jump back in time, so yes... you may have to endure a few indignities involving Ron and Hermione's past. But trust me—it makes what's coming even sweeter.

And yes, the Dior dress mentioned here is real: Spring 2005 Couture, Look 36/44. These were my college years, so the fashion is seared into my brain. As you've probably guessed by now, I love writing my pure-bloods as highly educated in Muggle luxury and the arts. You'll see even more of that soon.

Please enjoy—and thank you for reading!

Chapter 3: It's just about art.

Chapter Summary

“There’s a 24-hour place in Marylebone. They do the best breakfast at any hour.”

His eyes narrowed. “Muggle London?”

“No one will spit on your food there.”

He gave her a long look. “You’re dangerously persuasive.”

They left through the Floo, and for the first time, Draco Malfoy ate eggs in a cracked ceramic plate with a Muggle-born war hero in a neon-lit café full of cabbies and hungover tourists.

It was terrible.

It was perfect.

They started meeting once a week for 3 am breakfast at the end of her shift.

March 3, 2000

Tate museum, London *Malfoy Family Sponsored Wing: “Myth and Empire”*

The event was small, discreet. A new wing of modern Muggle art, tucked inside a private institution somewhere between Knightsbridge and South Kensington. Draco was only there because the Malfoy family had “culturally supported”—read: donated an eye watering amount of money—and a restoration spell that stabilized the building’s leaky magical foundation. He didn’t particularly care that much for buildings but Muggle painting was mesmerizing.

But this was a social obligation, and his mother had refused to be seen.

So Draco came.

He was sipping passable champagne and mentally cataloguing escape routes when he saw her.

Hermione.

She stood near a still life painting, talking to a group of Muggles with effortless poise. Her curls were pulled back in a soft twist, and she wore a dark green dress with simple lines and elegant cuffs. Emeralds gleamed in her ears. She laughed at something, not loud or shrill—just *right*. She carried a champagne flute in one hand, and she had the unmistakable look of someone completely at home.

Draco stilled.

He watched her.

Of course she would like museums.

Of course she would care about brushstrokes and light and meaning. Of course she would care enough to understand these things. And not just understand them—*belong* to them.

It was then—while watching her chat about early 20th-century abstraction with a Muggle professor—that something clicked, hard and final, in his mind.

She wasn’t raised like the Weasleys. Not even like Potter.

She had *manners*. She knew how to dress. How to speak. How to be quiet when it was appropriate and sharp when it mattered. How to carry herself like someone who had *roots*, not like she’d stumbled into power by accident.

Draco's grip tightened slightly on his glass.

She had been born into the wrong class of magic. That was all. Everything else—the intelligence, the poise, the hunger for knowledge, the control—it was there.

And *he* had noticed it first. Back at Hogwarts.

She had beaten him in every subject except Potions.

And even then—it was Snape. Snape had *cheated* for him. He *knew* it.

It would've been less humiliating if she'd simply taken the top spot. But knowing it was only his godfather's favor that kept her from a perfect record—

It had haunted him.

And then came the war.

Late summer, 1998

Wizengamot Trial Chambers, Level Ten, Ministry of Magic

The air inside the chamber was stale with tension and old magic. Velvet-lined benches held half the Wizengamot, many still in mourning black, some in Ministry crimson. The war had left its marks in grey hair and hollowed cheeks. Even the enchanted ceiling hung heavy with a somber haze, unwilling to mimic a clear sky.

Lucius Malfoy stood like a man carved from marble, the line of his jaw tight, his cane polished but unused. Draco sat beside him, spine straight, robes immaculate. They had rehearsed for this. The bow of the head. The apology without pleading. Contrition, but never weakness.

And still, it wasn't enough.

Until she rose.

Hermione Granger—hair smoothed, spine steel, voice unshakable—stepped into the chamber with the kind of composure that made men forget she had once been a girl in a school uniform. She wasn't speaking for her friends. She wasn't speaking for vengeance.

She was speaking for *them*.

For *him*.

Draco could barely breathe.

Her words weren't soft. They weren't forgiving. She outlined Lucius's complicity in brutal detail. Named what Draco had done—and had failed to do. But she also recounted Narcissa's lie to Voldemort. Draco's defection, quiet but real. The ways Lucius had—perhaps selfishly, perhaps not—chosen to cooperate right after the war. She reminded them of what they all were now: survivors, compromises, rubble rebuilt into people.

It wasn't mercy.

It was *judgment*.

And they listened.

Because it was Hermione Granger, the Golden Girl, standing there like a flame in the dark. Her approval was the final currency. She was the last stroke of gold on the ledger—the seal that sanctified every backroom deal Lucius had bought and every whispered favor Narcissa had traded.

When she finished, the chamber was silent.

The Malfoy family would not go to Azkaban.

Draco looked at her and knew that the rest of his life had already shifted.

That year—*eighth year*—he spent cleaning up what little remained of his name. Of his House.

Draco Malfoy had never been kind. But he kept the Slytherins in check—every last one who returned. No more slurs at her. No more snide looks. He made it safe enough for her to return, he made her untouchable.

She had finally taken what had always been hers: the top of every class. And for once, he did not resent it.

24 June, 2000

Daunt Books, Mayfair

A Release Party for *Modern Healing Theory: Post-War Application*

Draco had been invited by accident.

Or possibly out of spite—Theo had forwarded the invitation with a note that read: *If you're bored of opera, here's another form of intellectual torture. Bring a flask.*

He hadn't expected to go. He certainly hadn't expected *her*.

Hermione stood near the back of the room in a soft sage-green jumper, a glass of white wine in her hand, speaking animatedly to a group of middle-aged publishers with stained cuffs and fading combovers. Her hair was longer than he remembered, her posture straighter. Her eyes sparkled as she spoke—none of the strain he recalled from war briefings or Wizengamot trials.

She looked good.

She looked happy.

There was no ring on her hand. No bracelet, either. *Did the Weasleys keep the old ways?* he wondered absently. *Surely not.*

It shouldn't have mattered. He shouldn't have noticed. He certainly shouldn't have felt anything.

But he did.

Ron arrived late. Kissed her cheek, offhand and rushed. Then disappeared toward the table with snacks, clearly disinterested in the program. He never came back. By the end of the third lecture, Draco saw him slip out toward the pub down the street.

Hermione's face fell for half a second. Just a flicker. Then the smile returned—practiced, bright, exhausting.

Draco lingered near the biographies, pretending to read. Watching.

He hadn't come here for anything.

And yet—

Somewhere between the fourth and fifth speaker, she scanned the room—and saw him.

Her eyes widened, ever so slightly. Her smile tilted, surprised. Pleased?

She crossed to him during the break, a plate of shortbread in one hand and her wine glass in the other.

"Malfoy," she said, amused. "I didn't know you had a taste for fringe Medical publishing."

He gave a lazy shrug. "I heard it would be intellectually punishing. Theo recommended it."

She laughed, openly. "That does sound like him."

"I came for the shortbread," he added, deadpan.

"Well," she offered him one from her plate, "then your evening won't be a total loss."

He took one, carefully. Their fingers didn't touch.

They stood there, awkward and easy all at once.

Hermione sipped her wine. "So what *are* you doing these days?"

"Potions research," he said, surprising himself by answering honestly. "And a private course on ancient magics. Mostly theory. Some inheritance work."

Her eyes lit up. "That sounds incredible."

He blinked.

"You're lucky," she said, turning toward him more fully. "To just study. To think. I wanted to do something like that after school—but I ended up at St. Mungo's. Healing takes all your time, especially as a junior."

"You like it?"

"I do," she said softly. "It's frustrating. Beautiful. Terrifying. I feel useful."

Something flickered in her eyes—something fierce and exhausted. She looked at him like he was a whole world she hadn't touched in years.

"Bloodline curses are part of your ancient magic track?" she asked.

He nodded. "That's my current focus. Transmission across generations—ritual pathways, familial resonance, things like that."

Her expression sharpened. "We had a case like that. A young man with trace markers of something old and binding—but no known ancestry to trace it, muggleborn, probably descendant of a depleted magical line."

"I can send you my notes," he offered, without thinking. "If you're interested."

Hermione looked up at him, startled. Then smiled.

“Yes,” she said. “Very much.”

Summer – Autumn 2000

They began exchanging notes.

What started as Draco sending her his latest research on hereditary hexes became a quiet ritual. Once a week, sometimes twice, she'd owl back with commentary in the margins and a list of articles from obscure journals he hadn't considered. He sent better parchment. She returned it annotated. It was absurdly intimate, in its own academic way.

When he finally included a copy of a rare French monograph, she sent him a book in return. First edition. On magical etymology. It smelled like old paper and ink and affection.

He didn't say thank you. But the next time he owled her, he addressed her as "Granger, Archivist Extraordinaire."

She didn't say thank you either. But her reply began, "To the most pretentious of potion theorists..."

12 December 2000

A case came through the hospital—a child with a rare magical anemia, one that resisted standard blood-replenishing charms. Hermione sent Draco the chart by Hospital owl.

He responded within the hour.

His translation of a 14th-century Venetian remedy turned out to be the key. The child recovered.

Hermione didn't send thanks.

Instead, she sent a hand-drawn diagram of the revised charm. It was... beautiful.

4 March 2001

It was near the end of her shift when Draco arrived at the emergency ward with a blistered palm, quiet and biting as ever.

“What did you do?” she asked, examining the burns.

“Exploded a cauldron,” he muttered. “Trying to recreate a Sumerian reflux matrix.”

Hermione raised a brow. “With your hands?”

“With the wrong kind of stirring rod. I thought it was inert.”

She healed him with two charms and some salve.

“You could’ve just owled me,” she said dryly. “I would’ve told you metals absorbs ambient enchantment, should have used muggle glass.”

He smirked. “And miss the pleasure of your bedside manner?”

It was past midnight by the time he was cleared to leave. She changed out of her robes, hair twisted up haphazardly, and asked if he’d eaten.

“No,” he said, honest and a little surprised.

“There’s a 24-hour place in Marylebone. They do the best breakfast at any hour.”

His eyes narrowed. “Muggle London?”

“No one will spit on your food there.”

He gave her a long look. “You’re dangerously persuasive.”

They left through the Floo, and for the first time, Draco Malfoy ate eggs in a cracked ceramic plate with a Muggle-born war hero in a neon-lit café full of cabbies and hungover tourists.

It was terrible.

It was perfect.

They started meeting once a week for 3 am breakfast at the end of her shift.

4 July 2001

3:14 AM — Corner of Warren Street, Muggle London Some dodgy chippy near King's Cross with terrible lighting and excellent fare.

Hermione huffed, slumping into the cracked booth like a defeated general.

“I missed them.”

Draco looked up from his toast. “Missed what?”

“The Bolshoi,” she groaned. “They released tickets at midnight and I forgot. Everything good is gone.”

He blinked. “This is a Muggle problem, I assume?”

“Russian ballet,” she said, tossing her bag onto the table. “They’re only in London for two weeks. I wanted to see *Giselle*.”

Draco stirred his tea. “I know what the Bolshoi is Granger, I meant if muggles go off at midnight to buy tickets”

“Yes, well on the phone.”

“Charming.”

She gave him a look. “It’s beautiful. The footwork alone—”

“Again I know THAT,” he said, amused. “My family has seats.”

Hermione froze mid-grumble. “What?”

“For the ballet,” he said, casually sipping. “We’ve had a box at the Royal for generations. Grandmother was obsessed with *Swan Lake*.”

“You have seats?”

“Yes. Reserved, technically. Nobody uses them except my mother, and she’s in France.” He paused. “She hates the Russians anyway. Claims the Bolshoi men are ‘too sharp.’” He mimicked Narcissa’s disdainful sniff.

Hermione blinked. “You’re joking.”

Draco leaned back, one arm draped over the booth. “You can use them, Granger. Bring whomever you like. Just send word so I can get you the tickets my parents would be

delighted you use them.”

Something flickered in her face—delight, then hesitation, then something quieter. She looked down at her tea. “That’s... very generous.”

He shrugged.

“I mean—” she faltered. “I’d feel awful imposing.”

“You’re not,” he said flatly. “They are never used, Father enjoys opera but finds ballet to be ‘bourgeois Frenchmen and limp-wristed boys.’”

That made her smile. But it didn’t quite reach her eyes.

He tilted his head. “Problem?”

She shook her head. “No. It’s just—It might be awkward to have a whole box, no one I know would go with me.”

Draco blinked. “Potter?”

She snorted. “Right, why even ask?”

“He can’t even sit thru a movie.”

“Ron would sooner attend a goblin tax review session than sit through ballet.”

Draco lifted an eyebrow. “He seems the type.”

Hermione stirred her spoon slowly. “I just wish my friends would be a bit less indifferent.”

The words hung between them. Private. Unpretentious. Real.

Draco tapped his finger on the edge of his plate.

“I’ll go,” he said.

Hermione looked up, startled.

“I like *Ballet*, better than reading alone at home, I already do that most days.”

“You’d go?”

He nodded once. “Just tell me the date.”

Hermione studied him, uncertain. Then—softly, slowly—she smiled. Really smiled.

“Alright then.”

4 June 2002

Saint Mungo, emergency ward

Draco winced as he slid off the examination bed, one hand pressed to his ribs. “I told you I didn’t need to stay overnight.”

“You said that before I saw your x-rays,” Hermione said, already scribbling something onto his chart. “You’re lucky you didn’t rupture something.”

He smirked. “I’ve taken worse falling off a broom.”

“I’m sure you have,” she replied without looking up. “But it’s still internal trauma, Draco. You can’t just magic your spleen back into place.”

“Shame,” he muttered, then glanced toward the staff corridor. “You on shift now?”

She nodded. “I’m covering for one of the new interns.”

His brow arched. “Something serious?”

“She’s getting married,” Hermione said, with a shrug that tried to seem light. “Took four weeks’ leave.”

Draco stilled. “Four weeks?”

“She’s going abroad for the ceremony. Magical coastal villa. White dress. Ridiculous cake. The whole thing.”

He scoffed. “Sounds excessive.”

She shot him a look. “I think it’s sweet.”

He watched her a moment too long. “You’re still with Weasley? I assumed you’d be married by now.”

Hermione laughed—too quickly. “Not even engaged.”

“Why not?”

“We’re not in a hurry,” she said, breezy and flat, like a line she’d rehearsed. Said too often to sound like truth.

Too breezy. Too flat.

Draco tilted his head. “You’ve been together for what—three years?”

“Four.”

His jaw tensed.

She looked back at her notes. “He’s not the grand gesture type.”

Draco crossed his arms, ignoring the throb in his side. “Is he the bare-minimum type?”

Her hand froze.

He pressed on. “Just trying to figure out the category. Because if I waited four years for anything, I’d start wondering if I was being taken for a ride.”

She didn’t respond. But her lips pressed together too tightly.

He shifted the tone, softened it.

“You’re still the only witch I know who’ll work through dinner,” he said, glancing at the time. “Have you even eaten?”

“Oh,” she blinked. “No. I haven’t had time yet.”

“Of course you haven’t,” he muttered. “Has anyone brought you anything?”

“No, but I’m fine. I’ll grab something later.”

He stared at her.

She didn’t even hear herself. Didn’t realize how normal it had become for no one to care if she was fed. Or rested. Or remembered.

The anger hit him like a fire behind his ribs.

At Ron.

At all of them.

And just as he was about to say something cutting, she reached into her healer’s satchel and placed a small wrapped parcel on the edge of the bed.

“I almost forgot,” she said. “It’s nearly your birthday, isn’t it?”

Draco blinked. “What?”

“in a couple of hours, actually,” she said. “Isn’t it?”

He nodded slowly, caught off guard.

The wrapping was neat—navy blue paper, a precise knot of gold ribbon at the center. He unwrapped it carefully, fingers brushing the edge of a matte booklet.

Sheet music.

Muggle sheet music. Advanced. Obscure. Challenging.

“Liszt and Rachmaninoff,” Hermione said, watching his reaction. “Some of the more ridiculous pieces. I thought they might finally prove a challenge.”

He turned the book in his hands, silently. The pages smelled like fresh paper and ink and something impossibly clean.

“You remembered,” he said, almost under his breath. “About the piano.”

“Of course I remembered,” she said, suddenly shy. “You said you were running out of things that were hard enough.”

Draco didn’t speak for a moment. Then he closed the book gently and set it on the table.

He looked at her—really looked at her.

Too tired. Too thin. Still smiling like she owed it to the world.

And still, she’d remembered his birthday.

No fanfare. No gesture for attention. Just a wrapped gift chosen with impossible precision—a rare collection of Muggle piano scores only someone who had listened to him, truly listened, would have found.

It was personal. Thoughtful. Intimate in a way that undid him.

She was sitting there in her lime bright uniform, her curls tied back with a ribbon that didn’t match, her wand tucked behind her ear like an afterthought. She hadn’t eaten. She’d just stitched someone’s insides back together. And somehow, she’d made time for this.

For him.

A flicker of heat curled low in his chest. Possessive. Final.

That was it.

That was the moment Draco Malfoy made up his mind.

Ron Weasley had to go.

Ron was wasting her.

Hermione Jean Granger—Muggleborn, yes. But more magical than half the sacred twenty-eight. Sharp as a blade, loyal to a fault, and brave in ways that would shame most Gryffindors. Her blood might not be old, but her magic was—deep, strange, feral in its strength. It hummed in his bones.

What was a single drop of hers in the Malfoy line?

A gift.

An improvement.

Draco breathed slowly, the piano book resting on his knees like a vow.

She wasn't a compromise. She was the prize.

And he would not lose to a boy who didn't even know how to value her.

12 October, 2002

Millbank, London – 6:45 a.m.

The city was still quiet when Hermione stepped off the Tube and into the silver-wet hush of early morning. Millbank smelled of rain, riverwater, and coffee—sharper at this hour, more honest. The street glistened under her boots as she walked toward the Tate Britain, the Thames at her back, her breath rising faint in the chilled air.

She wasn't due to meet Draco for another fifteen minutes. He was never late—not to things like this—but she'd come early anyway.

The museum loomed ahead, pale and proud behind wrought-iron gates. Its windows glinted faintly in the dawn, and beyond the side entrance she could already make out the quiet rustle of early staff and signage for the members-only preview. The Dutch exhibition. Private hours. Closed to the public until midday.

It felt secretive. Exclusive. Magic, in the older sense of the word.

She wrapped her coat tighter, her heels soft on the damp stone.

Rembrandt. De Hooch. A rarely-exhibited Vermeer on loan from a private Dutch estate. She'd read about the curation months ago. Had even sent an owl asking for the gallery notes.

Draco had invited her weeks after she had mentioned the upcoming exhibit, with a raised eyebrow and a folded invitation. *Of course we have access. A few of those were ours until the '80s.*

He'd arranged the morning. Told her he'd meet her just before seven. Promised her the curator himself, if she wanted.

And she did want.

She should've been thrilled.

But guilt tugged, sour and familiar, beneath the thrill.

It was Sunday. She was supposed to be at the Burrow in a couple of hours.

Molly would already be basting the roast with rosemary and salt. The twins would be charming the potatoes into dueling and calling it “family entertainment.” Ginny would tease her about her hair. Ron—if he was even awake—would be somewhere with a hangover and a cup of tea, grumbling about dusting or Quidditch or his back.

And she had lied.

She'd told them she was covering for a healer at St. Mungo's. Research obligations, she said.

She hadn't said anything about the Tate. Or about Draco.

They all knew, of course, that she'd become friends with him over the last year. He'd helped with a few curse cases. Dropped off the odd ancient potion book. Even Ron had come to see it as a convenience—it kept him from having to come to "the boring things."

But this—this was different. This wasn't a work-related favor. This wasn't research. This was...

Something for her.

She could hear it now: *The Dutch masters*? Ron would've blinked. *That's, like... flowers and milkmaids, right?* Fred and George would've made some joke about *milky virgins*. Molly would've looked quietly disappointed. *Still clinging to your Muggle roots, dear?*

None of them would have come with her.

But Draco had. Draco had arranged the curator.

And there he was now, already by the gate.

A long black coat, charcoal scarf, one hand tucked in a pocket, posture relaxed but unmistakably waiting for her. The light caught in his hair, softening it to silver.

She slowed.

The guilt didn't vanish.

But it softened.

She wasn't missing anything new. Not really.

And what lay ahead—those perfect, echoing halls, golden light on old paint, a morning without translation or apology—that *did* matter.

She adjusted the strap of her bag. Lifted her chin.

And walked toward him.

January 14, 2003

Southwark, Apparition Point near the flat

“I told Greaves I’d meet the specialist team at the Ministry entrance,” Hermione said, wrapping her scarf tighter as they reached the cobbled circle near the alley. “Something about cursebound protocols. New case.”

Ron kissed her cheek, distracted. “Don’t let them rope you into another twelve-hour shift.”

“I won’t,” she said, already stepping back. “I should be home before midnight.”

The air shimmered as she Disapparated.

She landed five minutes later near Millbank, the wind sharper here, the Thames curling cold at the edge of the street. Her heels clicked briskly against the pavement. Draco would already be there—he was never late.

This was the fifth time this month she’d lied.

Ron knew about the ballet. But galleries were different. They came in waves. Temporary exhibits, limited openings. This one—post-war brutalism—was already overdue.

She’d mentioned it, once. Ron had asked why she didn’t bring Arthur along.

Just—no.

Arthur Weasley treated the Muggle world like a delightful but inferior curiosity. He would’ve asked why the walls were exposed, why the lighting was dim, why it didn’t look *finished*.

And Ron?

He wouldn’t have asked at all.

So she lied.

And told herself it didn’t count.

Not really.

May 21, 2003

Belgravia, London

Draco opened the wrought iron gate with a flick of his wand. “It’s nothing grand. Just an old property I had refurbished.”

Hermione paused at the threshold. The townhouse was narrow and elegant, all clean lines and cream stone, tucked discreetly between embassies and embassies-turned-flats. Inside, it was all pale light and deep wood, shelves already filled with records and first editions. A single painting hung in the parlor—a Turner, stormy and soft.

“You live here?” she asked, breath catching.

Draco shrugged. “Not really. Just needed somewhere close to the opera. It’s quiet.”

She turned slowly, taking it in. “You furnished a house near Covent Garden... for the opera?”

“For you,” he said, too easily. “So you didn’t have to apparate in an alley, it’s a bad look.”

July 16, 2003

Annual Spring Exhibition at the Huntington Club

They had not arrived together. Not technically. She'd spotted Draco near the glass sculpture installation, drink in hand, already being courted by two bored heiresses.

But when Lucius approached—impossibly elegant in tailored robes—he came directly to Hermione.

“Miss Granger,” he greeted, tone light. “Or may I say Healer Granger?”

She smiled, cautious. “Either is fine.”

To her shock, he gestured at a painting behind her. “That’s a Laskovic. Draco said you favored this modern stuff.”

Hermione’s throat caught. “He is very observant, I do.”

Lucius’s mouth twitched. “He is. Especially when it matters.”

For the rest of the night, not a single brow raised in surprise as she remained at Draco’s side.

January 29, 2004

After the Ballet, on the Walk Back from Covent Garden

She still had glitter from *The Firebird* on her shoulder. The music echoed in her ribs.

“He said what?” Draco asked, low and even.

Hermione grimaced. “He wanted me to skip tonight. Said ballet was ‘posh rubbish.’”

Draco’s jaw flexed.

“I snapped,” she admitted. “Told him maybe if he’d read a book, he wouldn’t feel so defensive. That he could spend every night in a pub and still never be interesting.”

Draco’s lips curled. “And?”

“He apologized.” Her voice was quieter now. “And I felt... awful.”

Draco shook his head. “Don’t. You were right.”

Hermione looked up at him.

He met her eyes. “You’re not cruel, Granger. You’re exhausted from lowering yourself for people who refuse to rise.”

She exhaled. Let herself believe it.

For the first time in weeks, she stopped feeling guilty.

3:45 am March 23, 2004

That horrible midnight breakfast place Hermione loves.

They were sitting at their usual table in the horrid place, warded with a charm Draco had installed himself to dampen outside noise. Hermione was halfway through her soup—he always made sure she ordered soup—and he was tracing the condensation on his wineglass with one idle finger.

“Theo saw them,” he said, casually. “Padma and Weasley. Together. At the Leaky.”

Hermione didn’t look up from her spoon. “It’s not illegal to have friends, Draco.”

“Mm. No.” He let the pause stretch just long enough. “I just didn’t realize Padma Patil was so easily impressed.”

Hermione’s spoon paused.

“I mean,” he added, playing with his fork, “she’s not unintelligent. Good marks. Better instincts than her sister. But any woman who finds *Ronald Weasley* dazzling must be... a little starved for options.”

Hermione huffed a laugh, dry and unimpressed. “You’re awful.”

“Am I wrong?”

“No. But still awful.”

He smiled, sharklike. “I just think it’s a waste. She could do better. So could you, for that matter.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, but her mouth twisted—half amused, half thoughtful.

And just like that, the seed was planted.

Late, July 2004 – After the Theatre

Belgravia, Drawing Room

They were still laughing when they walked through the front door.

Hermione kicked off her heels as soon as they crossed the threshold, one hand braced against the wall, the other holding her clutch. Draco had already loosened his tie, jacket tossed carelessly over the arm of the settee. The house smelled of cedar and something herbal—the remnants of the enchanted candles Hermione always noticed but never commented on.

“That bit with the long cravat,” she gasped, breathless, “I thought I was going to choke on my laugh.”

Draco grinned, rare and genuine. “Even *Weasley* would’ve laughed, I think. Assuming he could put together a decent outfit to get through the door.”

Hermione gave him a look, part fond, part warning.

“What?” Draco said, eyes wide with mock innocence. “I’m only saying—his shop’s doing well, isn’t it? Surely he can afford trousers that don’t look like they came from a charity bin.”

Hermione raised a brow, settling onto the velvet bench near the fireplace. “You’ve been keeping track of his financials now?”

“Hardly,” Draco drawled. “But everyone in Diagon Alley can see the queue outside that place. And yet—no ring. Not even a respectable bracelet.”

She blinked. “I don’t need one.”

“No one *needs* one,” he said, crossing to the sideboard and pouring them both glasses of elderflower cordial, no wine tonight. “That’s the point.”

He brought hers over and sat beside her—not too close, but enough that the heat of him teased against her sleeve.

She took a sip, letting the sweetness linger. “You’re impossible.”

“I’m right.”

“You’re at it again.”

“You’re deflecting.”

Hermione rolled her eyes—but the smile tugging at her lips betrayed her. “Well then,” she said lightly, tilting her head toward him, “it’s a good thing I loved the earrings you gave me for my birthday.”

Draco leaned back, smug. “Of course you did. I have impeccable taste.”

“You had them enchanted to change to match my outfit.”

“I had them enchanted to detect mood shifts and shade accordingly.”

“Oh,” she said, blinking. “That explains a lot.”

He sipped his drink. “I noticed they went dark blue whenever Weasley walked into the room.”

She snorted. “They go dark blue when I’m tired, Malfoy.”

“I rest my case.”

Hermione chuckled, curling her legs beneath her. The fire crackled softly. The air was warm, still threaded with laughter, but something else hummed beneath it.

A truth too obvious to name.

Neither of them said it. Not yet.

Chapter 4: A knife in the dark

Chapter Summary

Lucius set his glass down, fingertips tapping once against the crystal.

“I’d have preferred you marry someone tasteful and forgettable. A name that wouldn’t make waves. But we’re Malfoys. We have never been known for choosing what’s simple.” He paused, gaze narrowing. “Covetousness is in the bloodline. In you, it’s... pronounced.”

Draco didn’t deny it.

He only watched the fire catch the light in his father’s glass, and said nothing at all.

Chapter Notes

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

Fall 2004

Lucius Malfoy private office

The fire burned low in the hearth, casting gold and shadow over the heavy furniture and carved bookshelves. A decanter of firewhisky sat untouched beside Lucius's elbow. He held a single glass, half-full, the color of old amber. He didn't sip it. He was watching Draco.

Draco stood by the tall window, hands behind his back, perfectly still.

Lucius finally spoke. "You've made your disinterest in every respectable match I've sent quite clear."

Draco didn't turn. "They were dull."

"They were *suitable*," Lucius corrected. "Unremarkable, perhaps, but not without charm"

Draco let the silence sit a beat too long.

Lucius exhaled slowly. "You're spending all your time with her, I'm not a fool."

Draco said nothing.

"You could at least spare me the insult of pretending it's platonic. You've been seen everywhere—Muggle exhibitions, lectures, a political dinner in Soho. And this week you declined Lady Selwyn's daughter for the third time."

Draco finally looked over. "She is terribly dull."

Lucius snorted faintly, but didn't smile.

"I assume we're serious about Hermione Granger then?" he asked, voice now like a scalpel—light, precise, unforgiving.

"Yes," Draco said simply.

Lucius studied his son's face. Then, slowly, he leaned back into his chair, the fire catching on his silver hair.

"Well," he said, lifting his glass, "it's not the most foolish choice you could have made."

Draco raised a brow, slightly thrown.

Lucius went on, coolly. "The Malfoy name could benefit from alignment with a war hero. The right war hero. There's power in rewriting the narrative—and she, for better or worse, now *is* the narrative."

He sipped once, eyes half-lidded. “The public would call it progress. The Ministry would call it reconciliation. And the family—” he gave a dry smile “—will survive it”

Draco didn’t answer.

Lucius’s voice lowered, more pointed now. “And before you inflate this into an act of rebellion, understand—this is not *unprecedented*.”

Draco tilted his head. “How it’s not”

“Before the Statute of Secrecy, the Malfoy line—like many of the old lines—occasionally married Muggle-born witches.” He said it cleanly. No hesitation, but no warmth, either. “Never Muggles, mind you. We have standards. But witches with power, born into the right kind of Muggle families—moneyed, respected, *useful*—were sometimes brought in. Quietly. For fresh blood. For land. For longevity.”

Lucius swirled the firewhisky in his glass, watching the amber ribbon catch the firelight.

“Too much of the same blood pollutes the line. The Gaunts taught us that. Even the Blacks...” He paused, then added with a faint smirk, “And yes, I know—your mother is the best of them. But she is also... singular.”

Draco’s mouth twitched. “You’re romantic tonight.”

Lucius’s eyes sharpened. “No. I’m a realist. If you’re determined to deviate from pureblood tradition, then let it be for someone who can elevate the name—socially, magically, and above all, politically.”

He took a slow sip. “And she is, well. Singular in that regard, too.”

Draco turned to face him fully. “She’s still engaged.”

Lucius arched a brow. “So was your mother. And to someone far more contractually binding than Miss Granger. The right offer—matched with the right conviction—has undone stronger bonds.”

Draco blinked, faintly relieved.

“Until vows are spoken,” Lucius said, dry as parchment, “nothing is final. And between us...” He allowed himself a sliver of a smile. “Who in their right mind would choose a Weasley over a Malfoy?”

Their laughter was quiet, clipped. A little cruel.

Lucius let the smile fade. “I’ve heard about your renewed interest in our Muggle holdings.”

“I’ve accompanied her to several institutions.”

“So I gathered. Museums. Libraries. The more ‘cultured’ side of charity.”

Draco said nothing, just offered the smallest nod.

Lucius set his glass down, fingertips tapping once against the crystal.

"I'd have preferred you marry someone tasteful and forgettable. A name that wouldn't make waves. But we're Malfoys. We have never been known for choosing what's simple." He paused, gaze narrowing. "Covetousness is in the bloodline. In you, it's... pronounced."

Draco didn't deny it.

He only watched the fire catch the light in his father's glass, and said nothing at all.

11 August, 2004

Mr. Mulpepper's Apothecary, Knockturn Alley.

Draco leaned against the counter of the apothecary in Knockturn, flipping through a ledger when Ron Weasley trudged in, hair damp with sweat, robes disheveled. They nodded in the way old school rivals did—begrudging acknowledgment.

“You hear it’s Padma Patil’s birthday?” Draco said casually, not even looking up. “Best friend of your girl, right? Practically family.”

Ron blinked. “Er. Yeah, I guess.”

Draco closed the ledger with a snap. “You should send something. Flowers. Women love that sort of thing. Especially healers—they never get proper thanks.”

Ron frowned. “D’you reckon?”

“Pansy has a florist now. Exclusive. Could sort you out. Orchids, maybe. Or irises. Admiration and wisdom. Fitting.”

Ron grunted, but by sundown, a thin box of exotic blooms was on its way to St. Mungo’s. Padma found them on her desk the next morning, her name written in a loose, messy scrawl.

18 August, 2004

Twilfitt & Tatting's.

Daphne Greengrass took her tea with too much lemon and not enough sincerity.

Padma Patil hadn't meant to stay long—she was only meant to weigh in on sleeve treatments and review two swatches for her mother. But she'd accepted the tea before she realized the trap had already closed around her.

"I was surprised to run into Hermione at the Rowle's event," Daphne said lightly, fingertips brushing a bolt of sapphire velvet. "Then again, she's practically glued to Draco Malfoy these days."

Pansy Parkinson made a sound into her teacup—half snort, half sip. "It's sweet. All that ancient blood, reformed by earnest brilliance and good posture."

Padma frowned. "They're just friends."

"Of course," Daphne agreed at once. "But really, the amount of time they spend together? And Malfoy is... well. He's rather beautiful, isn't he?"

"Sharp men always are," Pansy said with a wistful sigh. "It's the cheekbones. Or the cruelty."

"You know," Daphne went on, plucking a silver clasp from the accessories tray, "I ran into him and Hermione outside the Wimbourne lecture. She looked radiant."

"She always does around him," Pansy said breezily. "I've always said they'd make an excellent couple. They're into the same dull things—museums, ballet, complicated wine."

Padma didn't say anything. She was still thinking about Ron.

"You know who's actually quite fit these days?" Daphne added, voice sweet with calculated venom. "Ron Weasley."

"Mmm," Pansy agreed, languid. "Tall. Surprisingly broad."

Padma blinked. "Ron?"

"Wasted on a girlfriend who clearly has other interests," Daphne said, with a shrug too casual to be real.

Padma hesitated. "He's... he's not bad, actually. I mean. Not a brute. He remembered my birthday."

That got Pansy's full attention. "Did he?"

Padma nodded, cheeks faintly pink. "He sent flowers to the ward. Thoughtful. No one else remembered."

"Well, then," Daphne said smoothly, eyes alight. "Maybe he's looking for options."

Padma looked down at her tea.

She didn't notice the smirk Pansy and Daphne shared over the rim of their cups.

3 November, 2004

St. Mungo's, Staff Lounge – Midday

"I heard you managed to get tickets to the Ballycastle–Vratsa match," Padma said, peeling an orange with far more precision than was necessary. Her tone was casual, but her eyes—sharp as always—were locked on Hermione.

Hermione looked up from her chart notes. "Oh. Yes. I did."

"You never said."

"I... haven't figured out what to do with them yet," Hermione said, flipping a page she wasn't reading. "There's a Ministry estate tour that same day. Research group. Ancient protective wards—I don't want to miss it."

Padma tilted her head. "So you're skipping the game?"

Hermione nodded, tucking a curl behind her ear. "I thought Ron would be excited, but I forgot to tell him. It's late notice now anyway."

"Give them to me."

Hermione blinked. "What?"

"The tickets," Padma said, popping a wedge of orange into her mouth. "If you're not using them, let me. I'm a huge Vratsa fan, and I don't want them wasted."

"Oh—yes. Of course," Hermione said, relieved. "You're the best, Padma."

Padma's smile was faint. "You're lucky I like you."

Hermione chuckled and went back to her notes. Padma watched her a moment longer, then added, casually:

"Would you mind if I asked Ron to come with me? Seems a shame not to use both."

Hermione looked up, startled. Then she smiled. "That's a great idea. He'd enjoy it more with someone who actually knows the game. Honestly, thank you."

Padma stood, smoothing her uniform skirt. "No problem."

6 November, 2004

Ballycastle Stadium – Vratsa v. Bats

The weather was crisp and bright, the kind of cold that bit at the edges of cheeks but still smelled like autumn. The stands were full. Padma had already charmed three people into trading for better seats. Ron looked like he'd never been that close to the pitch in his life.

"You're a Quidditch genius," he told her between bites of roasted nuts. "How do you know so much about the Vratsa lineup?"

Padma shrugged, tucking her gloved hands under her cloak. "We grew up watching them. My grandfather played. Besides, I needed something to keep me from going spare during Healer training. You know Hermione's top of our year again?"

Ron made a face. "Even now?"

Padma nodded. "And she doesn't even seem to try as hard anymore. It's maddening. But I like her."

Ron blinked. "Yeah. Me too."

She gave a small smile, then nudged him with her elbow. "Listen, if Hermione's stuck with another one of her emergency shifts next week, you should drop by mine for dinner. I always cook too much. Recipes don't work when I try to cut them down."

Ron hesitated. "She said she's on a double most nights this month."

Padma arched a brow. "Is she?"

Ron looked confused.

Padma didn't press. Just turned back to the game, voice light. "You'd be saving me from another week of curry leftovers. I promise the portions are big and the food's better than anything at the pub."

Ron grinned. "You've got yourself a dinner guest, then."

Padma smiled, but didn't look at him. Her eyes stayed on the match.

She didn't notice the guilt until later, but it sat low and warm in her stomach.

December 31, 2004

Ministry of Magic – New Year’s Gala, Atrium Ballroom.

The chandeliers glittered above like inverted star fields, each one enchanted to flicker with slow bursts of gold and silver. Velvet draped every bannister. Champagne floated by on trays balanced by silent, gliding elves. Somewhere beyond the crowd, a string quartet transitioned into a lilting waltz.

Draco had claimed a prime position near the bar, a drink in one hand and a smile that could cut glass in the other.

“You clean up well,” Padma Patil said, stepping beside him in a midnight-blue robe that shimmered like ink. Her hair was pinned with tiny opals, her earrings deliberate.

“So do you,” he said smoothly, offering her the better of two flutes from a tray. “Try this one. Less fizz, more taste.”

She accepted it with a pleased nod just as his eyes flicked across the room—sharp, hunting.

There.

Hermione.

Draco’s smile didn’t shift, but the tension in his shoulders relaxed by a degree. She looked perfect, as always, even if her date was already dragging her down.

Ron was in bottle-green robes that didn’t fit at the shoulders and gaped awkwardly at the cuffs. The cravat was a travesty.

Padma followed his gaze and winced. “Merlin’s sake. Doesn’t she *see* it?”

Draco made a tsking noise. “She’s Muggleborn, Patil. She doesn’t know about these things.”

Padma gave a short, surprised laugh. “Still. You’d think she’d notice when the sleeves look like someone else’s.”

“She needs a man who knows how to dress himself,” Draco murmured, his voice low, confident, amused.

Padma’s laughter bubbled up again, just as Hermione and Ron drew closer—Hermione bright-eyed and flushed from the cold, her curls pinned up with star-shaped clips.

Draco stepped forward, greeting them both with polite indifference, and then turned to Hermione with the full wattage of his charm. “They’ve moved the auction pieces to the east hall. You said you wanted to see the Beauxbatons screen—shall I show you?”

"Oh—yes, please," Hermione said, her voice eager. "Ron, do you mind?"

Ron blinked. "Uh—"

"Actually," Draco said smoothly, turning to Padma, "do you think you could help Weasley with his cravat? I'm sure he'd prefer not to be walking around like he's been attacked by it."

Padma smirked, already reaching for Ron's shoulder. "Absolutely. I was going to say something anyway."

Hermione gave a quick kiss to Ron's cheek and disappeared with Draco toward the east hall, already deep in conversation about antique magical tapestries.

Ron looked after them, vaguely baffled.

Padma turned him toward a side mirror. "Hold still. I'm fixing this. Honestly, I don't know how she lets you out of the flat like this."

He shrugged. "She's busy. I dress myself."

"Yes," Padma said dryly, "*that's* the problem."

She loosened the knot and redid the cravat with brisk efficiency.

"There," she said, satisfied. "You're not a scandal anymore."

Ron grinned at her. "Thanks, Padma. You're the best."

"I aim for dignity," she said, brushing an invisible crease from his shoulder. "Come on, dance with me. The band's actually decent this year."

Ron blinked again. "Er—sure."

Padma led him to the floor just as the strings swelled into a more upbeat number.

Behind them, far out of view, Draco and Hermione stood before the enchanted glass screen, her laughter ringing clear through the stone hall.

Up on the mezzanine balcony, above the noise and gilded nonsense of the gala, Neville Longbottom leaned against the banister with a half-finished glass of firewhisky in hand.

Beside him, Pansy Parkinson tilted her head as she watched the scene unfolding below—Draco leading Hermione off toward the east wing like they were already married, Padma adjusting Ron's robes like she was practicing.

Their eyes met. Pansy's lips twitched.

Neville snorted. "You want a drink?"

“Obviously.”

He returned a moment later with a neat pour of something pale and fragrant. She accepted it with a nod of thanks.

“Going to run to Potter and tell him?” she asked, arch.

Neville raised an eyebrow. “If those two don’t break it off soon, it’s going to be *awful*.”

Pansy sipped her drink. “You think?”

“I’ll say something,” Neville said mildly, “if they ever actually set a date.”

Pansy laughed, low and pleased. “Oh, that’ll be never then.”

Neville smirked. “What about *your* friend? Any chance he’ll stop circling and *do* something?”

Pansy rolled her eyes. “Who knows what he’s waiting for. Maybe for her to figure it out. *Smartest witch of her age*, and all.”

They both laughed.

Neville offered her a hand. “Dance?”

Pansy arched a brow. “Just one.”

“Of course.”

May 17, 2005

Ministry Atrium, mid-afternoon.

The Ministry atrium hummed with its usual weekday blur—floors polished to a mirror shine, owls overhead, and tired junior clerks dashing between lifts. Ron Weasley stepped out from Magical Law Enforcement, tugging at the collar of his robes and muttering about bureaucrats.

He almost walked straight past Draco Malfoy.

“Oi—Malfoy,” Ron said, surprised but not unfriendly. “Didn’t think I’d see you here today.”

Draco, impeccably dressed and visibly bored, raised a brow. “We can’t all work nine-to-three and call it service to the people.”

Ron smirked. “S’not like that. Hermione’s the busy one these days.”

“Is she?” Draco asked idly, as though the name meant nothing.

“Yeah. Always at the hospital. Always ‘on call.’ We barely even see each other lately. She’s exhausted all the time, and it’s like... she’s not really there. Not with me.”

Draco tilted his head, the picture of concern. “Do you think something’s distracting her?”

Ron frowned. “You mean... someone?”

Draco shrugged. “When someone becomes distant, it’s usually because their attention is elsewhere.”

That made Ron laugh.

“Oh, come on,” he said. “The only person Hermione sees more than me is you. And I’d have to be mental to be jealous of you.”

Draco's expression didn't shift. “Would you?”

Ron grinned, oblivious. “She’s a Muggle-born. I mean, no offense, mate, but you wouldn’t.”

There was a pause.

Draco’s voice, when it came, was soft. “No offense taken.”

Ron, missing the undertone entirely, rubbed the back of his neck. “Anyway, I reckon she’s just stressed. Probably jealous I get to hang out with Padma now and then. Padma’s been really nice lately. Good cook, too.”

Draco's eyes narrowed just a fraction. "She is pretty. And kind. Thoughtful."

Ron shrugged. "Yeah, she is."

"Maybe Hermione's just not used to sharing your attention," Draco said smoothly. "You've been a bit spoiled, haven't you?"

Ron laughed again, but it rang hollow this time. "Maybe."

Draco's mouth curved faintly. "Careful, Weasley. If you're not paying attention—someone else might."

Ron blinked, confused. "What?"

Draco didn't repeat himself. He just nodded once, and disappeared toward the lifts without waiting for goodbye.

Ron watched him go, brows drawn, a flicker of unease rising in his gut without knowing why.

The study was silent, lit only by the low flicker of the fireplace. Draco stood over a carved desk, holding a small glass vial between two fingers.

A house-elf appeared beside him with a soft *pop*, bowing low.

"Follow Ronald Weasley," Draco said, voice low and cold. "Everywhere. Every day."

"Yes, Master."

Draco held the vial out. The potion inside shimmered faintly, iridescent and thin as memory.

"Three drops," he instructed. "Each cup of tea he drinks. Nothing more."

The elf nodded solemnly.

"No one must see you," Draco added, tone clipped. "And never touch his food. Just the tea."

Another bow.

The elf vanished.

Draco stood very still for a moment, watching the firelight dance in the glass decanter by the window.

He didn't smile.

But he felt better.

A little.

Chapter End Notes

So this is the deal my Darlings, you lot don't tell my therapist the things I write and I don't tell yours the stuff you read... 

Because we all saw Hermione ditching Ron in that ball like a hot potato but we are all going to look the other way!

But seriously now, this story is very very short, 6 chapters in total, they are all finished up more or less, next chapter is done and I will post every Wednesday? do we like Wednesdays? ... it's almost Wednesday in the east coast right?

But I do enjoy to see Draco bringing up the worse on every single one of the people he touches.

Chapter 5: Orange blossoms in the fall.

Chapter Summary

She liked being the thing he couldn't resist. The one woman in the world he would burn for. Ruin himself and his blood for.

She had always wanted to be special.

And Draco Malfoy—the cruellest boy she'd ever known—had built her a throne of his worship.

Chapter Notes

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

20 November, 2005

Villa Vila not so early morning.

Hermione woke to the scent of almonds and citrus—and the quiet, unmistakable clink of porcelain.

Her eyes blinked open against the gauzy morning light spilling through the villa shutters. Her head ached faintly—just a whisper, the ghost of last night’s wine—and her limbs felt deliciously heavy against the linen sheets.

She sat up, slowly.

Draco was standing in the doorway of her bedroom, tray in hand, framed by the pale gold light behind him. His hair was still mussed, his sleeves rolled, and his shirt—white, too crisp for anyone awake before ten—was half-buttoned with practiced carelessness.

He shouldn’t be there.

He’d never crossed the threshold before.

But he was.

And he looked, somehow, utterly at home.

“Good,” he said casually, stepping inside. “You’re not dead. I told the elves I’d bring your breakfast if the villa was too silent after nine.”

Hermione blinked. “You brought me breakfast?”

“Don’t act so shocked. It’s your last week here. I’m being generous.”

He set the tray gently on the side table—silver pot of strong tea, fresh mandarin slices, and a flaky almond pastry dusted in powdered sugar.

Hermione stayed frozen for a beat too long, the sheets curled around her like a shield.

“I wasn’t expecting you to... come in,” she said.

“You left the door open,” Draco replied, unbothered. “Besides, I’m the one that dragged you to bed last night.”

She huffed, reaching for the tea. “Fair.”

“You are a very talkative drunk. And it haunts me.”

His tone was light. But something flickered beneath it.

He was fidgeting—subtle, restrained, but real. A thumb rubbing the side of his ring finger. A shift of weight. Restlessness, edged with something else.

“I have a plan,” he said suddenly. “You’re not tired yet. The weather’s clear. And there’s a church I’ve been meaning to drag you to.”

“A church?”

“Sixteenth-century crypt. Baroque frescoes. Probably cursed.” He crossed his arms. “You haven’t dragged me to any the whole week.”

She laughed, then bit into the pastry. “If you promise lunch after.”

“Naturally. I’ve made a reservation.”

She arched a brow. “You’ve planned the whole day?”

“Well.” He stepped back toward the door. “Mostly.”

Before he left, he paused and reached to the hallway side table.

He retrieved a slim, rectangular box wrapped in pearl paper and laid it carefully at the foot of her bed.

“It’s cold today,” he said, too casually. “And that ancient thing you call a coat belongs in a museum.”

She unwrapped the box slowly.

Inside was a coat the color of a cloudless sky—**soft pastel blue**, with dark horn buttons and a high, fitted collar. The lining was silk, the seams enchanted against the wind. The tailoring was exquisite.

Hermione ran her hand over the wool. “This is...”

“Italian, vicuña” Draco offered. “And yours.”

“I can’t accept this.”

“You can. You will. You’re freezing most mornings and yours is ugly.”

“It’s sentimental.”

“It’s unraveling.”

She stared at the coat. Then at him.

He leaned against the doorframe, arms folded. His expression unreadable.

“Draco...”

“Put it on,” he said softly. “We’ve got a church to haunt”

Hermione didn’t argue.

San Blasius Church — Late Morning

The wind off the Adriatic was brisk, tugging at the hem of her new coat as they stepped up the worn stone steps of the church. The pastel blue stood out against the bright gold and soft creams of the surrounding buildings, but Hermione didn't care. It was warm, soft, and—admittedly—flawless.

Draco was right. Her old one was pitiful.

The church doors creaked open under their touch. Inside, the air was cooler, still scented faintly of candle wax and damp stone. A mosaic floor stretched beneath them in dull cobalt and rust. Frescoes curved along the ceiling like vines. The saints and angels overhead had the long, sharp faces of ghosts.

"It's nearly empty," Hermione whispered.

Draco shrugged. "It's Monday. And cursed."

She shot him a look. "Is it really?"

"No. But you believed me."

She rolled her eyes, but she was smiling.

They walked slowly, the sound of their footsteps muffled by centuries of prayers. Hermione paused in front of a crumbling altar. The marble was cracked, but there were still gold flecks catching the light.

Draco stood beside her, watching the same things she did—but not quite.

She turned, about to point out the Latin inscription—

And caught herself almost reaching up to tuck back a piece of his hair.

Her hand stopped midair. She turned it into a brush of lint on his shoulder instead.

Draco glanced down at her, amused.

She cleared her throat and stepped away.

They drifted between the pews and pillars. She found herself watching his hands as he gestured, describing something about fresco preservation. She kept thinking about his mouth. His neck. The way he looked this morning in her doorway.

She shook it off. She'd had too much wine the night before. That was all.

They stood near the front of the sanctuary, staring up at the stained glass where some long-dead saint was mid-revelation. Hermione sighed softly, overwhelmed by the beauty of it. Or the quiet. Or maybe both.

“I think I’ll have to convince you to stay longer,” Draco said.

She turned, startled. “What?”

“Your holiday. Extend it.”

“I can’t just—”

“Of course you can. You’re THE Hermione Granger. You’ll write one note and the whole hospital will bow in fear.”

“They’re not afraid of me,” she said, though the corner of her mouth twitched.

“They should be.”

She shook her head, trying not to laugh. “You know I can’t.”

“You could,” he said, gentler this time. “You should.”

She looked at him, brow furrowed. “Why are you so adamant?”

He didn’t answer right away.

“Because,” he said at last, “you’re happier here. You sleep. You eat. You laugh.”

“That’s the holiday glow.”

“No. That’s what you should always look like.”

She blinked.

Draco wasn’t smiling anymore. He looked—earnest. A little intense. But the light coming through the colorful glass painted his face in green and vermillion, and she couldn’t think of anything to say that didn’t sound like surrender.

She turned back to the glass. Her throat felt tight.

He was glowing. That was the only word for it. Like sunlight filtered through something rare.

She didn’t notice the restless way he kept fidgeting with his wand, or how his gaze flicked toward the light and then back to her, secretive and too sharp. She didn’t hear the subtle thrumming of his magic, tuned too tightly, like something waiting to snap.

She was too wrapped in the sudden, breathless greed curling low in her chest.

It wasn't a passing thought. It was a truth that had been building quietly for years.

She wanted him to herself.

Every glance, every half-smile, every maddening silence that only she understood.

A day after another. Her mornings, her evenings, her always.

All those years of moments—shared jokes, sharp banter, hands brushing in crowded corridors—they had been fragments of something whole. Glints of gold in a long mosaic.

Now she could see it clearly.

It shimmered warm and devastating:

To have him. Entirely. Unshared.

The thought rose like fever.

And she said nothing.

Villa Vila, Late Afternoon

They returned to the villa just as the light began to turn honeyed and low.

Neither of them spoke much. She left her coat in the front hall and disappeared to change; he retreated somewhere deeper into the house.

Hermione didn't bother with jeans or a jumper—not here. Not when the stone was warm underfoot and the walls echoed like old music. She pulled on a cotton dress instead—soft and simple, the color of almonds—and tied her hair back in a loose twist.

She was curled on the couch, half-lost in a book, the wind tugging at her braid. The sea stretched beyond the terrace in endless shades of copper and blue. Her glass of wine was nearly empty, forgotten beside her.

Draco stepped out barefoot, shirt untucked, sleeves rolled. His hair was wind-mussed. He looked wrecked in the most precise, perfect way—like a painting smudged in just the right places.

He flopped beside her, too close. She glanced at him, amused. Their arms brushed.

They didn't speak.

The silence grew thick.

Then he shifted, his hand grazing her knee.

She turned. Met his eyes.

She meant to ask if he wanted more wine. Or to tease him. Or something else entirely.

Instead, she reached up and pulled him down.

The kiss was impulsive.

Soft at first.

Then not.

She tasted wine and salt and sun-warmed skin. She felt him hesitate for half a breath—and then melt into it, like he'd been waiting years.

When they broke, her heart was hammering.

She was laughing. Breathless. “I don’t think I’m girlfriend material.”

Draco’s eyes were still closed. “Of course you’re not.”

Her whole body went still.

Then his eyes opened—silver, unreadable, full of something that made her throat tighten.

“You’re not girlfriend material, Hermione,” he said, steady. “You’re Mrs. Malfoy material.”

She blinked, stunned.

But he didn’t stop “I don’t need seven years to know you’re the woman of my life,” he went on, quietly. “I’ll take the risk that you’re not as perfect as I already know you are.”

She laughed—half startled, half defensive. “Your family will murder you.”

“Father will adore you. You’re clever and terrifying. Mother thinks you’re pretty and you both love Puccini. I’m the only heir, Father would never.”

“Draco—”

“I’m serious.” He turned, taking both of her hands. “Let’s say a vow.”

She stared.

“You’re being ridiculous.”

“No,” he said. “I’m being selfish. I want you.”

She opened her mouth. Closed it.

His thumb brushed over her knuckles, slow and deliberate.

“I don’t want to wake up one day and realize, I lost you to caution,” he said. “Let’s be reckless. Just once.”

Her breath caught, that covetous voice in her head, to have him forever for herself not just the stolen time between their lives.

And then—

She kissed him again.

Hermione stood barefoot, dress skimming the tops of her thighs. Draco faced her, equally bare-footed, the cuffs of his shirt undone, his pulse quick at his throat.

“I know the words,” he said quietly. “They’re old. From the south of France. From the time of vows before rings.”

Hermione didn’t ask how he knew them by heart already.

She just nodded.

Their hands met between them. His palm was warm. Solid.

Draco spoke first, his voice low—no dramatics, no flourish. Just reverence.

“Je jure sur l’ombre et la mer, sur le feu et la pierre—”

I swear on shadow and sea, on fire and stone—

His magic rose—soft and slow—like a tide building in her chest.

“—de lier mon nom, mon pouvoir, et mes jours à toi.”

to bind my name, my power, and my days to you.

Hermione’s fingers trembled slightly. But she answered in kind.

“Et moi, sur le sel et le vent, sur le sang et le souffle—”

And I, on salt and wind, on blood and breath—

“—je lie mon nom, ma magie, et mon avenir au tien.”

bind my name, my magic, and my future to yours.

It settled like breath.

A thread of gold shimmered into view—thin as spider silk, bright as sun on water.

It wrapped once around their joined hands. Then again. And again. Slow and deliberate, like it was thinking, like it knew them.

Hermione’s breath caught.

She could feel it—not just on her skin, but beneath it. Twining through her bones, through the warm, wild place where her magic lived.

Draco’s hand tightened ever so slightly.

The thread sank into their skin.

Not burning. Not painful.

Just... like a part of her magic that was missing.

Soft as a heartbeat, and then stilled.

There was no sparks. No sound.

Only the stillness that follows something sacred.

They didn’t speak.

Not at first.

Just stood there, fingers still laced, the late sun casting shadows across the floor. Her pulse was racing. His magic buzzed like lightning pressed too tightly beneath his skin.

She looked up at him. His expression was unreadable.

But the way he held her hand—like it was both anchor and promise—told her everything.

They had done it.

No rings. No witnesses.

But it was real.

And it was done.

Their kiss deepened—years of careful restraint unraveling all at once.

It was clumsy at first. Too desperate. Too reverent.

Hermione's hands shook as they threaded into his hair. Draco's palms mapped the line of her back like he didn't quite believe she was real. They pressed together, greedy and uncertain, neither fully sure how to handle the sudden permission they had given themselves.

Because for years, they had not touched.

Not really.

The brush of fingers exchanging books. The brief, restrained pressure of hands helping one another out of coats. The accidental graze of knuckles passing wine glasses across too-small tables.

Each moment carefully managed. Each impulse to linger ruthlessly smothered.

Because one lingering look, one stray touch, could have set them both alight.

And now—

Now there was nothing holding them back.

She could feel it in the way Draco kissed her—hungry, desperate, stunned by his own hunger. In the way he cupped her jaw, almost trembling, as if anchoring himself to the fact that she was real, she was his.

Hermione gasped against his mouth. He pulled her closer, their bodies fitting together like a promise long overdue.

His hands slid from her face to her hips. He lifted her easily, making her laugh against his mouth—half shocked, half delighted.

Draco's breath shuddered against her cheek.

"I'm not letting you go," he said roughly, half a vow, half a warning.

Hermione buried her face in his neck, her fingers curling into the thin fabric of his shirt.

"Good," she whispered.

He shifted her weight against him in one quick motion and the floor under her feet disappeared and his lips were on her, the magic of their bond still buzzing on their bones as their lips meet, Mine! his lips his teeth were in the skin of her neck, like fire, painful demanding like lighting striking a forest, his bedroom smelled like him, like a fir forest on the beginning of spring ice and fir, his magic wild and ecstatic evaporated her dress in a puff of dissolving snowflakes.

His shirt joined her dress in the same spell, their skin meeting with an electric shock that made them both gasp. Then, suddenly, they were on his bed, the cool sheets beneath them, and the reality of the moment crystallized between them.

Hermione froze. Draco stilled above her.

Their eyes met, and for a moment, they had spent years carefully navigating the boundaries they'd now obliterated. The fierce hunger of seconds before gave way to hesitation.

"I—" Hermione started, then stopped, her hands hovering uncertainly at his shoulders.

Draco swallowed hard. "We don't have to—"

"No, I want to," she said quickly. Too quickly. Her cheeks flushed. "I just... I've thought about this. About you. For so long that I'm—"

"Terrified?" he offered, his voice rough with vulnerability.

She nodded, relieved he understood. "And I don't want to disappoint—"

He silenced her with a gentle kiss, so different from the devouring ones before. "You could never."

He was, captivated by the flawless curve of her breast, the small, enticing mole on her ribs, and the elegant taper of her waist. Draco's hunger was a famine 100 years in the making. As he let his mouth roam eagerly, hungrily, over her skin. His lips and tongue caressed every inch they could reach, tasting and savoring her as her soft, broken moans filled the room. It was the only sound apart from his hushed, fervent whispers. "Mine, my wife," he murmured, his voice laced with a desperate urgency. "My beautiful wife, the most perfect witch." His hands explored her body with a determined, thorough touch, tracing the curve of her waist, the roundness of her hips, the length of her thighs, until her trembling form lay utterly vulnerable to the violence of his craving. Her soft gasps and moans shattered the last remnants of his self-control, and though he knew he should be more restrained, more gentle, the tide of desire was too overwhelming. He had waited so long, far too long, and she was exquisitely fragile, like a delicate flower stem beneath him, a slender thread of gold spun too tight, and though she seemed as if she might shatter, he was driven to possess her completely.

Her skin was dewy, her warmth and the silky smoothness of her body, combined with her intoxicating scent, drew him in.

The delicate gasp that slipped from her lips startled Draco—hesitant, at first, more of fear than delight. It changed as he thrust into her, stretching her in a slow, painful advance to take her, to claim her. Her expression knifed through his resolve, her body tensing against him, tightening with the sting of it. But he'd known. This would happen. "What a good girl you are, love," he coaxed, a soft, rough murmur against her ear. His fingers pressed into her skin, hard and sure, and he could feel the gasp rise in her throat. "Let me help you." His voice was a low promise, this time, as he grazed his lips along her neck. He whispered a string of words, old and potent, woven into a spell. His hands were warm, magic flowing through his touch, and she felt her body soften under him, her hips still caught beneath his and held in place.

He sank into her, deep and sure, as her body gave into him: soft sounds spilling from her mouth, moans and sobs mingled together, as he drove into her with startling force. He did not stop, did not give her a moment's breath, as he held inside her, as deep as her body would allow, and pressed hard against her hips with his own. Her eyes were glassed and dazed, full of confused pain, her breath hot and broken, and the sight of it—the wild vulnerability on her face as she lay stretched beneath him—sent a feral thrill through his body. Finally. Finally. She was his. Fully his. She made the effort to smile, pulling it from somewhere deep and shaky, the intent of it breathtaking in its fragility.

"Are you going to be a good girl, love?" he asked, his voice trembling with rough need as he looked down at her.

She nodded, and more of his magic coursed through her, a rush that sent heat and light to every part her. Her body softened once more, and he sank into her again—the full, breathtaking length of him driving deep as her hips met his in a perfect, rhythm. He could feel her trembling beneath him, still tight but yielding, the motion of it all like a song, a prayer he'd thought himself too selfish to ask for. Too much. It was almost too much. She wouldn't get used him like this. Her body would never learn to yield without magic, without him spilling his power into her. He was sure of it. And though he knew he should give her pause, should let her catch her breath and find her bearings, Draco couldn't stop the fevered urgency of his desire.

It gripped him. Drove him. With a wordless sound he surged inside her, dragging a sharp, startled cry from her lips. Her face twisted in pain as she stretched to accommodate him. It was only pain this time, and met with arch of her neck, the graceful desperation of her fingers clutching at his forearms, he thought it the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

He thought it might undo him.

"Love. Love, I—" He breathed the words in a quick, ragged tremor of warmth against the curve of her throat. Always the clever one, always ahead of him, Hermione cut him off before he could offer to stop, to slow down, a breathless laugh spilling from her lips.

"I'm fine," she insisted, her voice thin with strain, but strong enough that he believed her.
"I'm fine, I promise, just don't—"

She gasped again as he pulled back and thrust deep, his hands on her hips digging bruises on her flesh.

"Merlin. Don't stop."

Draco groaned at the surge of relief, a wild, guttural sound ripped from somewhere deep inside him. He let her feel the full force of his craving, his low, relentless thrusts setting a rhythm that drew breathy, strung out cries from her lips. She would get used to it. She was getting used to it. Her body and her magic and the look in her eyes, not just pain anymore but a quiet, naked surrender, told him what her words could not.

Doubt dissolved as he moved over her, the last shreds of his self-control splintering like glass. She was soft and precious and she was his, her body responding to him as though they'd been made to fit together, her soft gasps and plaintive cries dear beyond measure. His eyes drank in the sight of her, sprawled beneath him with her skin flushed and her wild hair tangling in the sheets, a shimmering thread of gold visible at her wrist before it sank beneath her skin and disappeared into her bones.

They moved like a fever, pure instinct and yearning, like there was nothing else in the world but flesh and magic and want. He could feel the hum of her magic in his bones, the bond of the vow alive and electric and searing beneath their skin. His. She was his. And she was as breathless as he was, her nails leaving marks up his back, marks like summer welts, bright and red, and they stung in a way he knew he'd never forget. She was laughing and gasping and crying. He knew he could never, ever let her go.

Hermione was asleep upstairs, wrapped in linen and moonlight, her breathing soft and even. The vow still clung to the air like perfume—old magic and her voice in his blood.

Draco moved through the villa without a sound, bare feet on cool tile. Down the narrow stairwell behind the pantry, past the aging wine and enchanted preserves, into the cellar.

He didn't light his wand. He didn't need to.

The empty bottle waited on the top shelf, nestled between a sealed case of vintage wine and an old jars of pickled olives.

Felix Felicis.

Just enough for one perfect day.

He picked it up and turned it in his hand, admiring the gleam of the glass. His day had been better than he would have expected even in his most coveted fantasies. The timing. The weather. Her mood. All of it had aligned.

The potion hadn't needed to do much. Just tilt the odds in the right direction.

She had made the vow with her whole heart.

And now she was his forever.

He gave a satisfied breath as he transfigured the glass into paper with a gesture of his hand, and burned it, the wisps of smoke and ash floated in the air for a moment before vanishing to nothing.

Hermione woke in silence.

For a moment, she didn't know what had stirred her. The waves still moved softly below the cliffs. The wind hadn't shifted. The magic in the villa was calm.

But something inside her was not.

Her breath caught as she blinked up at the ceiling. The air was still warm from them, the sheets soft and expensive and smelling faintly of rosemary and salt and *him*.

Draco was asleep beside her.

Curled half onto his stomach, mouth parted slightly, one arm tossed across her waist like he couldn't bear the thought of her drifting even an inch away.

She turned, slow and careful, to look at him.

And her heart lurched.

He was beautiful in sleep. Younger. Open. As if the years and all that poisonous pride had been stripped away with his clothes and his awareness.

And he was *hers* now.

That was the part she still couldn't hold steady in her chest.

She had married him.

No witness. No logic. No plan. Just... heat and magic and hunger and a vow, older than fear.

“Je jure sur l’ombre et la mer.”

A dizzy little laugh bubbled up in her throat, but she bit it back.

The ceiling swam a little. Vertigo, maybe. Or something more dangerous.

Her body ached in ways it hadn't before. Not gently. Not sweetly.

Theirs had not been soft, sleepy wedding night love.

It had been hunger.

She'd loved him for a long time. Quietly. Wrongly.

In stolen glances. In long walks after the opera. In the way he'd remembered her coffee order before Ron ever remembered if she even liked coffee.

She had spent years carving out space in her life where she could fit him, harmlessly. As a friend. As a confidant. As a dangerous indulgence she never quite gave in.

But now she was in his bed.

In his *life*.

Forever.

And she felt—

Glorious.

That was the only word for it. Not soft or sappy or romantic.

Glorious.

Like some part of her had won.

Because there had always been this voice inside her—small and sharp—that whispered she wasn’t *really* wanted. Not the way other girls were. Not the way magical daughters were.

She was always the other. The clever girl. The war heroine. The impressive not because of her merits but because of her blood.

She remembered when she first heard the word *mudblood*. The way it cracked like ice inside her.

And she remembered Draco’s voice behind it.

The rage. The certainty. The *contempt*.

That boy—the boy who’d spat the word at her like it burned his tongue—was now beside her, sleeping like a man who’d finally come home.

He had given up *everything* for this.

For her.

He would never say he had changed his views. Because he hadn’t. Not really.

He still believed in blood.

He still believed in legacy and lineage and magic measured in generations.

But somehow—*somewhat*—he believed in her more.

She was his exception. The one drop of impure blood he was willing to bless his line with. And he had done it with abandon. With absolute, fevered conviction.

And that—

That was the sweetest poison.

She *liked* being the one who’d undone him.

She *liked* being the thing he couldn’t resist. The one woman in the world he would burn for. Ruin himself and his blood for.

She had always wanted to be special.

And Draco Malfoy—the cruellest boy she’d ever known—had built her a throne of his worship.

Her eyes burned suddenly.

She swallowed hard.

There was no guilt. Not really. Just a pulse of something sharp in her ribs.

Because she didn't know if what they had was love.

Not the kind of love she used to believe in.

But it was real. Twisted and intoxicating and *theirs*.

And maybe, she thought, as she turned to press her face against his shoulder, that was more than enough.

Chapter End Notes

We all still remember I told you this was a dead dove right? anyway the use of the Felix Felicis is sketchy but not outright a love potion. I'm having a great time with this, anyway next chapter is all the speculation of their friends and not so much as friends while they are away! ;)

Chapter 6: While you were gone

Chapter Summary

Fred leaned back in his chair, rubbing his jaw. “Should’ve made my move seventh year.” Harry blinked. “You fancied Hermione?”

“Didn’t everyone?” Fred said, unbothered. “She was terrifying. Smart as sin. And when she got that little scar above her eyebrow from dueling in the DA—bloody hell.”

George snorted into his pint. “Don’t be gross.”

Fred just grinned. “I’m not saying I was in love. But if I’d known my idiot baby brother was going to string her along for six years, I might’ve at least tried.”

Chapter Notes

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

THE TWINS

The Broom and Badger, Late Evening

The pub was half-empty and dimly lit, the kind of place you could disappear in for hours. A storm was rattling against the windows, but inside, it was warm—wood-paneled, low-ceilinged, enchanted for privacy. Fred, George, and Harry had claimed their usual booth, a round table tucked beside the fire.

Fred was already halfway through his second pint, cheeks a little flushed.

“I’m just saying,” he muttered, dropping a chip into his mouth, “Hermione and Malfoy were flirting with cheating for *years*.”

Harry grimaced. “Fred.”

“I’m not saying she *did* anything. I’m saying the line was blurry as hell. Come on, mate—she spent more time with him than with Ron. Than with you. Than with *anyone*.”

George shrugged, half-apologetic. “Not that Hermione would’ve ever cheated. She wouldn’t. But... she had more in common with Malfoy than she ever did with Ron. It was obvious. They saw each other *every week*. Like clockwork.”

Harry didn’t reply. He took a slow sip of his drink.

Fred leaned back in his chair, rubbing his jaw. “Should’ve made my move seventh year.”

Harry blinked. “You fancied Hermione?”

“Didn’t everyone?” Fred said, unbothered. “She was terrifying. Smart as sin. And when she got that little scar above her eyebrow from dueling in the DA—bloody hell.”

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Fred just grinned. “I’m not saying I was in love. But if I’d known my idiot baby brother was going to string her along for *six years*, I might’ve at least tried.”

“You didn’t because Ron was obsessed with her?” Harry muttered.

“Yeah,” Fred said, his grin dimming. “And I wasn’t sure if you were too.”

Harry let out a sharp laugh. “No. Not like that. I never saw her that way. She’s Hermione.”

Fred tilted his glass. “Exactly. She is *Hermione*. The girl who fought trolls, brewed polyjuice as a second year, and broke Malfoy’s nose in third year without blinking. She’s brilliant, and strong, and complicated.”

“Too complicated for Ron,” George added. “And maybe for you too, Harry. No offense.”

Harry shrugged. “None taken. I didn’t want… any of it. Not the politics. Not the Ministry. Not the relentless drive to save us all, once is good enough for me.”

Fred gave him a sideways look.

There was a beat of silence.

Fred leaned forward again. “We were all fools. Should’ve seen it coming. She’s always been fit—*still* is, for the record—but now I’m not saying a word about it, because her precious ferret would probably curse me dead in a second.”

George grinned. “He’s got that look. You know—the *feral Malfoy stare*. All of them get it once they’ve found their witch.”

Harry looked down at his drink. “He’s still a blood supremacist.”

George made a dismissive noise. “Sure. But that’s not the only game in town anymore. Half the Sacred Twenty-Eight are marrying half-bloods. And there’s one thing purebloods love even more than blood.”

Fred and Harry answered in unison: “*Influence*.”

George raised his glass. “Hermione has it. She saved their sorry arses from Azkaban. And now? Now she’s going to make the Malfoy name not just palatable—*respectable*.”

Fred laughed. “They’re probably kissing her feet.”

Harry stared into the fire, the image a little too easy to believe.

“She’s going to do more for that family glory than Voldemort ever did,” George added. “And Lucius knows it.”

“Otherwise they would have married Malfoy years ago” Fred said simply.

Harry sat back, quiet.

NEVILLE

Longbottom State, Greenhouse

The greenhouse was hot and smelled of damp earth and chamomile. Harry leaned on a bench near the spell-bound trellises while Neville gently coaxed a Moonbell bloom to close.

“Wherever she went, Draco is with her” Harry muttered, breaking the silence.

Neville looked up.

“They both took a portkey to Croatia,” Harry continued.

Neville smiled faintly. “Good. She deserves to take a break.”

“She left the country with Malfoy.”

Neville raised a brow.

“I don’t think they were doing anything,” Harry added quickly. “Just… talking. going to see muggle shows, Art shows.”

Neville didn’t react.

Harry scratched the back of his neck. “Ginny thinks they’ve been having an affair for ages.”

Neville’s jaw ticked. “That’s not just false—it’s insulting Hermione.”

Harry looked up.

“Hermione would never do that,” Neville said firmly. “At *worst* she might’ve had feelings she didn’t act on, but she wouldn’t cheat.”

Harry was quiet a moment. “But you think maybe she felt something for him?”

Neville snorted. “Of course she did. It was obvious.”

Harry blinked. “You just said—”

“I said she wouldn’t *act* on it,” Neville cut in. “Not unless she was free. And she wasn’t. Not until now.”

He went back to adjusting the bindings on a vine, speaking without looking at Harry. “That’s why I *don’t* think they were together. Because if they *had been* together, they’d already be *married*.”

Harry frowned. “What?”

Neville looked up. “You don’t get it, mate. You didn’t grow up in the magical society. You married Ginny straight out of school —no one ever had THE talk with you.”

Harry straightened, defensive.

“I mean the honor one,” Neville said, softer. “About courtship. About what things mean. About how things look.”

He wiped his hands on a towel. “Let me ask you something: how long did any of our lot wait between starting something serious and getting married?”

Harry hesitated. “I dunno. Not long? But I thought that was because of the war.”

Neville shook his head. “It wasn’t. That’s how it *usually* goes. Especially among proper families. You start courting seriously, you get married. A year maybe two, if the girl is too young and just finished school. None of this ‘seven years and no ring’ business.”

Harry exhaled slowly.

“There was *talk*,” Neville went on, a little grim now. “About Ron. About how long Hermione waited. People might love the Weasleys, but everyone knows they don’t do things the traditional way. And that’s fine. But for Ron to be with Hermione for *years* and never propose? Then turn around and plan to marry Padma within *months*—yes sure, he wants to before the baby’s born, but still”

Neville looked him straight in the eye. “That makes Hermione look devalued. Like she wasn’t worth committing to. It’s a *bad* look. Especially to the old families.”

Harry looked sick. “I never thought of that.”

“Of course you didn’t,” Neville said gently. “You’re not *them*. But Draco is. And if you think for one second that man would ever let Hermione Granger be seen as *less than*—you’ve completely misread him.”

Harry rubbed a hand over his face. “So you’re saying if they were anything, there’d already be—”

“A contract signed,” Neville said. “An announcement in the Prophet. A bracelet exchanged. You wouldn’t *have* to ask. You’d *know*. Because Draco Malfoy will never be someone’s boyfriend. Especially not hers.”

He paused. “If he ever gets the chance, he’s going to marry her.”

Harry looked toward the enchanted window, out at the lake glimmering in the sun.

The way of the world

The Burrow

From the *Daily Prophet*, Socials Section

Weasley Ties the Knot at Quiet Country Ceremony

October 21, 2005

In a modest but cheerful ceremony this past weekend, Ronald Bilius Weasley—co-owner of Weasley's Wizard Wheezes and former Auror—married St. Mungo's Healer Padma Patil.

The event took place at the historic Ottery St. Catchpole parish grounds and was attended by close friends and family. Best man duties were performed by none other than Harry Potter, longtime friend of the groom.

Weasley was previously linked to war heroine and noted magical healer Hermione Granger, though the two are said to have remained "just good friends" in recent years. Granger, currently abroad, did not attend.

Sources close to the couple suggest that Granger has been focusing on her medical and academic pursuits, spending extensive time outside of Britain.

The late morning sun poured through the curtains, lighting up the crowded table. A teapot hissed gently on the stove, and the smell of Molly's jam rolls drifted through the air.

Ginny leaned against the counter, newspaper folded over her arm.

"That's awful nice," Molly said at last, dabbing flour from her hands as she looked at the article Ginny had just read aloud. "Very... generous."

Padma sat at the table, trying not to twist her wedding ring. Her hair was down, loose around her shoulders, and she looked tired in that way only expectant mothers and guilty women could.

"I feel awful," she said quietly. "It wasn't—it's not like I planned this, it just happened."

Ginny gave a snort and plopped down across from her. "Don't be ridiculous. That relationship was dead for years."

Padma's voice was barely audible. "She and Malfoy were sneaking around. Everyone in his circle knew. Openings, gallery events... always the two of them."

Molly made a soft sound—neither agreement nor disagreement—as she stirred the tea. "Ron's the one who made promises. And didn't keep them. And if you ask me—he's always

needed someone more like you to keep him on track.”

Padma looked up, surprised.

“I’m not mad at you, dear,” Molly said gently. “I’m mad at my son.”

There was a pause. The sound of spoons clinking. Steam curling.

Ginny raised a brow. “Besides, once the baby’s here...”

Molly nodded. “No one cares. Married women with a baby have no past. Only purpose.”

Padma let out a soft, hollow laugh.

“I don’t know if that makes me feel better,” she murmured.

Ginny reached across the table and patted her hand. “That’s because it shouldn’t. But it does, doesn’t it?”

And Padma, quietly, nodded.

The colleagues

St. Mungo's – Staff Lounge, Early Morning

The tea in the lounge was lukewarm, and the scones were already going stale. Still, gossip made even the blandest snacks worth showing up for.

Sally-Anne Perks, still wearing the pink-accented robes she swore were 'just cheerful,' leaned across the table with wide eyes.

"I'm telling you, she's heartbroken," she whispered. "You don't vanish for three months unless something *horrible* happens. She left mid-rotation!"

Belvina Marchbanks, younger, sharper, and proudly Gryffindor, snorted. "No one just leaves a post like that. And then asks for more leave on top of it? She's a workaholic. Something *broke*."

Sally-Anne nodded sagely. "Ron Weasley. Honestly, I always thought he was a bit of a potato in a robe, but I never expected *Padma* of all people—"

"Oh, Padma's going to be a pariah once this properly gets out," Belvina added. "Imagine. Stealing your best friend's boyfriend while they're still living together. That's beyond betrayal."

Lucretia McNair stood at the tea cart, stirring her cup with deliberate poise. Her dark green robes were pristine, trimmed in gold thread. The badge on her lapel marked her as an interdepartmental liaison—high-ranking, just transferred, and smug as a cat with a canary.

"Merlin's wand," she drawled, "you girls really *are* still stuck in school."

Sally-Anne flushed. "Excuse me?"

"Oh, please." Lucretia turned, her smile razor-thin. "Granger and Weasley were done *ages* ago. If anything, she gave him more grace than he deserved. That thing with Padma? He knocked her up *months* after the relationship had already died."

Belvina blinked. "But she left in the middle of a rotation. She hasn't been back in—what—three months?"

Lucretia lifted one brow. "Because she finally let the Malfoy heir court her. That's what happened. And now that she's returning as the new director, I imagine the marriage contract's already signed."

"To *Malfoy*?" Sally-Anne squeaked.

Lucretia tilted her head, amused. "Don't be dense."

There was a long pause.

“But she’s—” Belvina began, hesitating.

“A Muggleborn?” Lucretia’s voice was dipped in ice. “Do be careful, Marchbanks. That sort of thinking might get you posted to magical waste management.”

“I didn’t mean—”

“You did. But it’s forgivable—Gryffindors are usually the last to notice they’re behind the times.” Lucretia sipped her tea. “Malfoy knows exactly what he’s doing. So does she. And frankly, it’s nice to see a marriage match that isn’t built on limp bloodlines and mediocrity for once.”

She gave them both a once-over.

“And you might want to start acting like it’s the twenty-first century. The Malfoys certainly are.”

She swept out, perfectly composed.

Sally-Anne leaned toward Belvina, wide-eyed.

“... What *is* happening?”

Belvina swallowed. “We’re witnessing the dawn of the new regime.”

Society

Greengrass Estate

The Greengrass parlor was quiet in the way expensive things often were—fire crackling low, tea poured into porcelain too fine for everyday hands, and gossip unfurling like a cloud of milk in tea.

Daphne reclined on a divan near the window, Tracey Davies curled in the corner seat with her boots tucked beneath her, and Pansy Parkinson, smug as ever, perched near the fire with her chin tilted at just the right angle to catch the glow.

The topic, as always, was Granger.

“Padma Patil,” Tracey said, picking at a candied violet, “is either the bravest witch in St. Mungo’s or the most delusional.”

“Poor girl thinks marrying the 6th son of the least of the 28th is a catch,” Daphne murmured. “No one’s going to even remember about it once Malfoy make it official with Granger.”

“They already don’t,” Pansy said. “Have you seen the notice in the Prophet? Full spread. Photos. The Patil Family couldn’t afford that font size.”

Tracey blinked. “Malfoy gold?”

Pansy smirked. “Indifference is a luxury. And Uncle Lucy is paying top galleon to make sure no one remembers Hermione was ever wronged.”

“A clean page,” Daphne said. “Classy.”

“They’ll be married by spring,” Pansy continued. “If they aren’t already.”

Tracey groaned. “Granger always ruins the fun. She was insufferable enough in school—now she’s going to be THE Lady Malfoy?”

“She will,” Pansy said. “Society will just have to catch up, I bet free elves with a salary would be the new luxury.”

Daphne raised an eyebrow. “We will have to play nice or the only society will be Luna Lovegod once Blaise can catch Xenophilius for longer than 5 minutes to discuss a betrothal.”

Pansy sipped her tea with studied grace. “Speak for yourselves.”

Both girls turned.

“I’m saying yes to Longbottom,” Pansy said breezily, admiring her nails. “Probably after Christmas.”

Tracey choked on her biscuit. “What?”

Daphne sat up. “You’re joking.”

Pansy gave a slow, predatory smile. “Neville has land. Legacy. A decent head on his shoulders. And he adores me.”

Tracey spluttered. “But—but you never told us—”

“Oh, and ruin the surprise?,” Pansy said, all sugar and venom. “I’m marrying into a respectable 28th House. And if either of you wants to stay relevant, I suggest you pick up the pace and find a reason to befriend the new Mrs Malfoy.”

Daphne glanced at Tracey.

Tracey raised her brows.

Pansy leaned back in her chair, victorious.

The Blue Room, Malfoy Manor

The fire had burned low.

Narcissa sat by the hearth, her embroidery untouched in her lap, silver thread slack between her fingers. The room smelled of beeswax, old roses, and memory. Pale blue curtains stirred faintly in the draft from the south corridor.

Lucius entered without knocking.

His cane made no sound on the velvet carpet, but Narcissa looked up anyway—she always knew when he was near.

“Well?” she asked, voice light, but her shoulders stayed stiff.

Lucius stopped a few paces from her chair and folded his hands behind his back. “A message came through Athena.”

Narcissa raised a single brow.

“They’ll return before the end of the month. She’s accepted the offer from St. Mungo’s. Director of the children wing.”

Narcissa’s fingers tightened on the hoop.

“She accepted?” she echoed. “That position has been closed to appointments for over a year.”

“Draco persuaded them. Quietly, I imagine.” His tone was dry as parchment.

Narcissa stood. “He’s been gone nearly four months. You don’t think—”

“I think,” Lucius said gently, “that Miss Granger is not a witch to act in haste.”

Narcissa walked to the window and stared out. “No. She isn’t. Which is what makes this so unsettling.”

Lucius remained still, letting the silence fill the room.

“I keep asking myself what he did,” she murmured. “She was steady. She was clever. She was... not ours.”

Lucius stepped closer. “Draco didn’t enchant her.”

She said nothing.

“He’s too proud,” Lucius added softly. “Too vain. Too patient to be so crass—especially with her.”

Narcissa didn’t answer, but the line of her jaw eased.

“He’s planned for years,” Lucius said. “This was not a conquest. It was a campaign.”

At last, Narcissa turned. “Then let us arm her accordingly.”

She crossed the room in a sweep of silver-grey silk and opened a drawer hidden behind her vanity’s mirror. From a warded case lined in velvet, she drew a small, square box—deep green and barely larger than her palm.

She held it out to Lucius.

He opened it slowly.

Inside, a ring gleamed like night itself.

A black diamond—cut sharp and precise—set in a coil of pristine gold. The metal was chased with minute runes, nearly invisible to the eye, and flanked by two smaller dark stones that shimmered like the space between stars.

“I chose this for her,” Narcissa said quietly. “It belonged to our great-grandmother—worn only a couple of times. Every Black woman since then has asked for it.”

Lucius’s brow arched slightly.

“Bella almost wore it,” Narcissa continued. “But she told me Draco could have it—once. For his proper bride.”

Lucius looked down at the ring.

“It’s beautiful,” he said. “And gold will certainly suit her.”

“Exactly.” Narcissa stepped back. “Let it be the first stone in her chest.”

Lucius shut the box and set it on his night stand. "Let it be hers now."

Narcissa nodded, but her fingers toyed with the empty air.

Lucius touched her hand. "He's chosen well."

Narcissa exhaled slowly, as if letting go of a decade of tension.

"Then so have we," she said.

Grimmauld Place, 1986

The chandelier was too large for the ceiling. Every time the door opened, the crystals tinkled like glass teeth. The room smelled of sherry and dragon smoke, of waxed wood and cold fire.

Draco was six years old and perfectly still.

He sat with his ankles crossed on a brocade settee, wearing a navy coat with silver buttons and a wary expression—both of which Narcissa had fastened tightly before they arrived.

Across from him, Great-Aunt Walburga loomed like a cathedral in velvet. Her eyes were too sharp. Her rings were too heavy. Her voice moved like clacking lace bobbins.

“Do you know what this is?” she asked, lifting her arm.

The bracelet slithered into view from beneath her sleeve.

Gold, ancient, coiled like a serpent. Thin links shaped like scales. A dragon’s eye for a clasp. Each charm faintly humming with old, old wards.

Draco’s eyes widened.

“It’s yours,” Walburga said, “if you choose correctly.”

He didn’t speak—just blinked, slow and reverent.

“It belonged to my grandmother,” she continued, gaze never leaving him. “And hers before that. Given only to a bride. The true bride. The one who makes you more than you were born to be.”

Draco licked his lips. “You wore it?”

She smiled. Not kindly.

“I kept it.”

Her fingers brushed the metal. The magic in it stirred—just enough to make the curtains rustle.

“One day, you’ll know. When she looks at you like fire and you feel it in your blood. That’s who this is for.”

Draco nodded solemnly. “Not just pretty?”

“Never just pretty. Pretty girls bore clever men. You’ll need one who terrifies you.” Walburga leaned forward slightly, her voice a croak of prophecy. “You’ll want the girl who would rather burn the world than belong to it.”

Draco’s throat bobbed. “And then you give her the bracelet?”

Walburga's smile returned. This time, it chilled the room.

"No, darling," she whispered. "Then she earns it."

Chapter End Notes

So, I have a ton of stuff happening between family and some travel and stuff, I was planning to update the Malfoy accord but I lost a tire in the middle of nowhere, got stuck in the next town until I could find someone to fix my tire, and managed to make it home because I'm traveling again tomorrow so there might not be update on Wednesday... we will see

Chapter 7: To have you back

Chapter Summary

Parvati could see the headline forming already. She wouldn't dare write it herself, of course—but someone would.

The Brightest Witch Redeems the Darkest Name.

Parvati's lips twisted.

Always a climber, that one.

But she had to admit—Hermione had climbed higher than anyone had thought possible. And dragged Malfoy up with her.

Chapter Notes

So two notes before we start, I realized I confused some of my notes we had already seen the bracelet and it was already been given to Draco (I had two pieces of Jewelry planned; the marriage ring and the courtin bracelet, so if you might go to the previous chapter you will notice my edit there instead of the bracelet Narcisa gives to Lucius the ring for Hermione. the flashback is the same because it was always around the bracelet.

Also one date changed from 1990 to 1986 (because I used my husband birthday instead of Draco to calculate that date... yeah my therapist is never getting that info... unless she is here) so those are the changes in the last chapter.

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

June 6, 2005

Padma's Flat

Padma's flat was dim and warm, lit by soft lamps and the orange scent of something sweet cooling under a bell jar. The curtains were drawn. Her couch was covered in mismatched cushions, throws folded neatly over the back. Bowls on the shelf held old keys, coins, a wand-polishing cloth. No art. No fresh flowers.

Ron liked it here more than he meant to.

He hadn't planned to show up. Not really. But when he'd owled Hermione and she hadn't answered, and Padma had said she'd made too much dinner, it felt easy. Too easy.

He knocked. She answered barefoot, her hair tied up, the smell of cinnamon clinging to her sleeves.

"I made enough for ten again," she said with a smile that tugged on his guilt.

"Hermione's still at St. Mungo's," he muttered, stepping in.

"Of course she is," Padma said.

Neither of them mentioned that she'd said she had the day off.

Dinner was served at the coffee table, on chipped ceramic plates. Ron sat on the floor with his back against the couch, and Padma tucked her legs under her. It was casual. Familiar. No questions.

Hermione would never.

Hermione liked order. Wine glasses that matched. She never said anything but she liked plain linen napkins. And she never let him eat on the floor.

Maybe that's why Hermione spent time with Malfoy. He knew about the right forks. The concerts. The ones she said were "just fun," But Ron would always find them dull.

He stabbed a fork into his food. "This is good," he said.

"Family recipe," Padma said. "It only works in giant pots. I'll be eating this for a week."

Ron smiled. "I could help."

Padma didn't answer right away.

And maybe that's when it happened. That moment.

A single glance. A breath too long between blinks. Her hand resting near his. The soft curve of her neck. The closeness. The quiet.

He kissed her.

She kissed back.

He didn't think of Hermione—not once—until much later, when it was done, and Padma curled next to him with her cheek against his shoulder and whispered, “She's with him tonight. Probably.”

And Ron didn't say anything.

June 7, 2005

St. Mungo's Staff Wing

Padma walked into the break room, cheeks flushed, heart pounding with something dangerously close to self-satisfaction.

She felt... triumphant.

Until she saw the tray.

Hermione's name written on a parchment tag. The delivery box was from a Muggle café in Notting Hill. Inside: lemon madeleines, a croissant, her favorite tea blend—each one exactly what Hermione would love.

"Oh, it's hers," said Sally-Anne, grabbing a cup. "She's been here since last night."

Padma blinked. "But she—she told me she had the evening off."

"Got called in late. Birthday party disaster—half the kids hit with a spell-gone-wrong. Granger fixed the worst three cases before midnight. She's sleeping in the on-call lounge."

Padma's stomach twisted.

She walked to the window. Swallowed.

In the reflection of the glass, she caught sight of herself. She had worn her favorite clothes. Her face too pleased.

Hermione was still at the hospital. Saving children. As always.

And Draco Malfoy had sent her breakfast.

Padma turned back toward the hallway. Her chest felt tight but she forced certainty on her bones.

If Hermione had someone who noticed those things—her favorite tea, the way she skipped dinner during long shifts—then Ron deserved someone too.

Right?

Hermione stepped out of the exam room, still in her scrubs, her curls tied up in a hasty knot. She looked exhausted but light on her feet.

“Padma,” she said, crossing paths near the potion cabinets. “Thanks for feeding Ron all the time.” He told me he stops by all the time. I owe you. I’ve been on shift so much lately I barely see him.”

Padma smiled. “Anytime.”

Her voice didn’t crack. Not even a little.

December 17, 2005

Ministry of Magic, International Portkey Arrivals – 4:35 a.m.

The Portkey release chamber hummed to life with a soft *crack*, followed by a pulse of blue light.

They landed with precision. Hermione's heels clicked once against the polished marble, her bright blue coat flaring gently at her calves. The air inside the Ministry was sharp with the scent of old parchment and reinforced wards.

No one spoke.

Draco straightened beside her, brushing a stray thread from his sleeve as if to signal: *Yes. We planned this.* His hand rested lightly atop hers, anchoring it in the crook of his arm. Possessive. Assured. Entirely satisfied.

Hermione adjusted her collar with one gloved hand, her expression unreadable but composed.

Her name glowed on the international registry log beside the arrival portal:

Hermione Jean Malfoy & Draco Lucius Malfoy – Residential Return, Florence to London – Portkey 341-B.

Not Granger. Not Granger-Malfoy. Not Granger-Anything.

Malfoy.

It was 4:35 a.m. exactly.

Ten minutes after the final owls had delivered *The Daily Prophet*'s weekend edition.

The press wouldn't catch up until at least Sunday Morning.

Until then, there were only a handful of quiet watchers. The janitorial elf near the fountain. A half-dozing security witch who sat up straighter when she saw them glide across the atrium floor. A senior scribe from the International Magical Cooperation Office, whose mouth dropped open just slightly before he remembered to bow his head.

The only sound was the quiet rhythm of their steps—hers measured, his slower, deliberate—as they walked side by side beneath the shadowed archways.

The atrium gleamed around them: dark green stone lit with flecks of gold, old magic murmuring beneath the polished surface. Hermione's coat stood out like a flare against the sober palette, like something that didn't *belong*—and yet had the audacity to be without faltering.

Draco's lips curled, faintly.

Let them watch.

They vanished into the emerald hearth glow of the private Floo.

A moment later, the flames flickered closed behind them, and the Belgravia townhouse was humming with their arrival.

Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy were home.

Parvati Patil hadn't dragged herself to the Ministry at this godless hour to witness history.

She was supposed to be catching a half-dozen Italian Quidditch players arriving via Portkey for a Witch Weekly interview spread—some puff piece on cross-cultural sportsmanship. Nothing thrilling, but good face time with the editor, and Parvati had never been one to waste a career opportunity.

She was still halfway through her first espresso when the magic shifted.

The Portkey sigil flared. Golden light spilled across the atrium floor. And **Hermione Granger**—no, not Granger anymore—stepped out.

Parvati's eyes flicked to the official registry glow above the terminal.

Hermione Jean Malfoy.

She blinked once. Twice.

No.

And yet there she was.

In a ridiculous, ethereal coat—sky blue, expensive, probably French. Curls tamed into an elegant twist. No grand announcement—just the quiet, devastating arrival of someone who had already won.

On her arm: Draco Malfoy.

He looked unbearably satisfied. Not smug exactly, but... triumphant. And Parvati, who had always prided herself on her instincts, realized with a cold, curling knot in her stomach what no one else had wanted to see.

Draco Malfoy—pureblood aristocrat, former Death Eater, social pariah had been made respectable again not by charity or contrition, but by Hermione's golden status —The smug bastard had been waiting. Biding his time like a serpent in a bird's nest, patient and poised.

Parvati's breath steamed in the cold morning air.

So this was the reason, No scandal. No retaliation. Just a quiet exit.

Hermione—ambitious, calculating, always a little too proud of her intellect—had taken the one thing no one was expecting, at least no one that knew her.

Victory.

If Padma had convinced herself she was marrying up—into the sacred lines of the 28th—barely, and the Order—then Hermione had simply **vaulted over her**, straight into a family far older, far richer, and once unthinkable.

She hadn't just redeemed a Death Eater.

She'd scrubbed him clean.

With her grace alone.

Parvati could see the headline forming already. She wouldn't dare write it herself, of course—but someone would.

The Brightest Witch Redeems the Darkest Name.

Parvati's lips twisted.

Always a climber, that one.

But she had to admit—Hermione had climbed higher than anyone had thought possible.

And dragged Malfoy up with her.

December 18, 2005

Early Morning – Weasley-Patil Home, North London

The kettle was already warm when Ron stepped into the kitchen.

Padma always enchanted it the night before. One of a thousand small things she did without asking. The whole house ran that way now—quiet little charms and routines he hadn’t noticed settling into place until they had, until it was *normal* for him to come downstairs and feel like a guest in his own home.

Not a guest, he reminded himself, rubbing his eyes. *A husband*.

A soon-to-be father.

He leaned against the counter, staring at the soft hum of the warming charms and wondering why he hadn’t slept.

They had picked the paint for the nursery last week—something cheery and lovely, a pale blue that didn’t clash with anything. The crib was arriving soon. And Padma had been... fine. Good. Domestic in a way he hadn’t expected. She cooked. She organized. She reminded him about things like appointments and bills and laundry.

But she never asked what he wanted, not even for dinner.

Hermione used to. Even when she was too tired to eat herself.

Stop it, he thought. *Don’t*.

But it wouldn’t stop.

It had crept in slowly—these cracks in memory. The shape of Hermione’s laugh. The way she’d tap her mug before taking a sip. How she *argued*, not to be right but because she wanted him to *think*. For weeks now, it had felt like everyone agreed not to talk about Hermione at all. As if she had vanished from their recent history. Not a whisper. Not a glance.

Not even to berate him about his betrayal.

He’d been grateful, in a way. Grateful that no one looked at him with anger or worst, disdain. Grateful that Harry didn’t bring it up. That Ginny didn’t look at him with disgust.

Grateful that Hermione had simply... let it go.

Why did she let it go?

The memory of those first few weeks with Padma was slippery. Blurry. He remembered every detail of course, but his own mind escaped him. He remembered warm hands and

whispered reassurances. He remembered feeling like Hermione was *always somewhere else*, like maybe she was slipping away already and—

Voices floated in from the living room.

“—of course she did it.” came Parvati’s unmistakable voice. “She was always a step ahead everyone.”

“She’s done it then,” Padma muttered. “I knew they had to be involved beyond a friendship, but this soon? this fast?”

Ron froze, halfway through setting down his cup.

“Oh come off it,” Parvati snapped. “It’s obvious he had been after her for years. She is smart and no one would have turned down a pureblood fortune. I mean, she has always wanted to be better than everyone else, even back at school, feeling superior to me and Lavender.”

Ron didn’t move.

“I just can’t believe it,” Padma said, softer. “I mean... Malfoy. *That* Malfoy.”

“I’m telling you,” Parvati sniffed. “She’s always been like this. Always so *perfect*. Golden girl and top scores and now—now she’s washed his Death Eater past so clean it sparkles.”

Ron backed away, careful not to let the floorboards creak.

He went upstairs without thinking. Sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the nursery paint chip still tucked into his nightstand drawer.

Hermione was married.

Married to Malfoy.

Malfoy.

A dozen moments crashed into him like ice water.

Draco at the pub, asking if Ron had remembered Padma's birthday.

"You should get her something—flowers, at least. Pansy can have them sent."

Draco hadn't even smiled. Hadn't mocked. Just suggested it like a friend would.

And Ron had laughed.

"Please. Like you'd go after Hermione. She's Muggle-born, right?"

Draco hadn't said anything.

Ron remembered that silence now. The same silence that had followed Draco's long glances across the Ministry atrium. The carefully worded curiosity. The faintest hint of something sharper beneath his civility.

He thought Draco was... what? Into blokes? Too posh? Still a blood supremacist?

He had been watching. Always watching.

And Hermione—

Hermione, who had always brought her own flowers home. Who never asked Ron for help with anything. Who had handled everything herself and still made *him* feel like she believed in him—

She had let him go.

Ron scrubbed a hand over his face.

And what was he left with?

A wife who baked and corrected him like his mum. A child on the way. A future he hadn't planned. Domesticity that had *slipped in* like fog, like a spell, like something too quiet to notice until it was *done*.

And Hermione...

Hermione was married to the richest man in England, who adored her and indulged all her whims, and somehow everyone had agreed to rewrite history like she had *never been his at all*.

He closed his eyes.

And for the first time in a year, Ron Weasley realized something he hadn't let himself say:

I made a mistake.

December 18, 2005

Belgravia townhouse

The rain tapped steadily against the windows—soft and silver and persistent, like an invitation to stay exactly where they were.

The tray sat between them, a picture of domestic perfection. Croissants, cheese, blackberries glistening like jewels. The coffee was still hot. Draco, very much not, lay sprawled across their bed, shirtless, tousled, and lazily smug.

Hermione sat cross-legged beside him, draped in one of his old button-downs, sleeves rolled and collar rumpled. She fed him as though he were a cat she'd only just lured inside—a bit at a time, fingers pinching up berries, pressing the edge of a cheese wedge against his lips.

He allowed it, eyes half-lidded, expression almost mocking. But he opened his mouth every time.

She tried not to smile.

She loved mornings like this. Loved knowing exactly what he liked—how he wanted his eggs, which pastries to avoid, that he'd drink anything as long as it was dark and bitter and served in silver. He liked compliments in French and silk against his skin. He hated waking up early but adored being woken up by her.

She could give him that. Over and over. She wanted to.

She fed him another blackberry, fingers grazing his bottom lip. His mouth closed over it.

I should've done this sooner, she thought. If I'd been braver. If I'd walked away when I first realized how tired I was of not being who and how they wanted.

They could've had this *sooner*—mornings where he looked at her like she was the only thing worth moving for. She would never say it out loud, but every time she spoiled him like this, it was part guilt, part reverence.

She pressed another blackberry to his lips.

He took it. But this time, his teeth closed lightly on her fingers.

Hermione startled.

Before she could speak, he moved.

In a single, practiced motion, he flipped the tray off the bed and onto a charm-suspended hover beside them. She gasped—half in protest, half in thrill—but before she could scold

him, Draco had rolled her onto her back and straddled her, one hand braced beside her head, the other already slipping beneath the hem of the shirt she wore.

“You are *dangerous*,” he said, voice low and rough against her throat. “You know that?”

Hermione arched beneath him, breath catching. “I was feeding you.”

“You were *teasing* me.”

“I was being kind.”

“You were being *cruel*,” he growled, kissing her jaw, then her collarbone. “Sitting there like you’re my own personal saint, knowing exactly what you’re doing with those fingers.”

She laughed. “We have three hours.”

Draco kissed her hard.

“Plenty of time to make me late.”

The rain was heavier now—steady against the windows, blurring the buildings beyond them into soft watercolor smudges. The breakfast tray floated forgotten in the corner. The bedsheets were rumpled, a croissant laying forgotten under the bed. Neither of them cared.

Hermione lay half-draped across Draco’s chest, her fingers tracing idle patterns along his stomach. His hand moved lazily through her curls, combing without purpose.

“You know we have to leave the bed eventually,” she murmured.

“Debatable,” he said.

She laughed against his skin.

“I suppose you want to make a statement today,” she added. “Waltzing into the Manor like you didn’t marry me in a villa with no witnesses or your parents approval.”

“Correction,” Draco said. “I married you exactly how I wanted to. With an oath just the two of us, and my parents approve.”

Hermione smiled. Then fell quiet.

He felt her breath change before her voice did.

“What if they’re not... thrilled?”

Draco tilted his head to look at her. “My parents?”

She nodded, not meeting his eyes. “I didn’t exactly... come with a dowry. Or a bloodline. And I know I’m not the match they imagined for you.”

He shifted, reaching toward the bedside table.

“I think you’re forgetting they’re just grateful I married anyone at all.”

He brought out a small, velvet-lined box—worn at the corners, but clearly treasured.

Hermione blinked. “What’s that?”

He opened it, then placed it silently in her lap.

Inside, nestled against the dark lining, was a bracelet. Gold so fine it caught the light like woven thread, delicate as lace but undeniably ancient. Its links were impossibly intricate, like the delicate scales of a snake, a dragon.

Hermione’s breath caught.

“It’s—”

“A Malfoy heirloom,” he said simply. “The women in our family wear bracelets during courtship. Always have. Charms for protection, enchantments for health, tokens added with each generation.”

She reached out, hesitated.

Draco took her wrist gently.

“It was my grandmother’s,” he said. “And my mother’s, until I asked for it.”

Hermione’s heart was pounding now. “She... agreed?”

“She did,” he said, snapping the clasp into place with a quiet click. “They’re not angry. They’re relieved. You’ve saved the family from years of my mother scheming and my father’s quiet fury at his only heir.”

She let out a shaky laugh, eyes fixed on the bracelet glittering against her skin.

“It’s beautiful,” she whispered. “I love it.”

Draco looked at her for a long moment. “Good. Because it’s never coming off.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow.

“You’re part of tradition now.”

Then he reached into his pocket and drew out a smaller box—dark green velvet, old and soft at the edges. He opened it without a word.

Inside, a ring gleamed like night itself.

Hermione’s breath caught.

Draco slipped it onto her left ring finger with care, his touch reverent.

“This,” he said quietly, “is your wedding ring.”

She stared at it, at the weight of it, the way the stones caught the stormlight—ancient and strange and utterly hers.

“It’s perfect,” she said, voice unsteady.

He didn’t answer—just looked at her with that same still, burning gaze.

She reached up, cupped his face, and kissed him softly.

And in that moment, with stormlight spilling through the windows, gold curling around her wrist, and black diamonds cold and certain on her finger, Hermione Granger—Hermione Malfoy—felt perfectly happy.

And it didn’t frighten her at all.

December 18, 2005

late afternoon—Grimmauld Place

When Harry opened the door, he froze for a heartbeat—then smiled so wide it made his eyes crinkle.

“Hermione?”

She looked up at him with a soft, sure smile, wrapped in a long coat the color of pale stone. Her hair was wind-tossed but elegant, cheeks pink from the december wind.

“Hi,” she said.

He didn’t wait. He pulled her into a hug, arms closing around her shoulders with the kind of familiarity that never faded, no matter the months apart.

“You look good,” he murmured. “Really good.”

She chuckled softly against his chest. “I’ve had sun and sleep. It’s a dangerous combination.”

He stepped back and looked at her properly, still grinning. “Come in. Please. Ginny and James are at the Burrow—I’ve got the place to myself.”

She nodded and stepped inside, the old floorboards creaking under her boots.

He didn’t miss the heavy gold bracelet shimmering faintly against the cuff of her coat, neither he missed the gold and black ring in her left hand. She hadn’t been wearing it when she left.

But he didn’t ask. Not yet.

He waited until, Hermione had taken her coat off and folded it neatly over a chair. Until She was comfortably seated at the kitchen table, hands wrapped around a mug he had just poured for her.

The bracelet glinted again as she reached for the sugar.

He slid into the seat across from her, exhaling as he settled.

“I’m really glad you’re here,” he said. “And... I’m sorry.”

She tilted her head.

“I was a bloody idiot,” he admitted. “About everything. You were right.”

Hermione just sipped her tea. “I know.”

Harry laughed, rubbing the back of his neck. “Still a little scary, that you never gloat.”

She arched a brow. “I don’t need to.”

He smiled, but then grew quiet, his gaze dropping to the bracelet and ring.

It wasn’t her usual style.

“Is that...?” he began.

Hermione followed his gaze.

“Yes,” she said simply. “We got married.”

There was a pause.

Harry didn’t ask who. He didn’t need to.

“When?” he asked.

“Almost two months ago.”

“That’s... why you extended your leave.”

She nodded.

Harry let out a breath, leaning back in his chair. “You didn’t waste any time.”

“It didn’t feel fast,” she said. “It felt right.”

Harry looked at her, and all at once, he could see it. She looked grounded. Steady. There was light in her eyes again, and not the brittle, burning kind he’d seen that awful day she left.

Harry took another sip of tea, still watching the way the bracelet on Hermione’s wrist caught the firelight. After a long moment, he shook his head with a wry smile.

“You know,” he said, “Neville called it.”

Hermione looked up from her mug.

“He told me this would happen,” Harry went on. “Said Malfoy’s not the type to have a girlfriend. The minute you gave him even a hint of approval, he’d marry you.”

Hermione laughed—surprised, genuine. “He said that?”

“Word for word.” Harry grinned. “Neville’s sharper than people give him credit for.”

Hermione took a sip from her tea, her smile softening into something quieter. “There’s so much about the magical world we never knew, isn’t there? Not the war things, or spells, or what you can learn from a book—but the other things. The *other* things. The stuff families are supposed to teach you.”

She looked down at her hands. “Maybe that’s true in the Muggle world too. Maybe there are things our parents would’ve told us, if we’d had them long enough.”

Harry’s breath hitched almost imperceptibly.

“Yeah,” he said, after a pause. “I feel that. I don’t know how *anything* works. Half the time I’m just winging it. The other half, I’m asking Ginny what we’re supposed to do.”
Hermione smiled gently. “Ginny’s lucky. And so are you.”

Harry gave a small shrug, the kind that meant *yeah, maybe* but didn’t want to admit it aloud.

A soft silence settled between them.

Then Hermione glanced at the clock.

“I can’t stay long,” she said, rising. “I just—wanted to see you first. Before the announcement.”

Harry stood as well. “The Prophet?”

She nodded. “Tomorrow morning’s edition. It’ll be official. I didn’t want you to find out with everyone else.”

Harry’s mouth quirked. “How thoughtful of Lady Malfoy.”

Hermione rolled her eyes but smiled. “Mrs Malfoy, for now and hopefully at least a couple of decades.”

They walked to the door together, old boards groaning beneath their steps. The hallway light was soft, golden, catching in her hair as she shrugged her coat back on.

Harry paused as he opened the door. “You look happy, you know. Not just the rested kind. The... terrifying Hermione-has-a-plan kind.”

She laughed. “Maybe I do.”

He looked at her for a moment longer, his oldest friend, familiar and unfamiliar all at once. Then he nodded, and opened the door fully.

Outside, waiting on the pavement, was Draco Malfoy.

He was dressed in a long, dark coat, his gloved hands casually in his pockets. His eyes found Hermione immediately—then flicked to Harry.

Harry stepped aside. Hermione didn’t hesitate.

Her hand slid smoothly into the crook of Draco’s arm, like it belonged there.

“Potter,” Draco said, with the barest incline of his head.

Harry returned it, just as cool. “Malfoy.”

No other words. None were needed.

Then with a sharp *crack*, they disappeared—vanishing into the winter air.

Harry stood in the doorway a moment longer, the cold wind brushing against his collar.

And he whispered, half-smiling, “Bloody hell.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this, as we are coming close to the end I feel tempted to add an extra chapter just with the flash backs and forwards that didn't fit anywhere else and maybe an extended epilogue. there are certain stuff that I might have failed to tag accordingly because the idea was not yet fully formed so for next chapter please check the note I will add at the beginning of the chapter ;)

as always thanks for reading.

Chapter 8: Everyone has eyes

Chapter Summary

The doors slid shut with a mechanical sigh.

Draco barely glanced up from the folder in his hand. He looked as he always did—impeccable robes, gloved hands, polished boots, the faintest trace of cologne Hermione had once described as “cleaner than virtue.”

Ron stood stiff beside him, jaw clenched, hair damp from the rain.
They descended in silence for a long, taut moment.

Chapter Notes

Went and scrapped chapter 8 and instead you get all the details of their return and Hermione's Directorship appointment to saint Mungo children wing. Plus other tidbits. I feel if I post now I can tide. you over to the actual chapter that's meant for next Wednesday! ;)

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

The Daily Prophet
Society & Announcements
December 19, 2005

The Malfoy Heir Returns with a Bride

The *Prophet* is pleased to formally announce the return to England of Draco Lucius Malfoy, heir to the House of Malfoy, and his new wife, Hermione Malfoy (née Granger), following an extended retreat abroad.

The couple, long regarded as close intellectual companions within international diplomatic and academic circles, are understood to have begun a private courtship earlier this year following Mrs. Malfoy's birthday, with the full knowledge and blessing of both families.

They were married on **20 November**, in a private ceremony held along the Adriatic coast and was said to be *deeply traditional* in accordance with ancient magical customs.

A formal spring reception and ball is being prepared by the Malfoy family, with invitations expected to be issued in early March. The event will mark the couple's official presentation as husband and wife in to society.

Hermione Malfoy, a decorated war heroine and one of the most distinguished minds of her generation, is set to assume directorship of the Department for Child Magical Illnesses at St. Mungo's Hospital this winter. Her appointment follows several years of specialization, and her appointment is widely regarded as a significant boon to British magical healthcare.

No further comments will be made at this time by either family.

19 December, 2005

The Burrow – *Morning, breakfast in the kitchen*

The newspaper landed with a *smack* against the worn kitchen table. Flour dusted the edges of the front page, Molly having just dusted it off the counter from a baking spell gone half-wrong.

Fred whistled low. “Well, that’s one for the family scrapbook.”

George leaned over his twin’s shoulder, blinking at the headline. “*The Malfoy Heir Returns with a Bride...* Oh, that is rich.”

“Twenty galleons,” Fred said, without looking up, holding out his hand.

George groaned. “You’re not serious.”

“I told you,” Fred said, smug. “I said if she didn’t come back with a tan and a husband, I’d be shocked.”

George rummaged through his coat pockets and dropped a heavy bag into Fred’s outstretched hand.

Bill looked up from his toast, amused. “You two actually bet on Hermione’s marriage?”

“Obviously,” Fred said. “It was the only way to make this whole thing less of a mood killer.”

“She married *Malfoy*,” Molly said, her voice carefully even as she stirred the porridge. “I... I did *not* see that coming—this fast.”

“Really?” George said, grinning. “Because I saw it coming three years ago. I mean, they were basically doing the whole courting thing in front of Ron in the most boring and polite way possible—at least Malfoy was.”

Fred flipped the paper toward Bill. “Here, check the bracelet. Looks like the one great-great grandma wore in the portraits. And that ring—tell me that’s not a Black heirloom.”

Bill squinted at the grainy *Prophet* photo. “Black diamonds. Classic spell-bonded setting, probably from the 1700s. The Malfoys really went full house of black on her. Shame Grandma Weasley got struck from the Black family tree; I’d love to study the enchantments on that kind of piece. Bet you it hums like a wardstone.”

“So she’s basically one of us now,” Fred said brightly. “Right? Cousin-by-Black-adjacency?”

George snorted. “Right, just the side of the family that never talks to us.”

“I always liked Hermione,” Fred said. “Just didn’t like watching her slowly calcify into Ron’s forever girlfriend.”

Molly clucked her tongue.

Bill sipped his tea. “Honestly, I’m just surprised it wasn’t sooner.”

Molly blinked. “Sooner?”

“Well, Ronikins married Padma *two weeks* after the split,” Bill said, glancing back down at the article. “Hermione gave it what two full months and then more before coming back. I say she wins this one.”

Fred raised his mug. “To Hermione, Queen of Poor Choices and Very good timing.”

George clinked his mug against his brother’s. “Long may she reign.”

Molly sighed.

19 December, 2005

Lucius Malfoy, Wizengamot Office.

The *Prophet* lay open across Lucius Malfoy's desk, its headline casting long shadows over a chamber already thick with whispers:

Granger and Malfoy Return, Married in Florence.

A knock—measured and respectful.

“Enter,” Lucius called.

Brutus Bulstrode stepped inside, his posture caught between deference and determination. He was broad-shouldered, his robes modestly tailored, and still too young to carry the full gravity of his family name with ease. But there was something earnest about him—solid, like oak still maturing.

He closed the door behind him and crossed the room with only a brief glance at the *Prophet*.

“I thought I should offer congratulations,” he said. “It’s... quite the headline.”

Lucius didn’t rise, but inclined his head with calm satisfaction. “Thank you. It’s been long in the making.”

Brutus gave a half-laugh. “I imagine so.”

He hesitated.

Lucius studied him. “You didn’t come just to flatter me, Brutus.”

Brutus smiled tightly and took the chair offered to him. “No, sir. It’s about Millie. She’s developed... an attachment.”

Lucius’s brow lifted a fraction. “To?”

“Someone from Magical Transport. Half-blood. Polite. Ambitious in a way, but... unexceptional. She wants me to consider the match. And I want her to be happy, but I don’t want to weaken our name out of sibling affection.”

Lucius’s expression softened just a shade. “So you seek clarity.”

“I do,” Brutus said quietly.

Lucius nodded once, as if that satisfied him. “Then here’s my counsel: if he were Harry Potter, I’d say yes without blinking. The name, the magic, the legacy—it would lift her, and the family. But he isn’t.”

Brutus blinked.

“And so,” Lucius continued evenly, “we must hold the line. Your sister has grown into a striking young woman—tall, graceful, with the Bulstrode cheekbones and almost nothing from her mother side. She could marry very well.”

Brutus flushed with pride, but said nothing.

“And just because I know this things matter to young ladies.” Lucius added dryly, “She’ll appreciate Dacian Rowle. Taller than her. Dark-haired. Discreet. And a good match.”

Brutus tilted his head. “Dacian’s a few years older.”

“Years, not decades,” Lucius said smoothly. “And Millie is not a girl anymore. She’ll come to appreciate a man who can carry the weight of her name without buckling.”

Brutus exhaled, thoughtful.

“Put an end to her flirtation before it goes out of hand. Let Dacian begin to call—gently. If there’s no spark after the spring, you’ll have lost nothing.”

He stood and adjusted his cuffs. “But she deserves a house and name of her same magnitude, No matter dead Conrad indiscretions.”

Lucius nodded, then paused.

“I’ve another suggestion,” he said.

Brutus turned back.

“Join us for dinner on Yule. Bring Millie. Let her see for herself what it means to marry upward in every sense. My daughter-in-law—Hermione—is unlike any witch you’ve ever met, and she needs new respectable girlfriends.”

Brutus’s brows lifted.

Lucius allowed himself a very slight, private smile. “You’ll understand why I made the exception.”

Brutus inclined his head. “We’ll be there.”

“And Brutus?”

“Yes, Uncle?”

“Don’t treat your sister’s future like a rescue,” Lucius said softly. “Treat it like a campaign. She deserves no less.”

20 December 2006

Grimaud Place

The tea had gone cold.

Ginny sat at the kitchen table, elbow propped up, fingers tangled in her hair as she stared at the copy of *The Prophet* spread across the counter. The headline was bold, gilded magically, and utterly impossible to ignore.

HERMIONE GRANGER RETURNS—NOW MRS. MALFOY, SETTLES IN BELGRAVIA TOWNHOUSE.

A glamorous photo of Draco and Hermione standing outside the Belgravia townhouse blinked up at her. He had his hand at the small of her back. She was wearing navy blue, her curls glossy and still wild, a black diamond ring unmistakable on her left hand.

Ginny's jaw was clenched so tightly it hurt.

"She didn't even tell us," she muttered. "She just disappeared. And now this?"

Behind her, Harry sighed.

"She didn't disappear," he said from the doorway. "She took personal leave from St. Mungo's. You know that."

"She could've said something," Ginny snapped. "She could've told *me*. I'm her friend."

Harry crossed the room slowly, picked up the teapot, and poured himself a cup. "You *were*. Then you started treating her like she had cheated on your brother."

Ginny's head jerked toward him. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means," Harry said carefully, "that I think you've been waiting for Hermione to do something terrible, so you could stop feeling guilty for how you've treated her."

Ginny's mouth opened, but Harry raised a hand.

"She didn't cheat on Ron."

"She married Malfoy!"

"She did but I don't think that matters," Harry said.

Ginny's face flushed deep red.

Harry set his tea down hard.

“She saved us, Ginny. You, me, Ron, everyone. More times than I can count. She gave up everything for the Order, She made herself an orphan.

Silence.

Ginny folded her arms tightly. “She’s not the same person.”

“No. neither of us are.”

“You’re really taking her side?”

Harry exhaled sharply. “I’m taking *your* side.”

Ginny blinked, caught off guard. “What?”

“I’m taking your side,” Harry said again, slower. “That means I’m not going to stand by and let you turn bitter over this. It means I’m not going to let you become some angry, jealous version of yourself just because Hermione moved on from your brother.”

She stiffened.

“Ron cheated on her, Gin,” Harry said, voice low but steady. “He humiliated her. And she let it slide. She didn’t retaliate, she didn’t trash him in the press, she just disappeared quietly and let him have his happy ending. She’s been gracious—for years.”

Ginny looked away, mouth tight.

“And now she’s married. She’s doing well. She’s happy. And if you love her—if you ever really loved her—you’ll be glad.”

“I just...” Ginny’s voice cracked. “I thought she’d come back to us.”

“She might,” Harry said. “But on her terms.”

He stepped forward, reached out, and brushed a hand over her shoulder.

“I want you to be your best, Ginny. The woman I married—the one who fights for people, who makes things better, who doesn’t tear others down.”

Silence hung between them.

“She still loves you,” Harry said softly. “You *know* she does. Don’t give her a reason to stay away.”

Ginny’s throat bobbed.

After a long moment, she nodded, quiet and shaken.

“I’ll try.”

Harry squeezed her hand.

Yule 2006

Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire

Millicent hadn't been inside Malfoy Manor since she was fifteen, when her father decided it was too dangerous for her to be within looking distance of the Inner Circle. And even before that, she'd never been invited specifically—only tolerated as part of a family tie.

Now, she sat in the golden-lit dining room, magnificently draped in holly and candlelight, the air softly humming with Yule enchantments—laid, she assumed, by an army of house-elves. She tried not to let her nerves show.

The guest list was small, but she knew the Malfoys were saving any larger gathering for the ball Hermione and Draco would host in the spring. They were seated at a long, oval table—just narrow enough to feel intimate. Lucius and Narcissa presided at each end, stately as ever. Draco sat to her left, lean and sharp in dark green. On her right, Lucanus Rowle—unbothered, unreadable.

Across from her sat Hermione. And flanking her were her brother Brutus and Dacian Rowle. Half a dozen other Sacred Twenty-Eight families filled the remaining places: quiet power, impeccably dressed.

Hermione looked... lovely. Understated, but luminous in a twilight-pink robe, her hair swept back in a loose knot, a thin gold chain at her throat. She didn't look like someone playing dress-up for high society—she looked like she *belonged*. That alone was disorienting enough.

More disorienting still: she'd been kind. Even warm.

When Millicent had stepped in, expecting polite distance or quiet scrutiny, Hermione had instead smiled and reached for her hand.

"I've meant to say this for ages," she'd said, while they waited to be seated. "But I'm sorry. For second year. I think I punched you first."

Millicent blinked. "I had you in a headlock."

They both laughed. And it hadn't felt fake.

Now, over an exquisite meal, Hermione spoke with Brutus about her position at St. Mungo's with quiet pride. She'd grown into a proper lady—not delicate, but deliberate. Her voice carried easily, but never over anyone else's. She asked good questions. She knew when to listen. Narcissa, clearly pleased, nodded often as Hermione spoke—her agreement never overbearing, but unmistakable. A seal of approval.

And then there was Dacian.

He was charming—surprisingly so. Not nearly as imposing as Lucanus, nor as polished, but sharp in his own dry way. He leaned in when Millicent spoke, his attention soft but focused, as though he'd never heard anything more interesting.

She blushed once or twice. Which she hated.

But it didn't stop her from speaking again.

She caught Draco watching them. Not closely. Not intrusively. Just... aware. Like he saw the blush and recognized it for what it was.

"We're thinking of hosting a spring reception," Lucius said later, his voice smooth.
"Something to celebrate Draco's marriage properly. As it was... rather abrupt."

Hermione smiled and sipped her wine. "Spring would be lovely. The conservatory should be in bloom by then."

Narcissa tilted her head, pleased. "Of course. You're right. The roses would be in full flush."

Millicent couldn't help but notice how easy they were with one another now—the Malfoys. They operated like a constellation. Everyone in orbit, no one outshining. It was strange... and impressive.

After dinner, the men disappeared into Lucius's study. Millicent followed Narcissa, Hermione, and the other women into a smaller salon. The air smelled faintly of lemon and peonies. At Hermione's quiet call, sherbets and sugared confections appeared in floating tiers across every table.

With ease that surprised her less and less, Hermione drew her in again.

"I was really glad you came tonight," she said quietly.

Then, after a pause: "Draco says Lucanus's younger brother was hoping you'd come. Apparently he remembers dancing with you at a ball in fourth year."

Millicent felt herself blush again. "Really?"

Hermione nodded, brushing a curl behind her ear. "He's very tall," she said teasingly. "You'd never have to worry about heels. And he's clever. He works in magical preservation—architecture, mostly. Bit of a history enthusiast. I think it's fascinating."

Millicent studied her. Hermione looked so at ease. She didn't say Dacian was a good match. She didn't push. But something in the way she spoke—offhand, curious, amused—made Millicent turn the idea over in her mind again.

Dacian Rowle.

6 January 2006

St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies, Childhood Injuries, and Magical accidents Wing.

Padma adjusted her healer's robes as she stepped into the Pediatric Diagnostic Wing. She'd been asked to consult on a particularly tricky hex reaction case—some specialist with odd readings and erratic magical surges.

She didn't expect to find Hermione Granger already there, standing over the patient file, brows knit, wand in hand, no healer robes but expensive ones with just a white outer robe, a privilege for Directors only.

"Granger?" Padma said, momentarily thrown.

Hermione didn't look up.

"Healer Malfoy," a passing junior corrected helpfully, then vanished into the corridor.

Padma froze.

She glanced at Hermione's left hand. The ring gleamed darkly beneath the pale sleeves of her robes. A courting bracelet unmistakable on her wrist.

Hermione finally looked up, eyes sharp, unreadable.

"I wasn't aware you were... back," Padma said carefully.

Hermione's smile didn't reach her eyes. "The announcement was in the Prophet two weeks ago. I assumed you read it."

"I meant here. At St. Mungo's."

"Ah." Hermione returned her attention to the file. "Yes. I've accepted the directorship of the *MMCIMA*."

Padma blinked. "But you hadn't finished—"

"I had, actually," Hermione said, flipping a page. "Before I left. I had more than enough hours banked in rotations and overtime. And an academic recommendation from the International Medical Guild. Not that it's your place to ask."

Padma felt her throat go dry.

Hermione glanced once—deliberately—at Padma’s rounded stomach. Her expression didn’t change. No sneer, no smile. Just cold observation.

“I assume you’re still in General Diagnostics,” Hermione said mildly.

“Yes,” Padma said, trying to keep her tone even. “I was called in for this consult.”

“Unnecessary,” Hermione said crisply. “The spell trace is classic unstable layering—incorrect sequencing of a cleansing charm with a reactive cooling hex. A first-year mistake. Easily treatable.”

Padma flushed. “The records suggested something more complicated.”

“They were incomplete.” Hermione passed her wand once more over the child’s chart, making three quick annotations in elegant, looping script. “See the residual glow at the fourth point. No original injury. Just interference. Likely from overzealous home treatment.”

Padma didn’t answer.

“I’ve already written the treatment plan,” Hermione said. “You can sign off on it. Or not.”

“Of course,” Padma murmured.

Hermione didn’t look at her again.

“Healer Patil,” she said coolly. “Good day.”

And with that, she swept from the room, her braid swinging neatly behind her.

Padma stared after her, jaw clenched, heart thudding. For a moment—just a moment—she felt like she was twelve years old again, staring at Hermione Granger’s hand in the air, already answering the question Padma hadn’t yet processed.

Only now, she wasn’t just smarter.

She was in power.

Padma stood just outside the charting station, hands cradling the file of a spell-burned toddler who wouldn’t respond to standard salves. Her back ached. Her ankles were swollen. Her wand felt heavier with each passing hour. She had four weeks left before mandatory leave, and it couldn’t come soon enough.

“Still waiting on your orders, Healer Patil,” one of the nurses said from across the room, her tone too cheerful.

Padma blinked. “Right—yes. Use the pain-reducing balm first. Wait thirty minutes. If the inflammation doesn’t respond, try—”

"I'll check with Healer Director Malfoy before I proceed," the nurse said quickly, with a tight smile, already walking away.

Padma closed her eyes.

It had been like this all week.

Ever since Hermione—*Healer Director Malfoy*, officially—had returned and taken control of the wing, it felt like everyone was keeping score. The other interns, the aides, the junior healers. Everyone was suddenly meticulous, deferential, rigid. And Padma was always... a beat behind.

Nothing Hermione did was overtly cruel. It was worse than that. It was measured. Professional. Exact.

Her critiques came in front of others, always with a tone that was perfectly polite. Padma's charts came back corrected in Hermione's script—sleek, controlled, no room for interpretation. When Padma handed off patients, Hermione would double-check everything herself. When she offered a treatment suggestion, Hermione rarely acknowledged it unless someone else backed it.

Everyone else saw it, and no one said a word.

"She's just hard on everyone," one of the interns whispered in the break room that morning. "She's a perfectionist."

"She's brilliant," another said. "I'd want her running the floor if my kid was here."

Padma sat silently, picking at the corner of her tea cup.

No one wanted to be the one defending the woman who'd gotten pregnant by the director's former fiancé. The newspapers might have swept it under the rugs but everyone at Saint Mungo knew.

Even though Padma was one of the best in her cohort. Even though she had always done the work. Even though she hadn't *meant* for any of it to happen.

But it didn't matter.

Now when Hermione Granger—*Healer Director Malfoy*—walked the halls like she owned the place. Which she almost did everyone was willing to trip Padma if it meant to gain favour.

One more week. She just needed to last one more week.

February 22, 2006

Level Four Ministry of Magic Lift

The doors slid shut with a mechanical sigh.

Draco barely glanced up from the folder in his hand. He looked as he always did—impeccable robes, gloved hands, polished boots, the faintest trace of cologne Hermione had once described as “cleaner than virtue.”

Ron stood stiff beside him, jaw clenched, hair damp from the rain.

They descended in silence for a long, taut moment.

Then Ron spoke.

“You were courting her,” he said, voice flat. “The whole time she was with me.”

Draco didn’t look up from the place where he was adjusting the pearl button of his gloves.
“Yes.”

Ron’s shoulders jerked, as if he’d braced for denial and didn’t know what to do with the truth.

The lift hummed.

“You smug bastard.”

Draco turned a page in his file, unbothered. “You were welcome to expose me.”

“You knew we were together.”

“You were sleeping beside her, yes. That’s not quite the same.”

Ron’s hand tightened on the rail. “She loved me.”

“Possibly,” Draco said coolly. “But she stayed with you out of only that. And maybe guilt. That’s not enough—she needed more.”

Ron lunged toward him a step, voice rising. “You’re not denying it. You’re not even ashamed.”

Draco finally closed the folder.

“No,” he said simply. “Because I married her. The moment I could. You had all the time in the world to do it—and you didn’t.”

The lift jerked softly as it passed another level.

Ron's breathing was sharp, his cheeks flushed.

"She never would've left if I hadn't—"

"Cheated?" Draco cut in, sharp as a wand's edge. "No, she wouldn't have. Hermione hates failure. She would've made it work. She would've kept polishing the wreckage until it resembled a marriage."

He stepped closer, voice lower now.

"But I don't want a witch who stays out of pity or love. I want a witch who is incapable of leaving because I'm everything to her."

Ron flinched.

Draco's tone sharpened, too quiet for anything but truth.

"She's not easy. She's brilliant, relentless, proud—and so very tired of being made to be a common thing. She is not domestic, she is a luxury."

Ron swallowed hard, gaze dropping to the floor.

The lift gave a final lurch.

Level Seven.

Draco didn't move to step out just yet.

"We're both married men now," he said. "So who cares who which girl we fancied before?"

His gaze was merciless. "Unless, of course, you still think about her."

The doors opened.

Draco didn't wait for an answer. He stepped out into the empty corridor.

Behind him, the lift door shut again—sealing Ron inside with his own silence.

Chapter End Notes

My dear Millie, her back story is one of my favorites she is actually a half blood, her father was pretty famous for his dalliances and she is the daughter of the muggle-born secretary of her dad, so I gave her an older brother that's an actual pureblood. Being in Slytherin wasn't easy for her but being a Bulstrode this was her only option.

Now see how Harry is trying to make ginny better (I don't know a bout the results I'm a mere conduit ;)

Next chapter we are taking a jump into 2008, If you are curious Padma's child is due on April of 2006.

Chapter 9: He married up

Chapter Summary

Draco shoved him harder, the back of his head cracking against the panel. The whole room had stilled. Theo was casually toying with his wand his eyes affixed on the two elderly wizards who had rose halfway to their feet, but had yet to intervene.

“Listen to me carefully,” Draco hissed. “Hermione Malfoy has more power in her pinky finger than your entire inbred line. She has more influence, more reputation, more magic than you’ve ever had.”

Gaspard sneered. “She’s just a climbing little—”

Chapter Notes

I have zero chill... but you told me to add more chapters so here have it!

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

3 March, 2006

Orbis Viridis, dueling club, Mayfair – Midnight

The club was quiet this late—only old families remained, sipping firewhisky beneath candlelit portraits and velvet drapery. Most had gone home right after dinner. The real duelers stayed past midnight.

Draco had just set down his glass when the words drifted over from the far end of the oak-paneled salon:

“...his little Mudblood’s is wearing the whole vault this days and using his money to play healer—.”

The voice was lazy. Confident. Old Gaspard Rosier.

Draco’s fingers stilled around the cut crystal glass.

A pause stretched.

Then he stood. Theo a couple of steps behind him.

The scrape of his chair was a warning. The steps he took were measured. But when he reached Gaspard’s chair, he didn’t speak. He lifted him by the collar of his brocade robes and *slammed* him against the wood-paneled wall hard enough that one of the ancestral portraits gasped aloud.

Gaspard choked. “Son—what the—!”

Draco leaned in close, his voice pure murmured violence. “Say that word again.”

Gaspard’s face flushed purple. “You’re off your bloody—!”

Draco shoved him harder, the back of his head cracking against the panel. The whole room had stilled. Theo was casually toying with his wand his eyes affixed on the two elderly wizards who had rose halfway to their feet, but had yet to intervene.

“Listen to me carefully,” Draco hissed. “Hermione Malfoy has more power in her *pinky* finger than your entire *inbred* line. She has more influence, more reputation, more *magic* than you’ve ever had.”

Gaspard sneered. “She’s just a climbing little—”

“If I hear you call her that again,” Draco interrupted, voice lethal-soft, “I *will* end your line. Right here. Right now. Even your precious squib grandson you keep hidden.”

Gaspard paled.

"I've read your family records," Draco said, quiet as ice. "Two squib sisters. One son who can't even hold a wand straight. And you think you can judge *her*?"

His eyes were murderously calm.

"I married up."

A beat of silence.

"Say it," Draco whispered.

Gaspard swallowed hard. "You married up."

Draco let go. The man sagged against the wall, gasping.

With one final glance, Draco adjusted his cuffs and turned away.

Theo handed him his firewisky back.

He Apparated into the foyerback at Belgravia just before one.

Hermione's voice drifted from the hallway.

"Draco?"

She appeared barefoot, curls a bit sleep-mussed, wearing one of his silk shirts and her old sleep shorts. When she saw him, she smiled—bright and real.

"You're home early."

Draco exhaled slowly.

"Yes," he said, letting his eyes rest on her, steadyng himself. "I missed you."

She grinned, stepping into him. "Lucky me, then."

His arms wrapped around her as she pressed against his chest.

He said nothing more.

But he held her like a dragon holds a treasure, he had ensured that *everyone* understood she belonged.

6 March 2006

Nott House

The fire had burned low by the time Blaise refilled their glasses for the fourth—or fifth—time. The wind outside howled against the glass, but the inside of the drawing room was warm, decadent, and thick with smoke and satisfaction.

“You absolute bastard,” Theo said, dragging a hand down his face. “You denied us the scandal of the century.”

“I didn’t realize you were planning the guest list,” Draco drawled.

“We *were*,” Blaise muttered. “I had half a dozen bets riding on who would hex who first at your wedding.”

Draco smirked. “Apologies.”

Theo leaned forward. “But seriously—who was the witness?”

There was a pause.

Draco blinked, serene. “There wasn’t one.”

Both men stared.

Theo’s glass hovered mid-air. “You mean—”

“It was an impulse,” Draco said, voice light, almost smug. “She kissed me. I asked. She said yes.”

Blaise sat back, stunned. “No contract?”

“No agreement?” Theo echoed.

“No need,” Draco said. “We married the old way.”

Theo’s jaw dropped. “You bound your *souls*—without a contract?”

“Fucking hell,” Blaise muttered.

Draco sipped his drink.

Theo exhaled, reverent. “You mad, mad bastard.”

“She can have a post-nuptial if she wants,” Draco added casually. “But we’re not going to need it.”

There was a moment of silence.

Then Theo grinned. “Everyone’s afraid of her now, you know.”

Draco’s eyes glittered. “As they should be.”

“I mean it,” Theo continued. “Even Pansy’s mother told her to write her a congratulatory owl or else, not that she needed the remainder she is engaged to Longbottom, always a step ahead that one.”

Blaise chuckled nervously. “You did rattled old Gaspard Rosier.”

Draco shrugged. “He called her *my little mudblood*. I told him if I heard it again, there would be nothing left of his line to teach a lesson to.”

Theo raised his glass. “Fair.”

“He’s an idiot anyway,” Blaise said. “Everyone knows you married up.”

Draco only smiled.

“I did.”

Theo laughed. “And even your father agrees”

“He was *always* for the marriage,” Draco said. “How else do you think I saved myself from my mother’s fury?”

They all leaned back.

After a pause, Draco glanced at Blaise. “So? Are *you* finally going to marry Lovegood?”

Blaise rolled his eyes. “Xenophilius finally agreed, we will announce it after pansy’s.”

Theo grinned. “You’ll learn all about Nargles now.”

Blaise threw a cushion at him.

April 2006

It just looks like a wedding

The Malfoy Manor had been transformed. Twilight shimmered across acres of manicured gardens and marble porticos. A full orchestra played in the courtyard, music wafting between the tall windows flung open to let in the scent of flowers and spring. Inside, the air smelled of beeswax, old gold, and something rarer—approval.

Understated elegance reigned. The room bloomed in hues of pale pink, bone-white, and silver. Anemones—blush with dark centers—filled antique vases, caught in low centerpieces that looked like sculpture. Every table glimmered under candlelight and crystal.

And in the middle of it all stood Hermione.

Her robes matched the anemones: sheer layers of near-weightless fabric, in the softest shade of rose. No tiara, no diamonds—just the black diamond ring on her left hand, and her bracelet. Her hair was swept up with the kind of careless grace Narcissa insisted could only be achieved with six separate spells and three willing elves.

She looked luminous.

She felt... numb.

Not in a bad way. Just... detached, maybe just exhausted.

There was warmth. Praise. Endless flutes of chilled wine. Compliments murmured from every corner of the room. People she had once hated,—people who had once sneered—now bowed, smiled, toasted. She heard her name paired with phrases like *elevated the family* and *remarkable healer* and *future Lady Malfoy*.

Hermione smiled and thanked them, over and over.

She wasn't a fool she knew some —most?— saw her as nothing but as a mudblood but would look the other way if it meant they were back on the public good grace.

She liked the admiration. The way her accomplishments were recited instead of a family lineage. Old Wizengamot wizards listened when she spoke, and tried to find a middle ground with her, not because they recognized her advantage and understood that if their wives and daughters wished to maintain their social standing, they had better comply.

She didn't think she would ever tire of that intoxicating power. At one point, she had considered pursuing a career in politics, but she was acutely aware of the daunting challenge it would have been without the backing of a distinguished family name. Now, however, she wielded influence from behind the scenes—just as a true Malfoy witch would.

The planning had been almost easy, except for her family situation, Narcissa had not asked many questions.

Hermione had told her, simply, once: *I am an orphan. By my own hand.* And Narcissa had nodded slowly. Then she reached forward, clasped Hermione's wrist, and said, *You are ours now. That is enough.*

Now, she floated through the ballroom on the arm of Theo Nott or Blaise Zabini or Pansy Parkinson—who had taken to Hermione with cheerful elegance, her relationship with Neville a surprise.

Her old friendships were fraying at the ends a bit. Harry and Ginny were there—Ginny tight-lipped but trying, she had wrote her a letter apologizing, Harry warm and politely putting up with all the purebloods trying to ingratiate themselves with him, or probably—most likely—pitching him betrothal contracts for James who was but a babe. Luna arrived with Blaise and charmed a circle of Rosiers and Nott cousins with her latest magic theories, but again Luna's eccentricities in pure blood society were delightful and harmless, they all had way more *eccentric* and dangerous cousins. Fleur and Bill stood in a corner with Lord Greengrass, laughing. Almost everyone was there, almost Hermione noticed the absences too. No Molly. No Arthur.

But every other Weasley was there, Bill had surprised everyone early in the year taking up the Weasley seat at the last Lords' assembly, after their cousin Edward's passing.

"Your robes are perfect," Narcissa whispered to her when they passed near the refreshment tables. "And the anemones—" she smiled lightly. "Exactly what I imagined. See what happens when you let me plan?"

Hermione smiled. "Thank you."

"Your friends seem to be enjoying themselves," Narcissa added, eyes sweeping the room. "I'm glad they came."

"So am I," Hermione said. And she meant it.

Draco was watching her from across the room—hands in his pockets, lips curled faintly in pride. Pansy leaned against Neville, saying something snide, and he laughed, shaking his head.

When they finally stood side by side again, toward the end of the night, he took her hand and bent slightly, brushing her knuckles with his lips.

"Well?" he asked, voice low. "Do you regret the spectacle?"

She looked around. The music. The perfect lighting.

"No," she said. "But, It's a circus."

7 June, 2006

Engagement Dinner at the Rowle Townhouse

The drawing room was all brass light and soft velvet walls, the sort of room old families knew how to decorate—elegant without effort. Crystal sconces glimmered along pale blue wallpaper, and a quartet of strings played something soft and classical beneath the murmured conversation.

Hermione stood near the tall windows, a flute of champagne in hand, her other fingers brushing the silk of her sleeve as if trying to steady something inside her. The scent of bay laurel and sandalwood curled in the air. Across the room, Dacian Rowle was laughing quietly at something Millie had said. She looked radiant in a yellow set of robes that made her look luminous.

The room held no uncertainty. Only certainty in elegant robes, family jewels, and the quiet confidence of people raised for this kind of luxury.

Brutus approached from her left—clean-shaven, well-dressed, perfectly polite. There was always a delicate formality to him, the solemn weight of a boy who hadn't expected to become a lord so young.

He bowed slightly. "Mrs. Malfoy."

Hermione smiled. "Please. Hermione, If you don't mind."

He glanced toward the fireplace, where Lucius and Narcissa were engaged in pleasant discussion with an old Selwyn aunt and two Fawley crones. "Hermione then, this evening wouldn't have happened without you and I'm so grateful."

She tilted her head. "I doubt that, they look great together."

"I'm sure," Brutus said simply. "Last year, Millicent was considering some bloke in Magical Transportation. A pleasant enough fellow, I'm told. But... not what she deserved."

Hermione blinked. "I didn't realize."

"Millie and I are half siblings," he continued, "Your friendship has helped her enormously. I think it reminded her who she was. Who we are. And Dacian—well, I owe you for softening her toward him, he had asked about her for months but. She would have dismissed him because of her experience growing up, times are changing for the better."

"Oh didn't mean to—"

"You did her a enormous favor," Brutus said mildly. "And I thank you for it. My sister has always had a good head on her shoulders. She just needed... a friend in the sacred and reassurance to remember her place."

He inclined his head again and disappeared into the crowd.

Hermione stood very still.

Millie had wandered over with Dacian now, her hand slipping easily into his. They made a good pair—physically, socially, politically. Their were not heirs —well, unless Lucanus couldn't find a bride, doubtful— A match that might produce respectable 28th's with so little muggleborn in them that everyone would look the other way.

Hermione's fingers curled tighter around the champagne glass.

It hadn't occurred to her that Millie had been seeing someone. She wondered who was he? — some Hufflepuff, someone gentle, someone *norma*—how serious it had been?.

And she had helped end that possibility.

She hadn't meant to. She wasn't even sure she'd been aware of it. But she saw it now, stark and cold: Preservation.

She hadn't even considered keeping her name, now she was a Malfoy in 20 years no one would think of her as anything else.

Hermione lifted the glass to her lips and sipped.

Millicent caught her eye and smiled—bright, girlish, unaware.

Hermione smiled back.

She would not ruin it for her.

3 October 2006

It arrived with the morning post—delivered by an owl she didn’t know. A small nod to civility, perhaps. Or an unspoken desire to keep the record clean.

The envelope was thick, embossed with her initials in pale ink. The handwriting on the front was unmistakable—precise, and unmistakably Padma.

Hermione slit it open with the ivory letter knife Draco had gifted her just the other day, a horrible affectation she knew.

The letter was short. Formal. Not cold. But not personal at all either.

Healer Director Malfoy,

I hope this finds you well. I’ve delayed writing for too long, but I wanted you to hear this from me rather than through Saint Mungo admin office.

After much reflection, I’ve decided not to return to St. Mungo’s following my maternity leave. My work there was meaningful, and I will always be grateful for the experience. But for now, I’ve chosen to remain home with little Hugo.

Should the time ever feel right again, I may revisit my career in healing maybe as a private practice. Until then, please know I wish you and the team every success ever.

With regard,

Padma Patil-Weasley

Hermione read it once. Then again. Then folded it in half and set it neatly beside the sugar dish.

Padma was quitting? Just... like that?.

And yet—

She had expected something else. She wasn’t sure what. An olive branch? An invitation to Hugo’s Naming? —Yes, they might—, maybe. A request of more time. An apology?. But Padma had written with the same plain facts she’d brought to everything lately—diagnoses, casework, even confrontation.

Hermione stared at the folded letter, unmoving.

Padma was a gifted healer. One of the best in her cohort. Efficient, thoughtful, instinctive. Loved by her patients. Trusted by her peers—well, mostly.

Hermione remembered the way conversations had stopped when Padma entered a room. The way junior healers angled their bodies away from her. How the elves had begun to “forget” her tea preferences. How every misstep—however small—had echoed louder when Padma made it.

And she remembered the way she had let it happen. The way her silence had sanctioned it. The way she’d acknowledge Padma as little as she could. The way she’d cut Padma with a faster more precise diagnostic whenever she could just like he had done in school to anyone she didn’t like.

Not openly hostile.

Just... harsh.

The ache in her stomach settled in like old guilt. Familiar. Irritating.

She could tell herself it hadn’t that bad. That her anger then had been understandable. That Padma had made her own choices. But the truth hung somewhere in the margin between power and pettiness.

When she had done this before was for her own satisfaction and pettiness back at school Ginny had joined her a couple of times, but mostly it was a thing she did herself when she was mad at someone, now she had every single person under her doing it, to the same person.

So Padma was gone.

Hermione reached for her tea, now cold, and didn’t drink it.

“Darling,” came Draco’s voice—smooth, amused, and just the right amount of lazy—“please tell me you’re not plotting someone’s downfall before breakfast.”

Hermione didn’t turn. “No. Just reckoning with one.”

He circled around her chair, glanced at the table, and caught sight of the letter. He picked it up without asking.

“Padma,” he murmured, reading it quickly.

When he was done, he set it down gently, eyes flicking to Hermione.

“This is good, right?” he asked.

She didn’t answer.

Draco leaned down and kissed the top of her head, then rested his chin lightly against her crown. “She just had a baby,” he said quietly. “She probably just wants some more time for the baby, and Weasley does good with his business.”

“She might,” Hermione said. “I just feel that I could have treated her better.”

Draco chuckled as if she had said something ridiculous. Then he straightened.

“Well. I’ve got something that might make you feel better.”

“I don’t need cheering.”

“Oh, this isn’t cheering,” he said, already striding toward the door. “This is for my distraction. Entirely selfish.”

Hermione frowned. “What kind of—”

A moment later, he returned with a slim velvet box.

She raised a brow. “It’s eight in the morning.”

He grinned and placed it in front of her. “Perfect timing, then.”

Hermione opened the box with mild suspicion.

Inside, nestled against black silk, were a pair of antique earrings—drop-style, moonstone haloed in gold filigree, delicate as frost. They caught the morning light like opals.

She blinked. “These are—”

“French. Eighteenth century. Your new robes for the garden gala are that absurd dove grey, and you said you had nothing to match.”

“I said that *in passing*.”

Draco shrugged, pleased with himself. “You speak. I listen.”

Hermione exhaled a slow breath. The guilt loosened in her chest, just a little.

“You’re spoiling me.”

“Unapologetically,” he said. “Now come upstairs. I need help deciding which muggle outfit to wear today for that gallery opening.”

She laughed despite herself.

And just like that—Padma slipped into a quieter part of her mind.

Not gone, just... shelved.

Belgravia Townhouse

June 5, 2007 – Morning *Draco's 27th Birthday*

Something was off.

The morning light was filtered, unusually golden for March in London, slanting across the carved ceiling of the Belgravia townhouse. It hit the corner of the dining table where Hermione had left a silver-ribboned parcel the night before—labeled “*Not until tonight.*” in her tight, charmingly bossy script.

Draco had woken alone. Again.

Hermione was always awake early these days—wandering the garden, fussing with correspondence, vanishing into the hospital or the library. But this was something else.

She was hiding something.

And it wasn’t just the damn gift.

He sipped his coffee, unsweetened and black, tapping one booted foot against the polished floor. He’d been circling around the truth for days—something wasn’t right. Her magic was different. Fainter? No. Not faint. Quieter. As though it had burrowed inward. As though she were guarding something.

From him.

He hated that.

Hermione didn’t keep things from him. Or—well. She did. But not *like this*. Not with wide, deliberate eyes and too-steady smiles.

He’d thought, once or twice, of using Legilimency. Just a brush. Just to reassure himself.

But he knew better. She’d never forgive him for it. And, worse—he didn’t want to deserve her wrath.

So he’d was back on his old ways, sneaking around, re-reading her correspondence. Every clipped “later,” every smooth deflection was driving him mad. But the idea that she might be *unhappy*—that she might be *regretting anything*—ate at him like acid.

He’d made her better, powerful, protected. She belonged now. He’d made it so.

But then, what the hell was she hiding?

He stood, crossing to the kitchen just as she walked in from the garden. Her cheeks were flushed, curls loose around her face, and she was wearing his jumper over a thin, longline shirt.

Draco stared.

Hermione looked up, smiled. “You’re glaring.”

“I’m observing.”

“You’re sulking.”

He tilted his head. “And you’re hiding something.”

She stilled. Just for a second. Then moved past him, pulling a peach from the fruit bowl.
“Happy birthday, darling.”

He didn’t say anything.

She turned, leaning against the counter, watching him with maddening calm.

“I have a gift for you,” she said.

He gestured toward the silver-wrapped box on the table.

“Not that one,” she said softly.

Draco narrowed his eyes.

“You’ve been reading my mail again, haven’t you?”

Draco’s lips curled. “I admit nothing.”

“Hmm,” she said, amused but not angry.

“You’ve been odd for weeks,” he said. “And no, don’t deny it. I notice *everything*, Dear. You were pretending that an article of portrait restoration made you cry.”

Her brows lifted.

Draco stepped closer.

“If you’re dying, I swear to god—”

“I’m pregnant.”

Silence.

It rang like a spell in the room.

He blinked.

Hermione bit her lip. "Only five weeks. I was going to wait to tell you tonight."

Draco stared at her. At her face. Her mouth. Her eyes. Her impossibly calm posture.

Then down—at her abdomen, flat and soft under his jumper.

Then back up.

And he laughed. Not loudly. Not like a man unburdened. But low and stunned and wrecked by wonder.

"You're—?"

"Yes."

He reached out. His hand hovered just above her stomach. "Is it... is everything—?"

"I'm fine," she said, gently. "*We're* fine."

Draco dropped to his knees.

She started.

He pressed his forehead against her middle, arms wrapping around her hips.

"You gave me everything," he whispered.

She buried her fingers in his hair, cradling him. "You looked like you were about to break from stress."

"I was," he muttered into her jumper.

She laughed, warm and tired and smug.

He tilted his head up. "Is this why you've been avoiding tea?"

She nodded.

He narrowed his eyes. "Does anyone else know?"

"No one but you."

"*I should've* used Legilimency."

Hermione smacked his shoulder.

"You wouldn't dare."

He grinned. "I don't have to now."

He rose to his feet, kissed her once—softly, reverently.

She smiled. “Happy birthday, Draco.”

He kissed her again.

“Yes,” he said. “It really is.”

Chapter End Notes

So there you have it, again I have zero chill, Someone asked in the previous chapter if Padma was a terrible Healer, she was not she was just behind Hermione, the thing is Hermione is just a genius and as she realized she tends to run into the ground others when she is angry at them. But now she has everyone following her lead, so a small defect in her character got out of hand.

Same with Millie, Hermione is learning to be more careful now. we will see, as you can see no one here has a secure attachment style.

Chapter 10: Birds of a feather

Chapter Summary

She walked the double mirrored observation room.
A toddler sat in the center of the room on a spell-soft mat, surrounded by floating blocks. Tan skin, wild black curls, and—when he looked up—bright, pale blue eyes. Familiar eyes. Startling, even across glass.
He didn't reach for the toys. Didn't babble or whine. Just stared up at the mobile of floating stars with a blank, heavy stillness.
Hermione's hearth clenched.
She reached trembling hands, for the chart enchanted at the door.

Chapter Notes

Hello, didn't wanted to go to sleep before posting, please enjoy I have had a handful of funerals and a lighting hit near my house and fry the most inconvenient appliances...
You all know the drill.

So we are going to get to some disturbing details of Draco actions and the consequences of this, please check it out if you have triggers around children and bigoted and ableist opinions

► So we are going to get to some disturbing details of Draco actions and the consequences of this, please check it out if you have triggers around children and bigoted and ableist opinions

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

12 August, 2007

Saint Mungo's

The corridor was quiet, mid-morning light slanting in through the enchanted glass. The walls whispered lullabies in soft, spell-muffled tones, and somewhere down the hall a nurse levitated a tray of charmed toys back into place.

Hermione moved slowly, reviewing expansion schedules and architectural plans in a slim folio—discreetly checking that the dragon mural in the toddler ward hadn't gone back to breathing fire again.

This wing had been built on Malfoy money—*his* money, really, but it bore their name. Clean lines, soft floors, wards to keep the children safe. It was putting their money where it mattered. She was proud.

She walked the double mirrored observation room.

A toddler sat in the center of the room on a spell-soft mat, surrounded by floating blocks. Tan skin, wild black curls, and—when he looked up—bright, pale blue eyes. Familiar eyes. Startling, even across glass.

He didn't reach for the toys. Didn't babble or whine. Just stared up at the mobile of floating stars with a blank, heavy stillness.

Hermione's heart clenched.

She reached trembling hands, for the chart enchanted at the door.

Patient: Hugo Ayaan, Patil-Weasley (Prewet, Weasley, Patil and Lyer

Lineage

Age: 20 months

Admitted for: Emotional Developmental Monitoring

- *Delayed emotional responsiveness*
- *Minimal speech*
- *No spontaneous crying or laughter observed*
- *Father and Mother are overly worried, it might be just a very serious child. a hand had scribbled in the almost ineligible hand of Florence Bulstrode.*

Diagnostic notes indicate magical stability. No sign of trauma. Bloodwork normal.
Potion exposure: none detected.

She read it again.

No sign of trauma. No potion exposure.

But she'd seen this before. She'd written the field guidelines on early emotional stagnation due to potion-altered conception. Symptoms like this often didn't appear until early childhood, when magical and emotional development began to become obvious.

Her pulse picked up. The Weasley name. The timing. The eyes.

She didn't remember deciding to move. Just found herself in the staff lavatory two halls over, locking the door behind her and yanking her wand from her robes with a trembling hand.

Her fingers trembled just once—then steadied.

The staff mirror above the porcelain basin was charmed for glamour checks and last-minute uniform straightening, not *this*, not what she needed. Hermione was nothing if not resourceful.

She touched the wandtip to the mirror's carved frame, murmuring, "*Ostendamus Cordis. Praeclarum Veritas.*"

The glass shimmered like disturbed water. Its reflection deepened, darkened, and filled with slow, golden light.

A diagnostic grid unfurled across its surface—fine as spider silk, edged in spellfire. Not Ministry-grade. Higher. Custom. Her own weaving, layered with protections.

She held the wand to her temple.

"Initiate *Vigilia Quintae Vitae*. Full internal integrity scan. Trace coercive brews, compulsions, ambient tampering—especially affective class. Focus on fetal and hormonal resonance markers."

The light shifted. A soft chime rang out, and then a net of magic spread outward from the wand's tip, crawling delicately over her like a second skin.

Her magic responded—a flicker of recognition in her pulse, in her blood. The mirror hummed.

Hermione leaned against the edge of the sink, gripping the porcelain hard.

She *knew*—knew—there was no way Draco would ever use something like that on her. Not when he had waited so long. Not when he had loved her so exactly. So devoutly.

And yet...

And yet, her hands had still drawn the runes for *those* spells. Her lips had still spoken them.

The mirror pulsed softly.

A line of gold text resolved across the surface, clear and kind.

Result: Nullum Detectum.

No enchantments or coercive residues present. No love or lust agents detected. No magical interference—internal or fetal. All pathways clear.

Hermione stared at it.

The net faded. Her magic settled.

And then—her breath broke.

She pressed her palm to her mouth and slowly folded to the cool tile floor, as though her knees had melted.

The tears came hot and quiet. Not sobs. Not grief.

Rage.

At herself.

How could she?

For all Draco's cold brilliance, his mania, his rules—he had never taken her will. Never breached her trust. He asked. He *waited*. He worshipped.

He had never touched her without reverence.

And she—Always the scared little Mudblood, that couldn't trust—had *checked*.

“Idiot,” she whispered. “Ungrateful, suspicious little idiot.”

She wiped her face on her sleeve.

Her hand drifted low across her belly, where the faintest swell was just beginning to make itself known. The baby was still quiet in her magic, like the hum of a spell not yet cast—but present. Undeniable.

“I'm sorry,” she murmured, voice raw.

And then she stood.

Straightened her robes. Lifted her chin.

She tapped the mirror twice to close the grid, and it went still, clearing to a perfectly ordinary reflection—just a woman in Healer whites, eyes red-rimmed, expression unreadable.

She was finer—*Hermione Malfoy*—was fine.

Perfectly fine.

16, Agust 2007

The West Study, Belgravia townhouse , *Late Afternoon.*

Draco rarely came into Hermione's personal study. Not without her, at least.

But something was off.

He could feel it—the same way you feel when a ward has been stretched too tight, humming just under the surface. She'd been... compliant, lately. Sweet. Too sweet. The kind of agreeable that Hermione only got when she was spiraling inside her head.

At first, he thought it was the pregnancy—hormones or maternal nesting. Then he thought it might be exhaustion from the hospital, the guilt about Padma still gnawing at the back of her mind. But last night she'd said yes to everything he suggested. The spring dinner. The redressing of the townhouse garden. Letting Luna bring one of her “experiments” to the next salon.

And Hermione never said yes to everything.

Which meant she was hiding something.

Draco's fingers glided over the edge of her writing desk, toward the slim leather-bound book she kept charmed shut. Not her official journals, not the hospital ledgers. This was *her* book. Her margins. Her thoughts.

The lock uncurled under his wand with the ease of someone that knew almost every corner and wrinkle in her magic.

Notes. Medical. Magical. Philosophical. And then—

A short, annotated passage.

“Coercive potions and conception: observed correlations with magical development disorders and chronic emotional instability. Hypothesis—early exposure (first 3-8 weeks post/pre-conception) creates arcane residue binding—difficult to counteract.”

The name *Hugo* was penciled in beside it. Underlined twice.

Draco exhaled slowly. Ah.

She'd figured it out.

Or rather—she'd guessed, which was close enough. Smart girl.

He closed the journal, carefully.

So. That explained the careful, worried eyes. The softness. The slightly overdone sweetness. She thought he might've done it to her.

He had to smile—dryly, without much humor.

Of course she'd panic.

He would've panicked too.

But he hadn't. Not with her. Never with her.

He was a manipulative bastard, yes. But *never that*. Not with *her*. Not even once. He didn't need to. He had played the long game, with patience and style.

She'd come to him willingly. No elixirs required.

And of course she KNEW IT, the guilt of that very feasible fear was what she was hidding.

He was still marveling over the cruelty of that kind of panic in her head—Hermione, the clearest mind of her generation—when the door opened.

Soft footfalls.

Draco didn't even flinch. "Come to snoop, Mother?"

Narcissa stepped inside, as poised as ever in a slate-blue shawl and matching heels. Her brows arched faintly. "It seems I was late."

He gestured lazily to the desk. "Found something. Nothing scandalous. But enough to explain whatever you noticed."

Narcissa moved to his side, resting one hand on the desk with a long-suffering sigh. "Is it going to require cleaning up?"

Draco's mouth twitched. "Possibly. She's figured out that something happened to the Weasley-Patil boy." He waved a hand dismissively, adding a soft, disdainful "tch," as if the matter were hardly worth his attention.

Narcissa frowned faintly. "What sort of something?"

"There was a little love potion in the tea," Draco said lightly.

Her voice sharpened. "You didn't—"

"Not *her* tea," he snapped, amused. "*His.* Ron's. I may be a bastard, but I'm not mean enough to saddle anyone with the worst of the Weasley brood."

Narcissa relaxed, slightly. "Oh. Well. That's reassuring."

"She thinks it's why the boy's... stoic."

"Well, isn't he?" Narcissa said, breezily. "A stoic character is not unusual in the bloodlines, better than magical latency, or a violent reaction to imposed structure—very typical of the 28th and the Patil family goes back at least a handful of generations, I would be surprised if her family is as worried as him.."

Draco gave her a dry look. "You sounded just like father right there."

Narcissa's expression didn't change. "Married for 30 years, it happens"

Draco laughed, low and fond. "She's going to want to fix it."

"Of course she will," Narcissa said. "That's what she does."

"I can't give her this," Draco said, gesturing vaguely toward the journal. "It'll spiral. She'll think it's her fault she didn't notice sooner. Or mine."

"She's clever," Narcissa said. "But guilt is her oldest friend."

Draco leaned against the desk. "So what do we do?"

Narcissa tilted her head. "Let *me* have tea with Maya Patil."

Draco blinked. "You know her?"

"We older ladies all know each other, darling." Her voice was knife-edged. "And I won't bring up anything directly. But I'll make the recommendation. Draco stepped forward, kissed her cheek. "Mother, You're always helpful."

"I've been practicing," she murmured. "It's nice to be useful again."

He smiled, glancing toward the locked journal. "We're actually hiding something from you, by the way."

Narcissa looked vaguely affronted.

"It's a good surprise," he said quickly. "Promise."

She hummed, noncommittal, and turned to leave.

As the door clicked shut behind her, Draco leaned back against the desk the Sacred Twenty-Eight had learned—quietly, through centuries of disasters and disappointments—that love potions, coercive bindings, and arranged unions left traces. Not just in the child’s disposition or magic, but in the soul’s architecture.

The counterbalance was never softness.

It was structure.

A strict moral code. Clear expectations. Purpose. Ambition shaped like a scabbard—cold, yes, but containing.

Empathy might guide you to mercy. But a rigorous code kept you functional.

Tom Riddle hadn’t been born broken. He’d been born *untethered*. The problem wasn’t his mother’s spellwork—it was the absence of a name, of rules, of anchoring blood magic. No godparent oaths. No family creed. No ancestral memory teaching restraint.

Had he been raised in a proper house, Draco thought—had the Gaunts been even *competent*—Riddle would’ve been fine.

Sharp, yes. Dangerous. Ambitious.

But not monstrous.

Monsters weren’t born of spells. They were born of neglect.

Spring, 2009

The Burrow – Sunday Quidditch and Smoke

Ron sat in the sun-dappled backyard of the Burrow, a Butterbeer open in one hand, his shirt sleeves rolled up, Hugo's toy broomstick discarded nearby. The boy was inside with Padma, who had taken to hovering when Hugo had a flare-up.

He wasn't fragile, exactly. But he needed... more. More time. More patience. More everything.

And Ron was trying.

Across from him, Harry laughed at something James had done to tease Albus and reached for another biscuit. "Still think Puddlemere's going to lose?"

"Dunno," Ron said. "Haven't followed much this season."

"Shame," Harry said, not unkindly.

The children playing filled the space between them—comfortable and familiar. And yet, Ron felt it—that quiet stretch between now and then.

He hadn't spoken to Hermione in nearly a year.

She was still somewhat close to Harry—he knew Albus and Malfoy's spawn where roughly the same age—but Harry refused to talk about her with him or listen to anything Ron had to say about Malfoy.

Bill had taken the Weasley seat on the Wizengamot. Fleur enjoyed it and they were the ones with the occasional, polished updates on Hermione. How her department at St. Mungo's had tripled in budget. How she was up for some international accolade. How the Malfoy townhouse was beautiful—little Victorie loved the garden walls covered in faeries of Hermione house in Belgravia.

Padma still refused to talk about her. Said she'd made her choices. That they'd made theirs.

But Ron sometimes caught Fleur looking at Hugo too long, like she wanted to say something but wouldn't.

And Bill had once muttered, after too much wine, that he still remembered how Hermione looked the night of that Yule Ball long ago. That she had always been *meant* for better rooms.

Ron didn't like that. He didn't like how it felt like betrayal. Or worse—that it might be true.

But He was doing great Padma and Him had a house now. A good one. Beautiful, with a nice garden and a home feeling. Between His share on the twins business and Padma's inheritance, they'd made smart investments. A second baby was not yet coming—they'd decided to wait until Hugo was older, more stable.

And Padma loved him. He knew that. Even if he didn't quite feel it the same way.

But he'd learned his lesson.

He wasn't going to ruin this, too.

Even if sometimes, late at night, he caught himself remembering what it had felt like to be known—truly known—by someone who never let him settle. Who never let him coast. Who made him better just by expecting it of him.

Harry handed him another Butterbeer.

"Cheers," Ron said absently.

They clinked bottles. Harry looked sideways at him.

"You all right?"

Ron nodded. "Course."

Somewhere, Neville was probably, sitting beside Pansy, with his perfect hair and perfect manners. Ron sometimes felt an old, childish bitterness rise when people praised him. *Neville saved the school. Neville made peace with the old families. Neville and his new wife threw the best dinner parties.*

Ron didn't hate him. But he hated how easy Neville made it all look.

Just like Hermione did now.

Just like she always had.

Maybe if he was different she wouldn't have drifted away.

He just sipped his drink, the sun warm on his arms, the grass too green, the air too still. Contentment was a kind thing. But it didn't always feel like enough.

April 2010

Wiltshire – the south garden of the Malfoy estate

The orchard rustled in the breeze, scattering petals across the garden path. Scorpius and Albus dashed after enchanted kites, their laughter bright and fleeting as dragonflies. In the corner of the garden, beneath a charmed parasol, Hermione poured tea for Ginny and herself.

“I’m sorry,” Hermione said, after a long silence.

Ginny looked up, brushing wind-blown hair behind her ear. “For what?”

Hermione stirred her tea, watching the spoon disappear beneath the surface. “For asking you not to bring James.”

Ginny leaned back, one hand resting on her own swollen stomach. “Don’t be. He’s... intense, lately. Everything’s a competition. And he’s too old for the soft games the little ones like. He’d have pestered the elves or tried to pluck the peacocks.”

Hermione’s shoulders softened. “Still. It felt... wrong.”

Ginny tilted her head. “You’re pregnant, Hermione. If you want a quiet afternoon, you should say so.”

Hermione gave a small smile. She liked Ginny’s newfound grace.

Ginny reached for her teacup and nodded toward the boys. “Honestly, Albus could use the break too. He’s so quiet around James. Always deferring, always the tagalong. It’s good for him to be with Scorpius. They get each other.”

Hermione followed her gaze. “Scorpius brings out the softness in him.”

“They’ll probably grow up attached,” Ginny said fondly. “God help Harry if Albus follows your child to Slytherin.”

Hermione laughed. The breeze shifted, bringing with it the scent of oranges and new blossoms.

“Any names yet?” Ginny asked, running her thumb along the rim of her cup.

“Lyra,” Hermione said softly. “Lyra Andromeda.”

Ginny’s eyebrows lifted. “Stars?”

Hermione nodded. "It's a... thing. With Draco's family. Andromeda Teddy's grandmother was his aunt."

"It's beautiful," Ginny said. "Strong."

Hermione hesitated. "And you?"

"Still arguing," Ginny grinned. "Harry wants Lily, for his mum. I think it's sweet. But I'm holding out for something that fits when I see her."

Chapter End Notes

We have some large gaps in time here, but I really want to emphasize, how almost everyone got what they wanted and still. it doesn't quite fit. ;) Ok I'm so tired I'm off to bed

Also, my formating was horrible I will fix it tomorrow but I figured some of you might not mind it

Chapter 11: The passing of time

Chapter Notes

There are some references to incest ahead, but The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black is involved so be aware this will be most likely my last chapter here, I have a ton of stuff about the kids about Hugo and ron and the other kids, that I might take my time and edit and post as a series of Drabbles.

to be fair this bit right here is pure self indulgence because I love to se a softie Lucius.

Enjoy!

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

2020

King's Cross was its usual brand of chaos on September 1st—all steam, owls, last-minute trunk slamming, and children vibrating with nerves and sugar. Ron stood near the edge of Platform, his arms folded as he tried to look casual while watching Hugo eye the crowd like a mini eye-Mad Moody.

"Do you have everything you need? Your money for the trolley, yeah?" Ron asked.

Hugo gave him a brief nod, lips a thin line. "I'm not going to need it."

"Course you are. Every boy gets hungry on the ride there."

"That's James," Hugo said. "He is always hungry."

Ron huffed a breath, trying not to smile. He knew that tone—it was the same one Percy used when he talked about Fred and George. Still, there was affection buried somewhere beneath Hugo's moral rigidity. Somewhere.

The boy was tall for fourteen, stiff as a broomstick, and already wore his detachment like armor. He wanted to be an Auror, had memorized three defense texts by the age of ten, and absolutely despised dark magic with a religious fervor Ron didn't care to temper.

"Right then," Ron said, scanning the platform. "Let's find James and Harry so you can be on your way."

But then he saw her.

Hermione.

It was like time hadn't passed—except it had. Her face held the same clever angles, but there was an unpleasantness in her demeanor now, something aloof and distant. She looked like Narcissa in a way Ron never wanted to admit: too elegant, too polished, despite the pristine muggle clothes there was something about her kids that screamed, Pure-bloods, beware. Her eyes were indifferent to the bustle and noise of the platform. She was only focused in one thing, her children.

And Ron saw them, It was impossible not to.

They were not just two or three. She had a full **parade**.

Malfoy of course stood a few feet away, distracted by the little girl in his arms—all brown curls and bright green ribbons, clinging to him like a Bowtruckle. A miniature Hermione. That had to be **their** youngest.

Hermione stood surrounded by **a pair of twins, all dark curls and silver eyes**, already halfway to setting something ablaze, and **another blonde boy close in age**, who was sitting on top of the trucks with a book in his hand.

Ron didn't know their names.

"Bloody hell, I didn't know they had so many."

But Hugo did.

"Scorpius, Lyra, Orion, Alhudra,—those two are twins, Pollux, and Ione," Hugo recited with the ease of someone who'd kept score out of sheer irritation.

Ron didn't reply. He watched Draco crouch to whisper something to Scorpius, who grinned up at him like they were quickly in agreement. The boy looked so easy with his father, so affectionate. That made something twist in Ron's chest. Not resentment, exactly. Not that.

"Scorpius is annoying," Hugo muttered.

"If he is half the prick his father was—"

Just then Rose came bounding up, her curls bouncing. "But you and James think that, that Lyra girl is pretty," she tattled with all the viciousness of a little sister.

Ron looked over and spotted Lyra—all blonde hair and honey eyes with dark lashes, looking like a doll in her crisp Hogwarts robes.

He leaned in. "Stay away from the Malfoy girl, yeah? Her dad's a psycho."

Hugo shrugged. "Sure, But would be easier if you and Mum arranged a betrothal. Then I don't have to waste time thinking in girls while I'm training for Auror."

Ron blinked. "Er... that's—we'll—Your mother and I will talk about that."

As if summoned, Padma swept in, adjusting Hugo's collar and flicking imaginary dust from his shoulders.

"We are not discussing betrothals five minutes before the train, Hugo," she said sharply.

Before Ron could recover, James came bounding over.

"Hugo!"

James was now fifteen, all messy hair and prefect badge, threw an arm around Hugo like they hadn't just spent the summer sparring over magical law. Hugo accepted the embrace with all the enthusiasm of a library statue.

Harry followed moments later, nodding to Ron.

Albus, however, had already trotted past them, straight over to the Malfoys.

Ron watched as Albus greeted Hermione warmly, then knelt to say something to the twins that made one of them burst into giggles. Malfoy looked... pleased. Actually pleased to see Albus Potter.

Ron scowled. "That boy is not a good influence."

Harry shot him a look. "Cut it out, Ron."

But Ron couldn't. He watched as Malfoy crouched down to kiss Ione's curls before helping Lyra up the train steps, the girl already chatting animatedly with Albus.

And her brother.

2007 Scorpius

Lucius felt it—the déjà vu every Malfoy before him must have known: the quiet, thundering certainty of continuity.

An unbroken line, stretching back more than ten centuries.

The child had hair like mist and eyes like mercury. His grandson was the exact image of his son—just as Draco had once been the exact image of him.

Hermione had done well. Better than well. Not in Lucius's wildest visions had he imagined this—his House restored. His name redeemed. A future, after all the darkness. After his father's ruin. After his own failings.

Making an exception—for her, for Draco—had brought only good.

He cradled the boy gently, the weight surprisingly light and unbearably immense.

“My heir’s heir,” he murmured.

Scorpius yawned.

And Lucius Malfoy—who had never fumbled in all his decades—felt his fingers tremble, ever so slightly, as he handed the child back.

2009 Lyra

Lyra was born in a squall of October wind—the first Malfoy daughter in over five centuries. The magic of it stirred the tapestries in their frames. Her birth made the wards hum.

Betrothal proposals arrived by the dozen, cloaked in flattery, threat, or ambition. Hermione, still pale from the effort of labor, burned every single one with a warded flick of her fingers and did not accept questions on the matter.

Narcissa had never been happier. A granddaughter. *A granddaughter.*

“She has Hermione’s mouth,” Draco said, helpless and awed.

“She has my mother’s eyes,” Lucius added, recognizing something ancient and violet-fierce in the baby’s pale gaze. A girl who would never be told to shrink or soften.

Lyra took after the Malfoys in looks—and her mother in fury. She scowled before she smiled.

Lucius gifted them the house next door to the Belgravia townhouse. “You’ll need more space,” he said dryly, handing Draco the deed. “It would be imprudent to store all this glory under so small a roof.”

2012 The Twins

Twins had never appeared in the Malfoy line.

Not once. Not ever.

And yet, Alhudra and Orion were born minutes apart—equal and opposite, but unmistakably matched. Two halves of something too old to name.

Black family blood. All of it. Dark curls, silver eyes, a fire behind their magic that tasted like winter thunder.

“She’s named them after stars,” Draco had said, almost sheepishly. “But… Father. They’re more Black than me or Mother combined.”

Lucius had studied the newborns closely—watched Orion stare, unblinking, at the ceiling wards, while Alhudra cried and an ink bottle explode with a flicker of raw, uncontrolled power.

“This is it,” he had said, after a long pause. “When they turn fifteen, I’ll retire. You would be Lord Malfoy and the House of Black will have its heir.”

Draco hadn’t spoken—but he had understood.

The magic was splitting the Malfoy and Black lines, he had hopped it would go to Teddy, but the magic had other plans.

2013 Pollux

Pollux came too soon after.

A surprise, even by their standards. A gamble Draco should not have risked, not so close to the twins. Lucius hadn't said so aloud—what use was chiding him now? when the child already breathed? But he had watched Hermione closely in those first months.

Still, the boy was... different.

Velvet-smooth magic. Eyes like glass. Expressions unreadable, even to his own kin. He trailed behind the others in silence, absorbing, calculating.

There was no babyish charm, no flourishes. Only precision.

Lucius gave him a silver pocket watch on his fifth birthday—an heirloom from a more brutal age. A relic shaped like consequence.

Pollux took it. Slipped it into his coat. Whispered *thank you* without smiling.

Lucius never admitted it aloud—not even to Narcissa—but this was the child he loved best.

2017 Ione

Ione Rana was the last.

Born at dawn, just as frost peeled from the Manor's glass.

Lucius had grown quiet that winter. Not out of melancholy—but calculation. Scorpius was nearly eleven, readying for Hogwarts. The family had expanded like a tree that after being fell grows new branches to the sky. And suddenly Lucius found himself... old.

Ione looked nothing like her siblings. She was Hermione in miniature—down to the sharp little chin, the wide brow, the unruly hair that refused to charm down.

The birth had been difficult. Lucius, who had seen wars and duels and betrayals, had found himself gripping the edge of a chair with bloodless knuckles as Healers rushed in and magic strained against magic.

But it ended well.

It ended *perfectly*.

And when he finally held the girl in his arms—last of them, smallest of them—Lucius murmured a single spell beneath his breath.

A wish.

2024

“She’s not sending them to Hogwarts?” Harry said slowly, still trying to make sense of it. “*At all?*”

“No,” Ginny said without looking up. “Orion’s off to Durmstrang. Alhudra’s heading to Beauxbâtons. Two different countries. Not a single year at Hogwarts between them.”

Harry looked like someone had just handed him a riddle written in Gobblede gook. “But... why?”

Ginny sighed and flicked her wand again, rolling a set of socks. “Because she’s Hermione.”

“Right, but—Hermione *loves* Hogwarts. She basically lived in the library wing. And they’re not even troublemakers, are they? I mean, not like James.”

Ginny snorted. “Please. Nobody’s like James.”

Harry smirked. “Still a little bitter you let me name them?”

She raised an eyebrow. “I let you name him *James Sirius*. And then agreed to *Albus Severus*. And you’re surprised they don’t get along?”

Harry opened his mouth. Closed it again.

“They’ve been at odds since Albus could walk,” Ginny continued. “And James—*reckless*, loud, always taking up the room. Albus—quiet, angry, sharp like a wand on edge. Magic’s funny that way. Names. Lineages. You plant one thing, and you grow EXACTLY that.”

Harry looked uneasy. “You think that’s what’s happening with the Malfoy twins?”

Ginny nodded. “Hermione does. Not that she is wrong to do so. But I’ve seen how she looks at them when they’re together. It’s not fear. It’s... caution.”

Harry frowned. “They’re *eleven*. They’re just close.”

Ginny finally stopped folding and sat on the bed beside him. “They’re not just close. They’re *Black* twins. Hermione told me—when Orion turns seventeen, he becomes Lord Black. Automatically. His name will shift magically. *Malfoy* to *Black*. And the moment that happens, Alhudra becomes part of the Black Family too. She won’t even have a choice just like Orion doesn’t. It’s ancestral magic. Deep, obscure, binding magic.”

Harry was quiet now.

Ginny continued. “If he didn’t have a twin, that would be the end of it. But he does. And it’s *her*. And you know how the Black bloodline is. The stupid tapestry is still in the attic, you

have seen it. You've heard the stories. Cousins. First cousins. Siblings, the Black Family magic is weird like that."

Harry rubbed his forehead. "You think Hermione's trying to outrun it."

"She's trying to *buy time*," Ginny said. "Two different schools. Two different countries. Two different languages. She's been planning for this since the both of them were born with full heads of black hair."

Harry leaned forward, frowning. "But what's her plan? Just keep them apart until they grow out of it?"

Ginny hesitated, then sighed. "She's considering a magical betrothal for each."

Harry nearly dropped his mug. "*What?*"

"She hasn't done it yet," Ginny said quickly, "but she's *looking*. Talking to the Rowles. The Notts. Even Greengrass. She thinks if they're both committed to someone else before they come of age—if there's structure, consequences, a magical boundary—then maybe they'll pull away from each other before the Black magic... digs in."

Harry stared at her. "They're *eleven*, Gin."

"I *know*," she said, rubbing her eyes. "And she knows. But she's desperate. She doesn't say it outright, but I can tell. She's scared."

Harry was quiet for a long moment.

"And what?" he said eventually. "She just hands them off to whatever family looks best on parchment? That's not Hermione. That's—"

"It's *an option*," Ginny said tiredly. "She's not doing it for funsies. She thinks it might work. That maybe the kids *won't hate* the ones they're betrothed to. Maybe they'll even like them. Maybe it'll give them something—*someone*—to think about besides each other. A distraction. An anchor."

Harry still looked appalled. "This is mental."

Ginny let out a breath that wasn't quite a laugh. "Well, it's not like *we're* much better. We named our sons after two men who couldn't stand each other. They've been fighting since infancy."

Harry tried not to smile.

Ginny added, "At least Lily seems okay. I pray we never end up in that boat. Though..." she glanced sideways, only half-joking, "she's still one-eight Black family herself. You never know."

That earned a full groan from Harry, who buried his face in his hands.

Chapter End Notes

Quick note this is not a dead dove for Hermione per se (kinda) but Hugo want's to tell you it's for him!

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