

## The Wedding (Hermione's POV)

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# The Wedding (Hermione's POV)

by [megalle](#)

## Summary

**DO NOT READ THIS IF YOU HAVE NOT READ "NOT WITH A BANG"**

This is Chapter 6 and most of Chapter 7, but from Hermione's POV. There are spoilers in this and so I wouldn't recommend reading this until you have completely finished reading Not With A Bang.

## Notes

So, when I started writing "Not With A Bang", I knew that even though it was only Draco's POV, as a writer I would need to know exactly what was happening for Hermione, both plot wise when she is not in the scene but also emotionally and mentally. Because of this, I mapped out her story and even wrote parts of it to make sure the little actions that Draco was observing made sense.

I know lots of people want the whole fic from Hermione's POV, and maybe one day I will actually write it. But for now, to celebrate exactly one year since I published the first chapter of NWAB, I thought I would share a section I wrote from Hermione's POV. I hope you like it. I am so grateful that I decided to write and I decided to publish and I wanted to mark the occasion.

If anyone is reading these fics and thinking "I might like it, but I am not sure," allow me to gently push you into being sure. It's brought me so much joy. Thank you!

The morning of her own wedding, Hermione sat alone in her house and realised she didn't have a ring. She was already dressed. She had done her hair (only after she'd received a threatening floo call from Ginny insisting that if she didn't do it, Ginny would and Hermione would not like it), but as she sat in her living room, waiting for Harry and Ginny to join her so they could Floo to the ministry and on to Malfoy Manor, she couldn't help but feel like a fool for forgetting a ring. According to the clock they were meant to leave soon, less than 20 minutes. There was no way Hermione could go out and find a jeweller to get a ring. What could she do? She rushed into her room and emptied her small jewellery box onto her bed. There were a couple of bracelets, a dragonfly brooch, but nothing that would make a suitable ring. Then she went down the hall and stood at the closed door of her parent's room.

On the other side, everything was exactly as they had left it the last time Hermione had seen it before the war. When she'd come back after the war, it had been different. Obviously, her parents had taken everything they cared about to Australia with them, so there were open drawers and empty dressers. However, after Hermione returned with them from Australia, she painstakingly unpacked all their things and returned them exactly. At the time, she'd done it assuming one day soon they would be back and would appreciate seeing their room as it had always been. Now, it was a reminder of everything she had taken away from them.

"Hermione!" Harry's voice called from the living room. It was enough to spur Hermione into action.

"One minute," she called back before opening the door and crossing the threshold.

Her Mother's jewellery box was sitting on her dresser, and Hermione brushed the polished oak face before opening it. It was meticulously organised; all the rings sitting in rows in the ring section. Most were inappropriate, ladies' dress and cocktail rings, but there was a plain gold band among them. Her father's wedding band. They'd had to take it off him as it caused him distress whenever he saw it. A prompt for his mind.

Trying to ignore the feeling that she was a thief, she quickly took the band and held it in her palm. It was simple but exactly what she would have chosen; she tried not to wonder if her father would have offered it for her wedding to Ron, had her life turned out differently. She extinguished that thought as quickly as it came. She was marrying Malfoy, which was as close as she could get to marrying no one. She did allow herself one moment of whimsy; she raised her wand and engraved the day's date to the inside of the band, the new date sitting just beside her parent's anniversary, before she went down to join the Potters.

Harry and Ginny left the ministry first, giving Hermione one more minute to catch her breath. Kingsley, who was not coming to the wedding, had come down to the public floos to see them before they left. To say his interactions with Harry were tense was an understatement. Harry might have agreed to accompany Hermione to her wedding, but she suspected that he wished she would flee to France. Maybe he'd only agreed to come so he could drive the proverbial getaway car if she changed her mind. Hermione suspected that Kingsley wanted to talk to her after the Potter's had left, but Harry pointedly asked for him to leave her be and wouldn't floo out until Kingsley had returned to his office. With a deep breath she stepped through the floo and went back to Malfoy Manor.

Her first thought was that the room was very crowded for a wedding she had been assured would only have six guests. Her second was that for all her thoughts and worries about her wedding and subsequent marriage to Draco, she hadn't given any thought to the fact she was returning to Malfoy Manor, the place she not only thought she'd die but had silently begged for it. Her third thought was that the wallpaper in this room was exactly the same as the wallpaper she'd stared at the night she was tortured; green oak leaves with little birds hiding throughout. She tried to step out of the heath and found her feet wouldn't exactly move.

Then her fourth thought came striding into the room; Draco Malfoy. Oh gosh, he'd gotten tall. His hair was longer or maybe just not slicked back? It fell softly around his face in any case and while he was still pale, he had the countenance of someone who spent time outdoors. He was wearing robes of course, severe formal ones, the kind Hermione remembered his father favouring and a shudder went through her as she considered that Draco may be more like his father now than he was at Hogwarts. Then she looked at his face and saw his eyes were darting over her nervously, much like she had just been doing. His eyes, still steely grey, looked nervous, not calculating, as she remembered Lucius's to be. It was enough to make her step from the hearth.

"Right," Harry took control of the situation, "Let's give the bride and groom a minute, and head out to the garden?"

He clapped his hands together and Hermione looked around as the other people in the room started to shift at his insistence. Blaise and Luna were here, Hermione registered. And was that Theodore Nott and Pansy Parkinson? All of a sudden her chest felt tight. Pansy Parkinson was at her wedding; the girl who had made fun of her hair, her teeth, her clothes. It was such a ridiculous thing to get upset about, especially given on a scale of seriousness the harm done by her soon-to-be husband was much more serious in nature, but something about having the girl who had made her cry in her bed at school far more often than Malfoy at her wedding, while her parents were not was too much for Hermione to process.

"It's ok," Hermione reached Ginny's hand. She couldn't be left alone with him, not yet. She was too worried that if he said something cruel or cutting she would skip right back into the floo.

"Unless Malfoy has some fine points of constitutional law he wants to discuss we can just skip ahead to satisfying the ministry part," she paused for a second, briefly wondering if Malfoy did have a plan for getting them both out of this? It would be nice.

"Are you sure, Hermione," Ginny murmured, "it wouldn't hurt to have a short conversation..."

Hermione squeezed Ginny's hand a little tighter, maybe a little too tight if the tingling in her fingers was anything to go by.

"Quite sure," Hermione gulped, "Let's just get this done."

Tonks led them all from the room and Hermione walked tensely. She had no idea where they were going or if they needed to go past *that room*. Eyes down, focus on Ginny's hand. That she could do. She watched the floor change and they walked down the hall, from parquet in

whatever room she had flooded into, to carpets in the hall, to stone on a terrace, to grass in the garden. It was only then she looked up. They were all standing under a large willow tree, and the fresh air and open space was like a balm. There were lavender ribbons and lights strung above her and Hermione wondered if the coincidence of her favourite colours being present was a sign that this might be ok. Then she mentally slapped herself because Hermione Granger did not look for signs. There was a round-faced officiant shuffling papers on a stone plinth and around the perimeter of the garden there were at least a dozen aurors and guards.

“I thought Kingsley and Tonks both said Malfoy wasn’t a risk?” Hermione hissed at Harry, suddenly feeling nervous.

“He’s not, they’re just probably here for the free food,” replied Harry, and Hermione couldn’t help but giggle, grateful at Harry’s ability to lighten the mood.

Her relief lasted all of 30 seconds, her husband-to-be had entered the garden and was making his way towards her. She let go of Ginny’s hand and wiped her sweaty palm on her dress. This was it. Draco came up to her and held out a hand in a gesture Hermione had only ever seen in a Disney movie and for a minute she considered taking it before balling her hands into fists to keep them by her side. There was no need to touch him. This was a marriage on paper only.

“You’ll have to touch me for the ceremony,” Draco said, his voice low and smooth. She’d forgotten how crisp his accent was, it reminded her of the professors at Oxford, and in that familiarity was something comforting.

“I know, but given I don’t have to right now, I should think we’ll both be happier if I don’t,” she replied. It was better to set some clear boundaries now. And so they didn’t say anything else to each other until they were before the ministry officiant.

“Mr Malfoy, Ms Granger, I’m Thaddeus Bell,” the officiant said jovially, “I hope you don’t mind I’ve bought some notes with me here. The Malfoy wedding rites are a little longer and more complicated than I am used to.”

Hermione cocked her head, Malfoy wedding rites? What were those? She’d been to many weddings since April and every ceremony had proceeded the exact same way, how much more different could a Malfoy wedding be?

“Malfoy rites? We don’t need the whole drawn-out affair of that,” Draco’s tone was defensive. He clearly knew what Malfoy wedding rites were, and he had no intention of taking them with her.

“No, no, I have it written here somewhere,” Thaddeus shuffled the papers in front of him until he pulled out the correct piece of parchment, “yes, unless the wedding rites are the specific Malfoy rites, the wedding will not be binding. Ergo, Malfoy Wedding Rites.”

The world around Hermione went silent. Malfoy had had a plan to call off this whole affair. He never intended to marry her. Well, not in any way that was legally binding anyway. She wasn’t sure if she should be elated or offended that he still found her so disagreeable. As the implications became more clear, questions started to bubble in her. What was so special about

these wedding rites? Was it a spell? Or just a slightly different ceremony, the same way Anglican or Catholic wedding services were slightly different. If it was a spell, would it even work on her and her *inferior blood*? She looked up at Draco, ready to ask at least one of her questions, only to see that his face was drained of colour and he was staring in the distance, hopeless. She chewed on the inside of her cheek to keep her questions to herself. She did what she had been practising since her impulsiveness had irreparably broken her parents and waited. It was Thaddeus who broke the silence with a nervous chuckle.

“I think there is a delicious wedding breakfast once we get through this, so shall we all get started?” he asked. Hermione nodded and waited for Malfoy. He was still musing over something before he turned to Tonks in the front row.

“It appears, cousin, I will need a wand,” he held out his hand.

Tonks scoffed, holding a wand towards him, “Why do you think all the Aurors are here? We weren’t worried that you were going to bludgeon the official with a bunch of daisies or a slice of wedding cake. Apparently, you’ll need this too.”

She reached back into her robe and bought out a narrow black box. This was new, she had never seen a wizarding wedding ceremony use anything from a box like that before. She couldn’t think about it too long however, Thaddeus was reading from his papers.

“The act of marriage is to tie two houses together and two magical cores to the ancestral seat. It is a ceremony as old and as blessed as magic itself. To it, you bring yourselves, your hearts, your magic and your blood. From it, you will draw strength, comfort and new life. Draco and Hermione, you come together today as representatives of your families. You bring your own raw magic, a gift and an honour bestowed by your magical bloodline. You have been taught the values of your families by your parents and grandparents, and you bring those values with you now, ready to make your own union stronger. The bond you are about to tie will be a new type of magic to you, one that is as much rooted in your ancestors and the land you call your home, as each other.”

Hermione felt her eyes grow misty at the mention of her parents. What values had they taught her? Which ones had she blatantly ignored in her dealings with them? Which ones was she ignoring right now, tying herself to Malfoy in a ceremony where the blood purity was barely veiled behind language of bloodlines and ancestors?

“Mr Malfoy, you can begin,” Thaddeus said, shocking Hermione back to the present, just in time to realise that Malfoy was taking her hand. His was cool and had calluses that seemed out of place on the hand of an aristocrat under house arrest. He sighed and began to recite an incantation.

*Hand that is thine, reach out to mine.*

*Heart that is mine, you have found,*

*Magic that is thine, with mine entwine,*

*And blood of us both, enrich this ground.*

The words sent a shiver through Hermione, and she felt something ancient and unknown uncurl from that place in her chest that she had always felt her power and start to snake its way from her chest to her shoulder and down her arm. Meanwhile, Draco motioned to Thaddeus and the boy opened the box Tonks had passed him, revealing an ornate silver dagger resting on black satin. Hermione couldn't breath; she knew that knife. What was he doing?

She tried to pull her hand free, but Malfoy held it tightly. She pulled her hand tighter, unable to draw her eyes away from the knife. How was no one noticing this? How was no one stopping this? She felt on the edge of a scream or a sob, when she felt a soft circle brushed against the skin of her hand.

Malfoy wasn't speaking but his thumb was stroking the back of her hand where his thumb rested. It was enough to stop her moving. Her eyes were still glued to the knife, but with his soft urging, she was able to see slight differences between this knife and the knife that still haunted her nightmares. Slow and steady her eyes looked back to Malfoy's face, where his silver eyes were fixed on her. There was no malice in them, just concern, and she let out a deep breath and raised her chin.

It seemed to be enough of a sign for Malfoy to continue; with heartbreakingly gentle hands, he turned her hand so it was palm up and took the knife. That was when he dropped her gaze, his entire focus on the silver blade he was dragging across her palm. Little pinpricks of fire erupted along with a ribbon of red. He manipulated her hand into a cupping shape to create a little bowl, which immediately started to fill with her blood. There was a gentle squeeze before he let go, a silent instruction to stay still.

Then, he slashed at his own palm without nearly the same level of care he had just shown her and he dropped the knife back in its box without ceremony. He held his injured hand over hers and let a trickle of blood flow into her palm, where it mixed with hers. She was so busy focused on the macabre sight, that she didn't notice him move his until their fingers were entwined and being lowered, gravity causing their mixed blood to flow to the ground. With a steady trickle coming from between them, Malfoy took the wand and uttered the spell Hermione had never heard before but knew she would never forget for as long as she lived-

*Simul Tenetur.*

Purple flames erupted from the ground, burning up the trickle of blood until it circled their hands, warming them slightly before burning away, healing their palms as it went. The tendrils of magic that had been gently winding its way down her arm before now surged forward like a wave rushing to the shore. And like a wave, when it came rushing back towards her, there was something new mixed with it. Glints of some other power combined with her own, like shiny pebbles or shells, catching the light. She looked up to Draco, searching his grey eyes to see if he could feel it too and found his eyes looking just as intently. His hand felt warm in her own, and though she had been bleeding moments earlier, she felt no pain. She wanted to look at her palm, see what marks this magic had left but feared breaking the contact would break the spell.

“Ahem,” Thaddeus cleared his throat and shuffled through his paper again, “Then, it’s on to the exchanging of rings, and I believe this is also where you can add your own vows if you wish to modernise.”

“No!” said Hermione, louder than she had intended, and she dropped Draco’s hand. She didn’t want to exchange any vows. She could make no promises to this man and she wanted none from him.

“No, you don’t want to modernise? Or no, you don’t have rings?” asked Thaddeus.

Hermione swallowed and took a deep breath. She was grateful to have raided her mother’s jewellery box that morning, “I have a ring but would prefer not to make any vows.”

“Me also,” Malfoy chimed in, and with his free hand, he retrieved a ring box from an inner pocket. Hermione looked at it and wondered where he had gotten it from; like her, he wouldn’t have been able to pop to the shops that morning.

“Wonderful,” Thaddeus chirped up, returning to his notes and reading again, “This promise born in blood is one you will wear proudly in the form of a ring. These rings, gifts from ancestors’ past, are the public symbol of both your union to the world and your devotion to each other.”

Hermione marvelled at the twist of fate that had led to her fulfilling a vow she didn’t even know she was expected to make. A gift from ancestors’ past indeed. Although she would wager all she owned that when that line had been written by whatever ancient Malfoy had crafted this ceremony and spell, the ring of a Muggle dentist was not the ring anyone was anticipating. She was too busy musing this to notice that Malfoy was reaching for her hand again, this time to slide a ring on her finger.

The magic still flickering down her arm and reaching towards Malfoy recoiled back to her chest when she saw the ring. It was possibly the ugliest ring she had ever seen. The gold band was fine, but the squat black triangle face with a series of tiny brown diamonds embedded in it was an accusation. She knew it must be a family piece, where else was Draco Malfoy going to get a ring, but she failed to believe that this ring was chosen from the Malfoy estate for any other reason than it was the one that held the least value, and would be least missed from their collection. She only hoped the brown diamonds were chosen purely because of their relative inexpense and not to pass commentary on her blood. The band felt cold as it slipped on her finger, loose at first before magically resizing itself to her finger and locking itself to her.

Offering her father’s simple gold band in return felt hollow. Offering part of her family history to someone who despised it seemed to be one of the stupidest choices she’d made recently, which was saying a lot. Although it had no fitting charms, the ring slid on easily and fit perfectly, and Hermione tried not to linger on the image of it on his pale hand.

“Excellent!” declared Thaddeus, the relief the ceremony was coming to a close evident on his face, “and with a kiss, I declare the union sealed.”

Okay, she knew this was coming. She'd seen enough weddings in the past few months to realise it, she just had to brace herself, and it would be quick. But her new husband failed to move. He stood staring at her hand and that god-awful ring with his fists clenched by his side. He wasn't going to move, and everyone was looking at them. Was it her? Did he find her that awful? Like the ghost of her past self had taken possession of her body, Hermione acted without thinking, taking a step forward, she rested a hand on Malfoy's shoulder, leaned in and pressed her lips to his. If he couldn't do this part, she would. After this day she reasoned, she would never have to make moves to touch Draco Malfoy again.

She didn't look at his face as she pulled away, instead, she looked for Harry and Ginny and walked toward them. Trying to keep her voice light, she asked ,“Right, is there cake?”

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There was cake, but Hermione didn't stop to look at it. She wanted to get as far away from the ceremony as possible. She wasn't sure why the ring had upset her so much. It wasn't as if she had been expecting a warm or enthusiastic welcome from Malfoy, but something about how he'd soothed her at the sight of the knife, followed by how her magic had responded to the binding spell. It made her feel, just for a second like they would be a team. It was such a nice feeling. She let herself relish that feeling just for a minute; just blame the spell. It was just the binding spell. She didn't want a team. Her reaction was just the spell.

Her steps slowed, and she looked to where her feet had carried her; back into the manor. On a landing of some sort, she'd gone up a flight of stairs without noticing. Before her was a large window looking out over the grounds, a round table with a vase of flowers in the middle. Flowers that were, like the ribbons, inexplicably her favourite colour. She reached out to brush the petals, make sure they were real.

“Hermione?” Ginny said standing next to her at the table, “Are you ok?”

“Yes,” said Hermione, firmly, a little embarrassed by her reaction. She was acting wounded, and the only way to be wounded was to actually have feelings about the topic.

“Are you sure? That was a lot, the knife and the blood...”

“Fucking Pureblood wedding traditions,” Tonks cut in, “yet another thing I should thank my mother for, leaving this absolutely twisted universe.”

Hermione swallowed, unsure to tell them that aside from her own issues about knives, the binding spell hadn't been awful. She imagined that if you did it with someone you cared for, it might actually be an entirely new type of magic. She placed both hands on the little table and leaned into them to ground herself.

“That's the ring?” Ginny said, looking at Hermione's hand with an unimpressed look, “I would have expected the only good thing about marrying into the Malfoys would be some blingy hardware from the family vaults.”

Tonks also looked at the ring, and Hermione thought she saw her wince, “That is from the family vaults.”

The silence that fell over the little group was suffocating, especially as Hermione could see as each member of the group read exactly what she had seen from the ring.

Harry broke first, "You don't need to stay here Hermione. You've fulfilled the letter of the law, but Kingsley can't expect you to stay in this house."

Hermione shook her head and moved her hands, returning to fiddling with a flower, hoping the vase blocked her friend's view of her hands. If there was one thing she knew, it was that you couldn't run from the consequences of your actions forever. It might have been more difficult to grasp for the boy who had lived, but leaving today would solve nothing.

"It will be fine. We'll learn to stay out of each other's way and besides, I hear there is a great library here somewhere," said Hermione, trying to sound braver than she felt.

Tonks met her gaze knowingly and said quietly, "The least awful of only awful options."

Harry snorted, "Toasting to someone's new life as the least awful option doesn't seem like the best endorsement. Come on, Hermione. I'm sure Kingsley would let you stay at home until Malfoy's sentence is finished."

"Not bloody likely," interrupted Tonks and Hermione raised an eyebrow at her. Clearly, Tonks had discussed this with Kingsley at some point.

"We've already been over this, Harry," Hermione said, just wanting it all to stop.

"At least let me fetch Glitter for you? So you won't be completely alone here," said Ginny and Hermione felt a hitch in her throat.

Bundling Glitter up into her carrier and taking her to Grimmauld had been one of the hardest things she'd had to do since she had accepted her parents were never going to get better and that she and Ron were better off apart. However, at least with Ginny and Harry, the cat would be cared for and happy. There was no way of knowing how Malfoy would react to a cat in his space. She couldn't guarantee that he wouldn't be cruel.

"What is Glitter?" Malfoy's crisp voice cut through, and they all turned to look at him at the base of the stairs staring up at them.

"The herpes of the craft world," Harry muttered, as if trying to lighten the mood, and Hermione loved him so much in that moment. He'd inadvertently named Glitter after he complained that once the cat had been on your lap, you would never get rid of the hair- Much like glitter... or herpes.

"What is herpes?" Draco asked. Tonks snorted, and Hermione felt like she wanted to as well.

Of course, Draco Malfoy had no idea about Muggle STDs, but before she laughed, she looked at Malfoy and his face, so tired and lost, pulled at something in her. Not her magic. Not the bond they'd just created. A part of her that she'd always had; she just never expected it to be triggered by Draco Malfoy.

“Ignore them,” she said with a sigh, “Glitter is my cat.”

“You still have your cat? That big ugly orange thing?” Draco asked, looking around the landing as if he expected Crookshanks to appear from under her skirt and attack.

“No, well, yes. I don’t have Crooks anymore. After the war...” she trailed off, she didn’t want to think about after the war, “But I have a new kitten, Glitter. But it’s fine; she can stay at Grimmauld. I didn’t think you’d want a pet roaming around your home.”

“You can bring your bloody cat, Granger. It’s of no significance to me,” he looked stricken by the implication, and Hermione felt a swell of hope. She didn’t have to be all alone here; she could have Glitter. That was all she needed.

“Actually, shouldn’t you have more things? Clothes and whatnot?” Draco continued

“I have a few things packed, I was going to ask Harry to fetch them later,” she answered, subtly swiping at her eyes. She hadn’t quite recovered from the news her pet was coming with her.

Draco shook his head, “Only a few things? I’d thought for sure there’d be at least a carriage worth of books.”

Hermione felt awkward again. He expected her to bring all her things with her. Surely that wasn’t necessary. “I don’t need much and I’ll still have my house. I know I have to live here, but I am keeping it, just in case...”

“He doesn’t need to, we can send Bobsy,” Draco offered and it took Hermione a moment to realise he was talking about Harry fetching her things, and another minute to realise Bobsy must be a house elf. She knew there were two at the manor still, of course, but it wasn’t something she was comfortable with. Now was not the time for that conversation however, so she said nothing.

“I can show you to your room?” Draco offered, and she nodded before turning back to the Potters and Tonks. It was time.

“I think you can go now,” she said.

Thankfully, Tonks and Ginny nodded, understanding that this next bit needed to happen, but Harry looked hesitant. He turned to Malfoy and pulled himself up to full height.

“I’ll be around Malfoy,” he said, and Hermione fought rolling her eyes. Harry may have been an only child, but every so often he liked to pull a textbook brother move; Hermione wondered if she was recreating scenes he’d seen on TV.

“Do you have your coin?” Harry turned to her now, bringing up the coins she’d charmed in 5th year to communicate to each other. They hadn’t used them in years, but since the war, she and Harry had kept them on their person at all times. A delicate thread connecting them when for the first time they weren’t physically in the same place. She nodded and Harry gave her a

quick hug before staring out the window while her friends left her alone in Malfoy Manor, with a husband.

“Shall we?” said husband asked, gesturing to the flight of stairs, taking them further into the house. She knew she should say something. They needed to talk about how this new situation was going to work. But the words just wouldn’t form. So she followed him, trying to make as little noise as possible.

“Your rooms are the closest to the library wing,” Draco started speaking, thank goodness, “you have your own bathroom, obviously, and there is a small sitting room attached. It’s a bit too small to be converted to an office, in my opinion, but my mother used to like to take her breakfast there.”

Hermione halted suddenly; she had assumed, given that Malfoy Manor was a manor, that she would be tucked away in a guest room, somewhere as far away from Draco and the Malfoy family as possible.

“I’m in your mother’s room?” she said

“No, of course not. But my wing is an exact replica of my parent’s,” Draco answered flippantly, as if she was stupid for thinking so. Unfortunately, his answer didn’t make her feel any better and she didn’t start following him again.

“I’m in your wing?” she hated how small her voice sounded.

“Yes,” Draco swallowed, “My parent’s wing remains prepared for them, and the guest wing... well our last guest was...”

“Oh,” Hermione tried not to think of who else had occupied that guest wing or too closely about why Draco still had a wing prepared for his parents.

“It’s a large wing. There are many doors between my rooms and yours,” Draco offered, his tone bordering on reassuring. Hermione took a deep breath and started walking with him again. This time, they walked in silence.

Hermione’s new room had a double door, as if to warn exactly of the opulence within. Before it was opened, Hermione imagined the worst. The same wallpaper as the drawing room, dark and emerald green everywhere, portraits full of wizards who thought she had no place in this house. So when she looked into the room, she was shocked. The smell hit her first. Fresh flowers. So light and inviting she couldn’t help but step into the room. Then she saw the colours; cream, pink, lavender, periwinkle. Her favourite colours. No one expected Hermione Granger to be such a fan of such feminine colours but she was. She just didn’t expect to see them here. Then she looked at the ceiling and a final piece of the puzzle slipped into place. There were no chandeliers, no overhead lighting to speak of. This room had been prepared specifically for her. Someone has shared her preferences. There was only one explanation.

“Your elves prepared this?” she asked.

“Yes,” Draco replied and Hermione noticed how intently he was watching her.

"I'd like to meet them?" she asked, unsure how it worked. Technically, they were free elves, but too many elves had been freed and still suffered mistreatment from old masters, too beaten and cowered by years of abuse to actually leave. Could Malfoy summon them? Would he allow her to talk to them?

"Of course," Draco stood up straighter, put his hands behind his back and called, "Bobsy! Vim!"

With twin pops, both elves appeared before him. One, a male in a tiny suit, stood straight and proud, looking Draco defiantly in the eye. The other was a female, dressed in a child's frock and looking like she wished to be anywhere but there.

"Mister Draco, we have a lot to be doing in the kitchen, surely you don't need us to coddle you right at this moment," the male said dryly. Hermione felt her mouth drop open. Okay, so no one could describe this elf as cowered or broken. She looked at Malfoy, waiting to see if he was going to lash out, but he just looked exasperated. Like a parent used to dealing with a petulant child.

"Your new mistress would like a word," he said, gesturing towards Hermione, and the elf dropped to her feet in a deep bow. To say it made her uncomfortable would be an understatement.

"Oh please, you really don't need to do that," she said, looking towards Malfoy, hoping he would echo her sentiment, but he was just smirking at her. Prat.

"Oh no, mistress, we are honoured to have a brave and valiant war hero in our home, and the dedicated and clever work you did at the ministry for house elves..."

Hermione was horrified; the elf looked as if he was going to cry. And over what? Her involvement in a war that still had too high of a cost? Laws that offered freedom only in theory and didn't have enough teeth to truly guard house elves or any other creature. Did this elf know it was all pretty window dressing? Did he know exactly how little Hermione had changed things? She felt herself feeling slightly panicked remembering her time at the ministry. Everything she failed to achieve. She picked at a flower, trying to focus on the texture of the petal in her hands to ground her. She felt her magic uncurl and seek something out, as if seeking help.

"Am I going to have to stand here all afternoon for this little tête-à-tête?" Draco snapped, pulling her attention. His face was something of a familiar sneer, and as if by muscle memory, the panic receded and left nothing but a desire to snark at him.

"You don't need to be here for this at all," she snapped.

"Well then, I have things to do. Bobsy will inform you of the dinner arrangements. He will also see to your things."

The male elf cut in before Hermione could, "Once Bobsy has finalised the dinner arrangements with Mistress to ensure they are to her liking, Bobsy will let Mister know."

Oh, it was perfect. She didn't need to put Draco Malfoy in his place, his elf would do it for him. She couldn't help it, she giggled. Which apparently was enough of an insult that Draco turned on his heel without so much as another word. Well, it seemed they weren't going to be having a conversation about the perimetres of their marriage today, then. She sighed and knelt down on the ground in front of Bobsy.

"Bobsy, is it?" she asked politely, extending her hand to the little elf.

"Yes, Mistress, and this my partner Vim," he said, shaking Hermione's hand before gesturing toward the shyer elf, "If you please, Miss, Vim doesn't much like being in the main part of the house. Not since... May she go back to the kitchen?"

"Oh, of course, I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable," Hermione smiled warmly at Vim, who couldn't quite meet her eye, "I just have one question before you go. It will be quick."

Vim nodded.

"Do you both wish to be here?" she asked, unsure how to phrase it, "I mean at the manor, not here in my bedroom."

"Yes, Mistress," said Vim, and Hermione was surprised at how musical her voice was, "We both chose to stay, together."

"Ok," said Hermione, trusting the elves' own words, "well thank you for my room. It is one of the most stunning rooms I've ever seen. And the colours. It's perfect."

Vim nodded and immediately apparated away. Bobsy lingered though, "Thank you, Miss. Mr Potter made suggestions when he visited."

"Mr Potter was here, was he?" Hermione should have guessed that he wouldn't have been able to leave it alone. He'd need to investigate for himself before sending Hermione into the manor. It was lucky for him that she was not at liberty to floo in and out, or he'd find himself with a late-night visitor.

"Bobsy, if it's not too rude, can I ask why you and Vim chose to stay at the manor?" Hermione asked. She was certainly curious. The elf didn't seem to fear Draco, but he also didn't seem particularly fond of him either.

"Do you know house elves often raise pure-blood babies and children?" Bobsy responded, and Hermione nodded; it was well known.

"My Vim nursed Master Draco as a baby and a toddler. She could have done a marvellous job in raising him too, but was ordered not to. Trouble was, he still needed raising. It goes against an elf's nature to walk away from a job half-finished, Miss. Even the tricky ones."

Hermione nodded, although she wasn't quite sure she understood. What she did gather was that Draco was important to both Bobsy and Vim.

“Anyway, Mistress, we should be making plans for you here. It’s a beautiful house, and we will try and make sure you are comfortable. What dinner plans would you like?”

“Can I eat with you?” she asked, figuring it was probably the simplest option.

“Master Draco eats in the dining room at six thirty. We eat in the kitchen at six,” said Bobsy, giving no indication as to where he felt Hermione should be, “you would be welcome at either table.”

“Thank you, Bobsy,” Hermione said genuinely, and the little elf started to talk about plans to move her belongings into the manor. Hermione half listened, half considered the validity of his earlier statement. Would she be welcome at each table? She looked at the ring on her finger and doubted it.

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