

Ours To Keep

Harry nodded numbly, still staring after the strange trio.

Draco Malfoy—exiled Death Eater, once the symbol of pure-blood supremacy—now walking beside the Minister of Magic, chuckling at his son's antics.

It made no sense.

And yet... it made a strange kind of sense.

As the lift doors closed, Harry caught the last thing Scorpius said:

“Daddy, do you think Uncle Kings will let me press all the buttons?”

Draco's dry reply echoed down the corridor.

“If he does, he's paying for the therapy.”



Harry sat at his desk, a stack of parchment and open reports splayed before him like a battlefield—but his eyes hadn't registered a word in nearly an hour. The familiar creak of his old leather chair echoed softly in the otherwise quiet Auror office as he leaned back and rubbed the bridge of his nose. His mind was adrift, tangled in thoughts of Draco Malfoy.

Malfoy.

The name still pulled at something bitter in his chest, even now.

Everything he'd just learned was right there in black ink - spelled out across the documents he'd requested after their meeting.

Exile confirmed by the Wizengamot, ten years duration.

Limited wand usage—supervised, strictly monitored.

All inheritance and assets frozen as reparations for the war.

Authorised to work in Muggle society. Began Muggle employment eight years ago.

That last detail gnawed at Harry. Eight years. Malfoy had been a doctor—a real one. No magic. No shortcuts. Just books and blood and bone and training. Years of sleepless nights, exams, and hands-on experience. A job that required empathy, patience, precision.

None of which Draco Malfoy had possessed when they were boys.

Harry scowled at the document. *It wasn't a lie. It wasn't some performance. He wasn't doing it for recognition, or to win favour with the Ministry.*

And the most confounding detail?

He didn't even want his inheritance back.

There'd been no plea in Malfoy's voice. No desperation for gold or prestige. Just one quiet insistence: *I want to come back because my family needs to be together.*

Harry sighed, fingers trailing through his messy hair. His gut twisted, uncomfortable in a way that had nothing to do with his lunch. There was something—someone—he was missing in all this. *Family*. He had assumed the boy, of course. But there was more to it. There had to be. The boy wasn't enough of a reason to uproot a decade's worth of self-imposed exile. Something else was pulling Malfoy back to England.

Someone.

Head over heels

He didn't know what irritated him more: the mystery of it, or the fact that Malfoy hadn't seemed the least bit interested in offering an answer.

A knock on his office door interrupted the storm in his head.

“Mr. Potter,” said the voice of his assistant, peeking in, “the Minister wants to see you. Now.”



The door clicked shut behind him as Harry entered Kingsley Shacklebolt's office. The familiar scent of old parchment, lemon oil, and cinnamon tea greeted him - warm and grounding. Kingsley sat behind his expansive desk, arms folded as he waited, his face unreadable.

“Take a seat,” Kingsley said, gesturing to the plush armchair opposite him.

Harry obeyed without comment. His eyes scanned the familiar room—rich mahogany bookcases, walls lined with enchanted maps, and portraits of former Ministers dozing peacefully. But something new caught his attention.

On the edge of Kingsley's desk sat a small, gilded picture frame—one Harry had never seen before.

The photograph was enchanted, gently moving in a soft loop. In it, Scorpius Malfoy sat cross-legged on the grass, a bright laugh frozen mid-sound. Beside him, a little girl twirled in a flurry of white linen and wild curls. Her hair was long, untamed, and undeniably familiar. *That texture... that fire...* Harry felt a cold thread run through his spine. The girl's skin was pale and freckled, a dusting of copper constellations scattered across her cheeks. Her eyes—*silver*—were wide and expressive, lit with mischief as she poked Scorpius with a twig.

He stared at the image for longer than he meant to.

Kingsley followed his gaze and smiled softly. “She's got her mother's hair, doesn't she?”

Harry turned slowly, confusion flaring. “Who is she?”

Kingsley didn't answer. Not directly.

Instead, he said, “I imagine you've got questions.”

Harry blinked. “A few, yes.”

Kingsley nodded once, leaning back in his chair. “Malfoy's exile is up for review. You're aware of that?”

“I am,” Harry said. “And I understand the process. What I don't understand is... why now?”

Kingsley laced his fingers together, resting them atop the desk. “Because his wife's work requires her to be in England.”

Harry's stomach gave a strange lurch. “His wife.”

Kingsley raised a brow, watching Harry's reaction carefully. “Yes, Harry. His wife.”

Harry tried to keep his voice neutral. “And... who is she?”

Kingsley offered a small, almost amused smile. “All in due time. I have been given permission by the Malfoy family to provide as much information to you, and you only, as I feel is adequate

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but I am still resigned to my own opinions on this matter.”

Harry clenched his jaw. “Minister—”

“Harry,” Kingsley interrupted, voice calm but firm, “this isn’t about satisfying your curiosity. I know today’s meeting with Malfoy surprised you. I also know you’re still trying to reconcile the boy you once knew with the man he’s become. But let me be clear: Draco Malfoy has changed. He has spent a decade atoning in a way most people wouldn’t have survived.”

Harry looked down at his hands. His knuckles were white.

“He’s done the work,” Kingsley continued. “He’s accepted limitations on his magic, rebuilt a life with his own hands, and chosen to dedicate that life to healing. And that child you saw? That boy loves him. Fiercely. And so does his daughter. And I so happen to be quite fond of all of them.”

“I don’t doubt that,” Harry said quietly. “I saw it.”

Kingsley’s gaze sharpened. “Then you also need to accept that you don’t know everything. I’m telling you this plainly, Harry—I support Draco’s petition. I’ve been aware of his progress for years. He has earned this opportunity. And, more importantly, we need his wife in England. Her work with the International Magical Council is vital—particularly her influence on our international reputation.”

Harry stiffened. “So that’s what this is about?”

“This is about many things,” Kingsley said, tone steel-edged now. “It’s about second chances. It’s about diplomacy. And yes, it’s about making sure we don’t lose one of the most brilliant minds of our generation to another country because we couldn’t treat her husband fairly.”

Harry blinked. “So she’s that important.”

Kingsley gave him a long, knowing look. “You used to know just how important she was, Harry.”

The words landed like a slap.

Harry felt the blood drain from his face. His mouth opened and then closed again. He couldn’t ask. He didn’t want the answer to be what he was beginning to suspect.

Kingsley leaned forward. “Draco Malfoy has changed, Harry. He has moved on. But you?” His eyes narrowed, gentle but unwavering. “You haven’t. You’ve clung to the image of who he was because it’s easier than accepting he became a better man when no one was looking. Including you.”

Harry looked away.

“I’m not angry with you,” Kingsley continued, more softly now. “But I *am* telling you... don’t interfere. Don’t dig. Don’t provoke anything that could jeopardise this. Draco’s past is not what’s on trial anymore. If Hermione Malfoy—”

Harry’s head snapped up. The name struck like a thunderclap in his chest. He didn’t breathe. He couldn’t.

Kingsley barely blinked. “—decides Britain isn’t worth the fight, then we will lose both of them. And believe me, the International Council will notice. So will every department that has worked tirelessly to rebuild what we lost in the war. Don’t be the reason we lose them again.”

Harry didn’t speak.

Head over heels

I don’t need magic to be useful. And if my mentor is to be believed I did it all rather quickly and advanced.”

Draco’s eyes wandered over the faces in the throng, noting expressions of pity, admiration, and scepticism alike.

Harry opened his mouth, but before he could speak, a deep, warm voice cut across the atrium.

“Draco Malfoy!”

They both turned.

Kingsley Shacklebolt—tall, powerful, robed in deep navy with gold trim—strode toward them, his broad grin unmistakable. The Minister of Magic looked like he hadn’t aged a day.

Draco squared his shoulders.

“Kingsley,” Draco greeted, his voice steady. “Good to see you.”

To Harry’s astonishment, Kingsley smiled and clapped Draco on the back. “Welcome back.” “Uncle Kings!” Scorpius squealed and let go of Draco’s hand to hug Kingsley.

Harry’s mouth dropped open as the boy launched himself at the Minister of Magic—who caught him easily, lifting him into a bear hug.

“There’s my little rascal,” Kingsley chuckled. “What are you doing in my atrium causing chaos already, eh? You’ve grown since I last saw you.”

“Mama says I’m growing faster than a Puffsketein in a pie shop!” Scorpius declared proudly.

“Sounds about right,” Kingsley chuckled.

“Daddy says I have to be quiet but I think that’s boring,” Scorpius declared. “Are we getting ice cream after the big meeting?”

“We’ll see if I can sneak out of paperwork, yeah?”

Draco cleared his throat. “You’re spoiling him.”

Kingsley winked. “That’s what uncles are for.”

Harry was frozen in place.

“You... know him?” he said, finally pointing to Scorpius.

Kingsley set Scorpius down gently and turned to Harry, nodding. “Yes. Draco and I have been in contact for years. He’s done exceptional work in Australia. Pioneering, actually. His papers on magical war trauma were presented at the international summit last year.”

Draco folded his arms, trying to look modest. “I told them I didn’t want to speak. I have crowds.”

Kingsley gestured toward the elevators. “Your wonderful wife would never accept that, would she? Come. Let’s chat in my office before the schedule gets too mad.”

Draco nodded and gave Scorpius a nudge. “No touching things in the Minister’s office.”

“Unless it looks magical,” Scorpius replied.

“No.”

“Unless it looks *safe* magical.”

“Still no.”

As they walked toward the lift, Kingsley paused, looking back at Harry.

“Harry, come see me this afternoon, would you? We’ll talk.”

Harry had no idea how to respond to that.

Before he could speak, Scorpius turned back to Draco and whispered (though not nearly quietly enough), “He doesn’t look as cool as you said, Papa.”

A slow smirk curled at the corner of Malfoy’s lips. “Yes, well, I may have exaggerated a bit.”

Harry scowled. “Funny?”

Scorpius still studied him with a child’s brutal honesty. “I thought he’d be taller.”

Draco let out a soft, delighted chuckle. “Me too, love. Please try not to ask him if he fought a basilisk or why he looks so tired. It’s impolite.”

Scorpius nodded seriously. “Okay. I won’t say anything. Except, does he know Mum? From school?”

Draco’s lips thinned. “Let’s not talk about Mum just yet.”

Harry was staring. “He looks like you.”

“Pity,” Draco said smoothly. “He got his mother’s brain, at least.”

“Who’s the mother?”

“That’s none of your business Potter,” he said, his tone softening further as he prepared to continue, “I’m married, I’m happy, and I have no desire to dwell on what once was. I have chosen a path of healing, of service, and I seek only the right to be with my family without the shadow of my past darkening our future. More importantly, my family needs me here.” His words were resolute, an invocation of hope amid the clamor of disapproval and disbelief.

Harry frowned slightly, the weight of his own past mistakes gnawing at him. “Your family?” he echoed, his mind racing. *But I mustn’t pry.* Yet beneath the surface, Harry’s thoughts betrayed him—he wondered about the mysteries that lay behind Draco’s guarded expression, the untold stories of a man transformed.

Draco inclined his head, as if acknowledging an unspoken truth.

Harry frowned. “Yet, you still brought a kid to your trial hearing?”

Draco raised a brow. “Yes, Potter. Because that’s exactly what this is—a proper trial with courtroom theatrics and flaming torches. No, I brought him because he’s five and my wife is in meetings all day. She’s the reason we’re trying to move. Her job brought us back. I won’t have my family scattered due to my past mistakes.”

Harry blinked. “She works in England?”

“She’s in international law. Works in the Australian Ministry as one of the main leads for the International Confederation of Wizard’s Magical Security Council. Big titles, longer words, lots of diplomatic nonsense I’m not allowed to speak about.” Draco tilted his head. “Don’t worry. I’m not here to reclaim gold or power. I’ve got a life now. A proper one.”

“And what do you do?” Harry asked, suspicion still lingering.

“You said so yourself, rumors are true. I’m a doctor. Muggle-trained. Specialising in post-traumatic disorders. I work with Muggles and magical folk alike. Mostly war-related trauma. Fascinating stuff, actually. I also do some keynote speaking from time to time. The muggles call them TED Talks.”

“A doctor,” Harry repeated, as if Draco had just told him he’d become a florist.

“Yes, Potter. A healer without a wand. Can you imagine?” Draco’s tone was dry. “Turns out

His heart thundered in his chest.

Hermione.

Married. To Malfoy.

With children.

A little girl with wild curls and silver eyes.

He felt like he’d been punched in the gut.

Kingsley sighed and stood. “You have a decision to make, Harry. You can be part of the world as it is now. Or you can keep living in the past. But you can’t do both. And I don’t believe it goes without saying that everything we’ve discussed in this room stays within these walls.”

Harry stood slowly, hands shaking as he turned to the door. He paused, glancing one more time at the photograph.

Scorpius and that girl—*his* daughter. *Their* daughter.

Happy.

Together.

A family.

“I understand,” Harry said hoarsely.

Kingsley didn’t reply.

As Harry stepped out of the office, the door closed behind him with a soft click. And for the first time in years, Harry Potter found himself questioning everything he thought he knew—about enemies, about friends, and about the very nature of love.

Head over heels016

guiding Scorpius forward, but the murmurs followed. A Malfoy in the Ministry was always going to attract attention. A Malfoy with a child? That was something no one had expected.

At the entrance of a bustling atrium, Harry Potter, now a senior Auror, caught sight of the unmistakable figure. His heart skipped—a reaction both involuntary and deeply conflicted. Harry's mind, long preoccupied with his own scars and responsibilities, could scarcely process the sight of Draco Malfoy, an echo from a past fraught with enmity. Yet, as he watched, curiosity wrestled with disbelief.

"Malfoy?" he called, using the name as if it were both a challenge and a greeting. "It's been... years."

Draco tensed at the sound of the voice that came from behind - incredulous, familiar, and immediately unwelcome. He turned slowly, shielding Scorpius slightly behind him. His silver eyes met green, wide with confusion and disbelief.

"Potter," he replied evenly, the old habits of formality still clinging to his speech. "It seems fate has a curious sense of irony, doesn't it?" His tone carried neither malice nor triumph—only a quiet resolve born of years spent rethinking life's priorities.

Harry looked almost exactly the same—messy hair, tired eyes, the perpetual air of someone who'd missed a crucial piece of information and was only just realizing it. He wore dark Auror robes, open at the collar, and had a Ministry badge clipped to his belt.

"What...?" Harry blinked. "What are you doing here?"

"Exile's nearly up," Draco said simply. "I'm here to petition for my release, as per the terms. Temporary travel permit for two weeks. That's in three days."

Harry's eyes dropped to the small child still clinging to Draco's hand.

Scorpius, to his credit, didn't flinch. He tilted his head at the famous wizard with the same curiosity he had for birds, puzzles, and why adults always asked stupid questions.

"And who might this little one be?" he asked, his voice softening with genuine curiosity.

"My son," Draco said, cool but not cruel, a trace of pride and melancholy mingling in his tone. "Scorpius."

The simplicity of the introduction sent ripples through the gathered crowd. A nearby Ministry clerk, barely containing his astonishment, leaned towards a colleague.

Harry's jaw tightened. "Didn't know you had a..."

"No. You wouldn't."

"I never imagined a Malfoy as a caring father—much less one who'd choose healing over harm if the rumors are true."

His words were not meant as an insult, but the old prejudices and unresolved history between them made the question weighty. As the whispers crescendoed into a low hum of speculation, Harry's own thoughts churned with conflicted emotions.

There was a pause. Scorpius tugged Draco's sleeve.

"Who's he, Papa?" the boy asked, his voice clear and curious.

Draco exhaled through his nose, his grip on his son tightening slightly. "That, love, is Harry Potter."

Scorpius' eyes grew impossibly wide. "The Harry Potter?"

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of platinum-blond curls flopped over his forehead and into his storm-grey eyes—the only real marker of his Malfoy bloodline. The rest of him—the mischief in his smile, the way he bounced on the balls of his feet, the faint sprinkle of freckles over his nose—was purely his mother.

“You alright, bug?” Draco murmured, squeezing his son’s hand.

“I don’t see any floating quills,” Scorpius replied in an unimpressed tone. “You said there’d be floating quills. Or a wand scanner. This just looks like those museums mum and I go to all the time.”

Draco huffed out a breath of dry laughter. “Yes, well. That’s bureaucracy for you. All dramatic entrances and zero actual innovation.”

They began walking again, Draco leading them towards the security checkpoint—an ironic necessity for someone who, for the better part of a decade, had barely been allowed to cross the magical border without three levels of clearance and a pocketful of permission slips.

“Papa?”

Draco looked down at him, his features softening ever so slightly. “Yes, love?”

“Is this where all the wizards are?”

“It is,” Draco murmured, guiding him through the bustling space. “England’s finest, supposedly.”

His son giggled at that. Unlike his father, the boy had not grown up surrounded by magic. No, Scorpius had spent his entire life in Australia, raised in the Muggle world with only glimpses of the magical one. He had never seen a building like this, never watched robes billow as witches and wizards bustled about, wands tucked into sleeves, enchanted memos zipping through the air. The Australian Ministry of Magic, or AMOM, had adopted muggle culture and acclimated to it wonderfully. Wizards and Witches walked and talked amongst muggles on a daily basis, and although the statute of secrecy was very much alive and wizarding culture was always present the old school style of dressing, speaking and acting was but a memory.

“Do you think Mama would like this place?” Scorpius asked thoughtfully.

Draco smirked. *Oh, she had certainly spent enough time here.* “She’d probably find it outdated.”

A few witches and wizards glanced up as he passed. Some looked vaguely curious. Others squinted, as if trying to remember where they knew him from.

Of course. They hadn’t seen him in ten years. Not since the war. Not since the exile. But still the whispers came.

“*Mertin’s beard, is that Malfoy? Draco Malfoy?*”

“*He’s back? I thought he was dead.*”

“*I thought he was in exile. Living as a muggle, so much for pureblood royalty.*”

“*And, Morgana help me, is that a child?*”

The rumours swirled like autumn leaves caught in a draft, each new whisper adding layers to the man who now walked among them. Draco lifted his chin a fraction. He knew what he looked like now—leaner, sun-kissed from the Australian sun, no longer the ghost-white, sneering boy they remembered. Still elegant. Still unmistakably a Malfoy. But no longer chained to the name. He carried a new purpose now. A new life. Because of this he ignored them,



Chapter 2: The Forgotten Friend

“Somewhere between the silence and the storm, she built a life she never thought she could have—one made of love, resilience, and a man who saw her not as a symbol, but as a woman worth fighting for.”

The late afternoon sun slanted through the charmed skylights of a hidden magical workspace nestled above a Muggle co-working hub in the heart of London. Glamoured to appear nondescript from the outside, the sleek office space belonged to the International Confederation of Wizards’ Magical Security Council—specifically, its main director, Hermione Jean Malfoy, ne. Granger.

She stood at the centre of her private office, surrounded by a fortress of parchment, glowing magical contract scrolls, quills, and Ministry correspondence from at least five countries. The view beyond the enchanted glass walls revealed a shimmering, protective glamour over the Thames skyline, though Hermione hadn’t spared it a glance in hours.

Her wand was tucked behind her ear like a quill, sleeves rolled up, hair pinned haphazardly atop her head. A deep furrow carved its way between her brows as she glared at a parchment floating mid-air before her.

“In what world,” she muttered, seething, “does cross-border magical healthcare get lumped into bloody economic trade agreements? Mertin’s saggy bollocks, do they think trauma gives a toss about national commerce?”

The door burst open with flair.

“Good afternoon to you too, Director Malfoy,” drawled Pansy Parkinson, gliding in like she owned the place. Clad in storm-grey robes tailored within an inch of their life and Louboutin-style dragonhide heels that announced every step with authority, she looked every bit the elegant menace she prided herself on being. “Have you broken any diplomats today, or are you saving that treat for dessert?”

Hermione didn’t look up. “Only the slow, sexist ones.” She jabbed a finger at the floating document. “Whoever wrote this clause about magical orphanages being ‘optional’ can choke.

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Optional? As if displaced children are an accessory to be added at political convenience. It's infuriating."

Pansy made a tsking noise as she sauntered toward Hermione's desk and perched on its edge with familiar indifference, careful not to disturb the precarious stacks of policy drafts. "You are dangerously close to insufferable again."

Hermione lifted a brow, deadpan. "Again?"

"Yes, again," Pansy sniffed. "You know how you get when you're stressed. All self-righteous fury and martyr-level productivity. Honestly, it's exhausting just watching you." She flicked her wand and summoned Hermione's abandoned teacup to her hand, inspecting the contents. "Cold. Disgraceful. You're a mother of two, Hermione, how have you not figured out how to finish a bloody cup of tea before it dries a tragic, lukewarm death?"

Hermione sighed and leaned against the window ledge, shoulders stiff with the weight of what lay ahead. "Because I'm preparing to throw myself into a courtroom full of crusty old men who still think I'm a threat to their precious traditions."

"You *are* a threat to their traditions," Pansy said breezily. "Which is precisely why they need you. And why you're going to win."

Hermione gave a short, humourless laugh. "You really believe that?"

"Darling, you're Hermione bloody Malfoy. The brains behind half the magical legislation in this hemisphere. And let's be honest, Draco's been punished more than most of the Death Eaters who *actually* enjoyed their time in the Dark Lord's circle." Pansy's tone sharpened, her facade slipping into steel. "They used him as a scapegoat. A warning to the Pureblood elite. He was sixteen when he took the Mark. Sixteen. A bloody child."

Hermione's jaw clenched. "He was groomed, threatened, cornered by his own family and the Dark Lord. But he made his choice in the end. He didn't kill. He didn't betray. He protected the students during the final battle. He helped in the dungeons. But they never cared about that."

"No," Pansy said bitterly. "They cared about his last name. And his bloody hair."

A silence settled between them. Weighted but not uncomfortable.

The kind born of history. Of trust hard-won. Of years.

Hermione had never expected to be close with Pansy Parkinson. Truthfully, she had loathed her once. But war shattered expectations, and time stitched together unlikely alliances. In the wreckage of the old world, Pansy had been a sharp-tongued constant.

She hadn't expected to fall in love with Draco Malfoy either.

Twelve years ago, he had become the youngest Death Eater in recorded history. Ten years ago, the Wizengamot had stripped him of his freedom, his wand privileges, his right to live freely, and exiled him to Australia with barely a coin to his name.

She'd been there when the sentence passed.

She had stood in the gallery, silent and shaking, not as a member of the Golden Trio but as a woman unsure whether to scream or cry.

Then, she left.

Not because she didn't care.



Chapter 1: The Man in the Ministry

"He had learned to live in the silence. Now, he walked into the noise - carrying his whole world in one small hand."

The marble floors of the Ministry of Magic gleamed with their usual cold perfection, every step echoing like a quiet warning through the vast atrium.

Tall golden walls gleamed under the enchanted ceiling, fireplaces roared with green flames as witches and wizards stepped in and out, and the grand fountain in the centre—now replaced with a memorial to those lost in the war—stood solemnly, its inscription catching the light.

Unity and sacrifice.

Draco Malfoy hated how familiar it still looked. It had been ten years since he had last set foot in this place.

Ten years since the Wizengamot had stripped him of his freedom, sentencing him to exile in Australia with limited wand usage, no access to his inheritance, and the world's collective scorn as his shadow. 11 years since the Battle of Hogwarts. 12 years since he became the youngest Death Eater in History.

And yet, here he was again—at 28 years old—returning on a temporary permit to plead his case before the Wizengamot, his back straight, his expression unreadable, wearing a charcoal-grey Muggle-cut blazer over a white shirt, the sleeves rolled just above his forearms. His left arm covered in tattoos, all with hidden meanings, covering the one mark he never wanted and no longer feared or hated. There was a time he would've worn tailored, luxurious wizarding robes and walked with an arrogance that filled a room. Now, bore not the arrogance of his youth but the measured dignity of a man remade by hardship and exile. His confidence was quieter, honed by years of struggle, and softened by the small boy gripping his hand tightly.

I have not returned to reclaim lost power or to revel in the name I once bore; I return simply to ask for the lifting of my exile, he mused silently. For the sake of my family—my son, my wife, and the future we are determined to forge in a world that has so often misunderstood us.

Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy was five years old and currently staring up at the atrium with his mouth half-open, as if he expected dragons to swoop down from the chandelier. A mess

Because she couldn't stay.
She went to Australia to find her parents, to reverse the spell she'd cast in desperation and grief. She had no intention of staying. She was supposed to come back.
But she didn't.

And in the midst of everything, she found Draco in a tucked-away Muggle bookshop. Not the cold, haunted boy she remembered, but a quiet man with ink-stained fingers, a wary smile, and a medical textbook in his lap. They argued like it was still sixth year, but something shifted. Over time, the ice cracked.

And she saw him.

The real him.

The man no one else had bothered to look for.

The man she fell in love with.

Now, she was back in London. Hiding in plain sight.

And the next time she stepped into the Ministry, it would be to face her past—and fight for her future.

For him.

For their children.

For the life they had built when no one else had wanted them to have it.

Hermione turned to Pansy and said, "We're going to win this. I'm not leaving him there. Not one more day."

Pansy smirked, brushing an invisible speck from her sleeve. "Of course we're going to win. Because if they try to deny him, I'll hex their bollocks into oblivion. You know I'm charming under pressure."

Hermione cracked a grin despite herself. "You're insufferable."

And for the first time that day, Hermione laughed. Not because things were easy.

But because she was ready to fight.



FLASHBACK

After the war, everything had unravelled too quickly to stop. The Wizarding World had celebrated peace while those who fought for it stood shell-shocked amidst the ruins, unsure of who they were without the war to fight.

The Golden Trio didn't break all at once. They cracked, like old stone under the weight of too much pressure.

Ron had proposed first.

Foolish. Desperate. A ring shoved into her palm while she was still attending funerals, still waking from nightmares, still clutching her wand in her sleep.

She had said yes. Not because she loved him—not in the way he wanted—but because she was so bloody tired. Because he looked at her like she was the only thing anchoring him to the

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DON'T DO IT.
IF YOU BOUGHT THIS, SHAME ON
YOU
IF YOU BOUND THIS YOURSELF. IM
SO PROUD OF YOU!

XOXO -8ENNA



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present, and she didn't have the heart to pull that away.

Two months later, she ended it.

And Ron Weasley—boy-turned-war-hero-turned-bitter—had not taken it well.

“You think you're too good for me now, is that it?” he had spat, red-faced and trembling.

“After everything? After all we went through? What, going to fix your parents and forget us like they never mattered either?”

Her voice had been cold, detached. Too calm for how much she was shaking. “Don't you dare. Don't you dare compare what I did to protect my family to your bloody ego. I can't marry someone who doesn't see me. Who wants me to be grateful he's settled for me instead of Lavender bleeding Brown.”

He'd thrown a photo frame at the wall.

They hadn't spoken since.

Harry had drifted, not stormed. Slowly, quietly, apologetically.

“I just need space, Hermione. Ron's struggling, and I'm... I'm tired. I need time.”

Time became months. Months became years.

He never asked her how her parents were. He never visited. Always some mission, some excuse, some vague apology offered too late.

So she left. Not with fanfare, not with goodbye.

Just a single letter on the kitchen table of Grimmauld Place and a packed bag.

Australia had been meant to be temporary. Just long enough to find the right Arithmancy alignment, the right Memory Charm counter spells. Long enough to bring her parents back to themselves.

But when she did—when her mother wept and her father held her like he would never let go—Hermione realised she couldn't return. Not yet.

She wasn't ready.

So she stayed.

She had already enrolled in a Muggle university under an alias. Studied psychology and law by day. Helped rebuild refugee housing by night. And slowly, piece by piece, the Hermione Granger the world had known dissolved into someone else.

The first time she had seen him after the war had been pure coincidence.

It had been raining in Sydney.

She'd ducked into a bookstore between errands, tracking water across the hardwood floor, curts sticking to her temples.

He had been standing in the back, dressed in worn jeans and a grey jumper that swallowed his frame, flipping through a medical journal with an expression of quiet determination.

Her heart had stalled in her chest.

She almost hadn't recognised him.

Gone was the expensive arrogance, the gleaming hair slicked back with purpose. Gone was the weight of Malfoy Manor and the expectations of a dying name.

He looked—normal. Not like a Death Eater. Not like the boy who had once spat “Mudblood” across the corridor floor. Just a man. Tired. Alone, or so she thought. Trying.

“Sometimes mercy is a choice. Sometimes, it's a gift. And sometimes... it's just love, showing up when you need it most.”

Perhaps that was why she had approached him.

“Malfoy?”

He had tensed immediately, shoulders stiffening, spine going ramrod straight. He turned slowly, cautiously, and when he saw her, his expression shifted like clouds across the sky.

Shock. Warmess. Guilt.

And something else. Something painfully human.

“Granger?”

They stood there in silence, surrounded by the smell of ink and rain, two ghosts in a city that didn't know them.

“What the hell are you doing here?” she asked finally.

He swallowed. Looked down at the journal in his hands.

“Trying to disappear,” he said honestly.

Hermione crossed her arms. “You're shite at it.”

He smirked, the briefest flicker of the boy she remembered. “Apparently.”

That was the beginning.

They didn't speak again for a week. Then she saw him at a library near the university. A month later, at a Muggle cafe. Eventually, they stopped pretending it was coincidence.

They bickered at first. She challenged him. He pushed back. But behind the old habits was something new. Respect. Curiosity.

And pain. So much pain.

They didn't fall fast. They didn't fall easily.

But they fell.

And Hermione, for the first time in years, felt seen.

Not as a war hero. Not as a symbol. Just as herself.

Draco had been the only one there, emotionally, when she had finally got an update on her parents and realised that restoring their memories would not be as simple as lifting a spell.

He had held her when she had broken down, had listened as she spilled years of resentment, guilt, anger—at Ron, at Harry, at the Wizarding World that had *never* truly accepted her.

And at some point, in between late-night conversations, shared grief, and quiet moments of understanding, she had fallen in love with him.

It had taken her a decade to come back to England.

But she hadn't returned alone.

She had returned as Hermione Malfoy. Mother. Wife. Director.

And she would burn the world to ash before she let them keep her husband in exile one second longer.

OURS TO KEEP

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Based on Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
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11 years since the Battle of Hogwarts, 12 years since he became the youngest Death Eater in history. Ten years since the Wizengamot had stripped him of his freedom, sentencing him to exile in Australia. Draco Malfoy returns to England determined to end his exile and bring his family home. In Australia, he's built a quiet life as a respected Muggle doctor, a devoted husband, and a loving father to two young children.

When Harry Potter spots Draco at the Ministry with a child in tow, he's stunned by the secret life Draco has been living. As a high stakes Wizengamot hearing looms, long buried truths resurface and past relationships are tested.



“I'm terrified, Pans,” Hermione whispered now, her voice barely above breath.
Pansy blinked, uncharacteristically gentle. “Of the trial?”

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“No.” Hermione shook her head. “Of being back here. Of seeing them. Of looking at everything I left behind and wondering if I made the right choice.”

Pansy stood and crossed the room, wrapping her arms around her with surprising tenderness. “You made the only choice that gave you peace. You chose love. And no one gets to question—not Potter, not Weasley, not the entire bloody Wizengamot.”

“I love him so much, you know?” Hermione murmured into her shoulder.

“I know,” Pansy said softly. “We all do. Even Theo, and he’s emotionally constipated.”

A knock interrupted them, and then a small voice came through the door, muffled but unmistakably bossy. “Mummy?”

Hermione turned just as the door swung open and in toddled Cassiopeia, two years old and already a menace in designer nappies. Her wild dark curls had escaped whatever braid Pansy had tried earlier, her cheeks were smudged with green crayon, and she was barefoot.

“Hi, sweetheart,” Hermione said with a tired smile, scooping her daughter up. The weight of her small frame settled against her hip like it belonged there.

“Mummy, I want ‘cream now. Auntie Pansy said we go! We go now!”

Hermione blinked. “You did what, exactly?”

Pansy grinned. “We made a plan. Ice cream and chaos. It’s practically tradition.”

“You’d better not be teaching her spells again. She can’t even do magic yet.” Hermione gave Cassi a knowing look. “And what’s the rule with Auntie Pansy?”

Cassi grinned, wide and wicked. “Don’t tell Daddy!”

“Excellent,” Pansy declared, twirling the toddler with flair. “She learns quickly. We’re going to Floren’s, and then we’re finding a glittery wand holster for your princess wand. Or six.”

“You’re banned from the Magical Menagerie for a reason.” Hermione smirked.

“Neville will be there too. He says Cassi needs more soil-based toys. Educational ones. Poor sod thinks she won’t hex the greenhouse by age five.”

Hermione pressed a kiss to her daughter’s head. “Alright. But she naps when she gets home. And don’t let her talk either of you into another pygmy puff. Or an illegal plant.”

“No puffs,” Cassi nodded solemnly, then looked to Pansy. “But maybe big chocolate one?”

“You’re diabolical,” Hermione muttered. “That’s your goddaughter.”

“Damn right she is,” Pansy said proudly. “Neville and I are raising her to be an icon.”

When the door closed behind them, Hermione exhaled a breath she hadn’t realised she was holding.

She moved back to her desk, picked up the last treaty draft, and signed it with a firm hand. It was done. Her responsibilities here were wrapped.

Now came the hard part.

Not returning to England. She was already here. Hidden away in a high-security co-working suite the ICW had glamourised and warded for her privacy. She didn’t want the press to know. Not yet. Not until the trial.

Now came facing the people she once called family.

Facing Harry. Facing Ron.

Facing the ghost of the girl who had carried the weight of a war on her shoulders and

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head_over_heels016

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thought she had to keep carrying it alone.

But as she looked at the photograph on her desk—taken on the beach near their home in Sydney, with Scorpius on Draco's shoulders and Cassi asleep against her chest—she remembered why she was doing this.

Not for redemption. Not for legacy.
For them.

For the family she chose. For the future they deserved.

She rested her hand against her stomach, absently. It had finally started to show as she neared the end of her second trimester. Enough for robes to fit awkwardly, and enough that her trousers were protesting and she needed to start telling people before they figured it out. Her pregnancies were always on the small side but this one seemed to be growing a tad faster than her other two.

Twins, if Poppy's smirk and Pansy's smugness meant anything. Hermione was refusing to find out until the birth. Everyone was betting, as usual.

Everyone but her.

Pansy reappeared one hour later, sans child, sipping a suspiciously pink drink.

"You left my daughter with ice cream and glittery chaos?" Hermione asked without looking up.

"She's painting Theo's shoes and telling Ginny all about her new plan to name the next baby 'Wiggly Wonkles.'"

"Merlin save us."

"She's perfect. Honestly, if I weren't so stunning, I'd consider stealing her."

Hermione smiled, eyes drifting to her stomach. "I think one toddler is enough madness for now."

Pansy glanced down, eyes gleaming. "Yes, well, tell that to the two you're carrying now. Speaking of which, Blaise and Luna are fighting and letting everyone know that they get the new babies. I'm starting a betting pool."

"Pansy!"

"What? None of us want children. Yours are replacements. It's a shared custody arrangement. We all agreed."

Hermione groaned. "Please tell me you haven't told Draco."

"Of course I haven't. He'd take it as a personal challenge to out-father everyone."

Hermione snorted. It was true. He'd kill himself trying to be everything their kids needed, just so they never felt the weight of his name like he had.

She batted her lashes. "Blaise is convinced it's a girl, and Luna is threatening to enchant the hospital records because she's sure it's a boy. I started a betting pool that since they each want one, you'll have twins."

"How do they even know?" Hermione hissed.

"They guessed. And I might have smirked when they asked. You know how Luna is when she's right. It's terrifying."

"They're going to drive me mad."

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“It’s their job as godparents. I’ve put galleons on the betting pool so make sure I win.”

Hermione groaned. “I’m not finding out until the birth. It avoids the inevitable argument about names.”

“You mean Scorpius Hyperion almost being named Percival Niggellus.”

“It was a *family* name!”

Pansy gagged. “Hideous. Honestly, thank Salazar for Theo and Ginny being his godparents. Ginny’s the only one who had the balls to tell Draco no.”

Hermione chuckled. “It’s fitting. They’ve grown close. She barely speaks to the rest of the Weasleys now anyway. Except George, Charlie, and her dad.”

“The only tolerable ones. The Weasel’s still sulking into his Firewhisky.”

Hermione stiffened slightly. “He can sulk forever. He made his choice. I made mine.”

Pansy leaned back, eyes thoughtful. “You do know Potter probably already knows, right?”

Hermione stiffened. “Knows what?”

“That you’re back. That you’re married. That your last name is Malfoy and you’ve been shagging Drake for almost a decade. Pick one.”

Hermione scowled. “He doesn’t know everything.”

Pansy arched a brow. “You think he won’t? It’s Potter. He has no subtlety. He probably walked past a photo of Scorpius and thought, ‘Blimey, that blond boy looks familiar’ and now he’s connecting dots with all the finesse of a troll.”

“I’ll handle it,” Hermione muttered.

“Will you?”

Silence.

Pansy crossed her legs. “Do you care what he thinks?”

More silence.

“Hermione.”

“No,” she said finally. “I don’t. Not really. Not anymore. I’m just... angry. At how easily he walked away. At how fast he chose Ron over me. At how he never bloody asked.”

Pansy nodded. “Good. Fuck him, then. You don’t need his approval, and you don’t need his apology. You have your family, and all of us. And we’ve been here. All this time.”

Hermione blinked quickly, her eyes glassy.

“I know,” she whispered.

“You never should have. And you don’t owe that man a damn thing. You don’t owe any of them a damn thing.”

Hermione nodded slowly. “I know. It’s just... the past never stays buried in this world. Especially not for us.”

Pansy’s expression softened. “Then it’s a good thing you’re not afraid to dig it up and set it on fire.”

Hermione smirked. “I’ll bring the petrol.”

“And I’ll bring the wine.”

They laughed then, the kind of laugh that came with years of surviving together. Of heartbreak and healing and wild toddler chaos. Of found family and real love.

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Head over heels016

Hermione reached for her tea, now ice-cold again, and sighed.

“I’m going to win this, Pansy. I have to.”

Pansy stood and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “You will. Because you’re Hermione fucking Malfoy. And they forgot what that means. Time to remind them.”

And with that, she disappeared again in a swish of silk, heels clicking with purpose.

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“No,” Harry said. “I came to... check the premises. For the trial. For your reinstatement.” Draco gestured around the room. “Feel free. There’s no basement, no shrines, and the only thing cursed in this house is the toddler when she’s denied biscuits.”

Harry walked a slow circle, trying to reconcile the old enemy with the man who lived here now. The house, he realised, was *shining*.

Not in the cold, museum-like way of Malfoy Manor, but in the way that whispered comfort and chaos. Shelves of books lined every wall. There were toys scattered in corners, a blanket tossed carelessly over the arm of a velvet settee. A framed photograph of Hermione holding a chubby baby Scorpius sat beside a crooked drawing labelled *Mummy & Daddy & Me + Dragons*. There were photos on the mantelpiece. Of Draco holding a sleeping newborn looking adoringly at Hermione. Of Hermione at a podium with Cassi in her arms. Of Scorpius on Draco’s shoulders. Sun-soaked beaches, Draco in Muggle hospital scrubs holding a newborn Cassi. Hermione in her wedding gown alongside Ginny, Luna and Pansy, a candid shot of them dancing barefoot in the backyard with Scorpius on her shoulders.

A life.

Built from ruin.

“How long?” Harry asked softly.

Draco didn’t pretend not to know what he meant.

“Eight years married soon. Ten years together. Friends before that.”

“You *love* her?”

Draco turned to him fully then, something ancient and immovable in his expression.

“With everything I have.”

Harry closed his eyes, the weight of years pressing down.

“You alright, Potter?” Draco said, arms crossed as he leaned against the kitchen doorframe.

Harry blinked. “Yeah. Just... didn’t expect any of this.”

Draco shrugged. “Most don’t. People assume we’re living in some crumbling ruin or dark lair. But Hermione’s always preferred warm colours and fresh lilies. We’ve had the house for about three years. She’s travelled back loads. Keeps it quiet. You know how the press gets. Nobody has seen the golden girl in a while, especially what they would say, especially if they got wind of who she married.”

Harry nodded numbly.

Draco went on. “She brings the kids every few months. Visits her parents, my parents, Pansy and Neville. Theo. Luna. Blaise. They all live here now, or close. You probably walked past Blaise and Ginny’s place and didn’t even notice.”

Harry’s jaw tensed. “Kingsley told me. About the... marriage.”

Draco gave a soft hum. “I know. He told me. He was at the wedding. There was a fountain. Too much food. McGonagall was singing with Poppy. Theo got drunk and proposed to Luna using a fork forgetting for a moment that he was gay and that Luna prefers more feminine wiles than male.”

Harry tried to laugh. It came out wrong.

“Why didn’t she tell *me*?” he asked quietly.

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Draco looked at him, really looked.

“Because by the time she needed you, *you* weren’t there. And when she left, she didn’t want anyone chasing her out of guilt.”

That stung. More than it should have.

Harry rubbed his hands over his face. “She treats me like a stranger.”

Draco sighed. “You are, *male*. She doesn’t hate you. But she doesn’t trust you either. Not the way she trusts us. I don’t blame her.”

Harry nodded slowly. “She’s different.”

“She’s *here*,” Draco corrected. “For the first time in years.”

Hermione reappeared then, stepping lightly down the stairs, barefoot now, her expression calm but distant.

“Everything alright?” she asked, her eyes fixed on Draco, not Harry.

“Fine,” he answered. “He didn’t hex the sofa. Yet.”

She nodded. “Then we can begin the inspection.”

Harry swallowed.

Ten years. And she looked at him like he was just another line on a report.

And maybe, in the grand story of her life, that was all he had become.

She gave Harry a look. “You want to see the house? Or do you need to hex a few more appliances for your report?”

Harry had the decency to look sheepish. “Td... like a tour. Please.”

Draco raised an eyebrow but gestured for him to follow. “Right. This way, then.”

Hermione stood in the middle of the hallway, arms folded, eyes fixed on both of them like a hawk watching two particularly stupid pigeons. Draco reached out and brushed his fingers gently down her arm, a silent offer of calm.

“We’ll be fine,” he murmured.

“I should be here,” she said, although her voice had softened.

“You’re exhausted. Go to your office, love. Check your treaty updates or yell at someone over Floo. Let me handle this.”

Hermione sighed, letting her forehead rest against his for just a moment. “Don’t let him break anything else.”

“No promises.”

She kissed the corner of his mouth before pulling back. Harry looked away, suddenly very interested in the wallpaper.

“Auror Potter,” she said coolly, turning to face him. “You’re here in an official capacity, so do your job.”

“Hermione, can we talk?” Harry asked.

Her eyes didn’t flicker. “You’re not here as my friend. You’re here as an inspector. So inspect.”

And with that, she turned on her heel and disappeared into her office, the door clicking shut behind her.

Draco stared after her for a moment, a ghost of a smile on his lips and a slight frown on

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his face, almost unnoticeable. Then he clapped Harry on the shoulder. “Come on. Let’s get this over with.”

They moved through the ground floor—a space that radiated warmth and history. The kitchen gleamed, the copper pots and enchanted kettle humming gently. The dining room had mismatched chairs and a worn oak table carved with initials in three different styles: D.M., H.G., and a wobbly S.M.

“We brought some stuff from our home in Australia,” was the only detail Draco gave as an explanation.

The living room was all soft throws, enchanted fairy lights in jars, and a massive bookshelf that groaned under the weight of magical texts, Muggle novels, and toddler picture books.

“Playroom’s in there,” Draco said, nodding at a door decorated with glittering letters. “Prepare yourself.”

Harry stepped in and gaped.

The walls were a shifting mural of Cassi’s finger paintings, dancing unicorns, floating star charts, and a self-writing chalkboard currently spelling out “*Mummy is the Queen of the Universe*” in oversized letters.

“Scorpius did that last week,” Draco said with a smirk. “Bit of a flair for the dramatic. No idea where he gets it.”

Harry laughed despite himself. “Looks like a bloody museum of childhood.”

“It’s chaos. But it’s *our* chaos.”

They made their way upstairs next.

“Mostly bedrooms and bathrooms,” Draco explained. “One guest, one nursery, one each for the kids, and two offices. Hers is full of maps and Ministry folders. Mine’s mostly Muggle books and broken biro’s.”

“You actually use biro’s?” Harry asked, amused.

“I do. Badly.”

They paused outside a door. Draco opened it.

“My office,” he said simply.

It was smaller than expected, but every surface was covered in medical journals, old poison books, and sketches of anatomical diagrams. There was a framed photo of Hermione holding a newborn Cassi on the desk.

Before Harry could step in, they heard a chair scrape across the floor from the room opposite. Draco turned and knocked lightly on the half-open door.

“Love?”

Her voice filtered through, muffled but unmistakably sharp. “Still fuming.”

“I know,” he said gently. “I just... I’m heading out with Potter to the hospital. Need to show him my workplace too remember. Don’t forget to eat.”

There was a pause.

“Don’t forget to breathe, Malfoy.”

He chuckled. “Not without you.”

Another pause. Then softly: “Be careful.”

Head over heels016

Guilt crashed into him like a Hippogriff.

“I’m sorry,” he said quickly, stepping back. “I didn’t mean to frighten her. I just—you were shouting, and—”

“You thought he was torturing me with a pregnancy announcement?” Hermione snapped.

“I... maybe?”

Draco was beside Cassi and Hermione in an instant.

“It’s alright, princess. Just Uncle Harry...”

“*Don’t call him that!*” chastised Hermione while Draco gave her a look and continued speaking to Harry. Her former best friend though felt the rejection in his soul.

“...being a prat. He didn’t mean it,” Draco murmured. “You want to go upstairs with Mummy?”

Cassi nodded, sniffing against his shoulder.

Hermione took her wordlessly, pressing a kiss to her temple.

“I’ll get her settled with Scorpius,” she muttered. “Don’t break anything while I’m gone. Including him.”

Draco chuckled and saluted.

Hermione nodded once and swept past Harry without sparing him a glance. Her footsteps vanished up the stairs, softening as she reached Scorpius’ room.

Harry stood in the ruins of what had once been a warm, buzzing room. He hadn’t seen Hermione in ten years. And she hadn’t looked at him once, not unless you count her threatening him.

Draco straightened his shirt, exhaled deeply, then turned.

“So.”

Harry met his eyes. And for the first time, saw it. Not just the man he used to hate, but the *man*. Tired. Steady. Entirely rebuilt.

“She’s pregnant,” he said dumbly.

Draco’s mouth lifted into a tired, amused smirk. “Yes. *Again*. I was suggesting five children total, but she’s banned me from speaking for the next week about that particular subject or she’ll hex me, so negotiations are at a standstill.”

Harry rubbed the back of his neck. “I... I shouldn’t have come in like that.”

“You *think*?” Draco arched an eyebrow. “Fucking brilliant, Potter. Really. *WELCOME back after ten years, here’s a Shimmer!*”

Harry winced. “I just thought, never mind. I was wrong.”

Draco walked over to the espresso machine, sighed, and tapped it with his wand. It sparked.

Died.

“Well, at least now I don’t have to listen to it make that horrible whirring noise anymore.”

Harry swallowed. “She looks... older. Tired.”

Draco bristled. “She’s raising two children, running international diplomacy for postwar justice, and pregnant with possibly twins. She’s *earned* every line on her face.”

Harry nodded quickly. “I didn’t mean—she looks amazing. Just different.”

“We all are,” Draco muttered. “But you didn’t come here to comment on my wife’s skin.”

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team, I will hex you into next week.”

At that very moment, the front door creaked open.

Harry Potter stepped across the threshold cautiously, the wards shifting to let him through thanks to Kingsley’s clearance. He had expected nerves. He had expected awkwardness.

He had not expected *screaming*.

“I swear to *Morgina*, I am *not* doing this again, Draco!”

It sounded urgent. Angry. Dangerous.

Instinct overrode logic.

Harry didn’t hesitate.

He yanked his wand free from its holster, heart hammering, and charged inside.

“*Snape!*”

“BLOODY HELL!” Draco yelped as the red jet of light narrowly missed his ear and scorched the top of the sleek new espresso machine.

From behind the armchair in the sitting room, there was a sharp gasp and a high-pitched shriek.

Cassiopeia, two years old, hair in messy pigtails, unicorn jumper glittering under the overhead lights, cradling a stuffed puffskein—burst into tears.

Hermione appeared in the doorway like a stormfront, eyes blazing, wand half-drawn.

“WHAT THE FUCK, HARRY?” Hermione thundered as she stormed in, eyes wild, wand raised and hair frazzled from whatever hex she had been threatening her husband with.

Harry stood frozen, wand still raised. “I-I thought—you were screaming—I thought he was hurting you!”

Hermione advanced, expression murderously incredulous, and *snatched* the wand out of his hand like it was a child’s toy. She jabbed her finger into his chest.

“You don’t *stom* into someone’s home *throwing hexes*, Potter! Is this what passes for Auror protocol these days? Or did you leave your training manual next to your common sense? You absolute arse.”

“You just tried to hex my coffee machine, Scarhead. That’s a declaration of war.”

Hermione spun on him. “Do *not* encourage him!”

“Yes, love,” Draco said immediately, lips twitching.

“I thought he was hurting you!” Harry protested. “You were yelling!”

Draco was bent double, hands on his knees, laughing.

“That’s marriage, Potter!” Draco said. “Occasional yelling, occasional shagging, lots of compromise. You’d hate it.”

Hermione jabbed another finger at Harry’s chest. “You could have hurt Cassio!”

Harry turned, stricken. The small girl had gone deathly quiet. Tears streaked her cheeks, her lower lip wobbling as she clutched her plush toy like a shield.

“I didn’t see her,” Harry said hoarsely. “I didn’t know.”

Hermione was already moving, lifting Cassio into her arms.

Harry looked at the little girl still sobbing behind the armchair, her huge silver eyes swimming with tears.

Head over heels

Draco leaned his head against the door for a moment, then turned back to Harry, a flicker of softness still clinging to his expression.

“Right,” he said. “Let me just talk to her real quick and we’ll go. It’s time to terrify some Muggles.”

Harry blinked. “Wait, your actual workplace?”

“Yeah, the Muggle hospital I’m starting at. Started my license transfer over six months ago. Things in the Muggle world take longer than in the magical so I’ve been preparing for the move for almost a year. The team knows. I already have an office set up and I should be able to start seeing patients as soon as the Wizengamot clears me. If they do. We can just have you poke around, cast your little spells, and confirm I’m not smuggling cursed artefacts into the morgue.”

“I—I don’t exactly blend in at a hospital.”

Draco gave him a look. “You do remember how to transfigure your own bloody clothes, right?”

Harry sighed and waved his wand, transforming his robes into smart black trousers and a button-down shirt. “Happy?”

“I don’t need to be happy. I need you to complete the task and have everything ready for the Wizengamot. Can’t have you say I didn’t comply.” He did not mean to say it so arrogantly but Potter really is daft. “I’ll be right down.”

As he headed down the stairs, Harry took one last glance up toward the office Draco had disappeared into. Hermione’s office.

The door had nearly clicked shut, but not quite. A sliver of warm lamplight stretched across the hallway carpet, just wide enough for shadows to dance through. Draco’s lean frame stood close to hers, one hand resting gently on her waist, his thumb brushing back and forth in slow, absent-minded comfort. Hermione’s arms were folded across her chest, her brow creased, her voice low.

Harry shouldn’t have listened.

But he did.

“I don’t trust *him*,” Hermione murmured. “Not with this. Not when it matters.”

Draco didn’t respond immediately. When he did, his voice was steady, quiet.

“He won’t ruin it. I don’t think he came here to destroy anything.”

“That doesn’t mean he won’t. You didn’t see his face when he attacked you downstairs.”

Draco took her hand. “We have Kingsley. We have good people on our side. George. Neville. Red. Pansy. Blaise. Theo. Luna. McGonagall. Poppy. Our parents. And you, love. Merlin, we have you.”

There was a rustle, like her forehead pressing to his shoulder.

“I just want this to be over,” she whispered. “You deserve to come home. Not just for a trial. Properly. Without hiding. Without looking over your shoulder.”

“Then we’ll win,” he said. “Because I’m not going anywhere. I’m not leaving you here. Or the kids. You won’t be alone. This—” he paused, and Harry could hear the emotion thicken in his voice, “—this is the only thing I’ve ever wanted to keep.”

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“Even after all the shit they put you through? You know I won’t come back fully without you.”

“Especially because of that. Let them see who I became in spite of it.”

There was a silence. Soft and heavy.

Then:

“You’re everything to me, Hermione. You know that, don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” she said. “Now go. Before I beg you to stay and make him go by himself.”

A kiss.

A door finally closing

Harry continued down the stairs, quietly, heart twisting

He had come here to investigate.

But all he had uncovered was how much they loved one another.

Not out of obligation. Not from some misplaced desperation.

But because they chose it.

Every single day.

And for the first time since Hermione left, Harry wasn’t angry.

He was just... sad.

And ashamed.

Because even after all this time, after everything they’d survived together, he’d never really seen her at peace until today.

And it wasn’t with him.



An hour later, Harry stood inside a bustling Muggle hospital in central London, feeling more out of place than he had in years. The sterile scent of antiseptic stung his nose, mingling with the low hum of fluorescent lights and the occasional beep from machinery he couldn’t name.

Draco moved through the corridors with a natural ease, dressed in dark slacks, a grey jumper, and a stethoscope draped casually around his neck. Not glamourous. Not hiding. Just... existing.

As they approached the hospital’s main reception desk, a middle-aged woman with sharp eyes and a kind smile looked up and beamed.

“Dr M!” she called out. “You’re here. I thought you weren’t due until next week!”

“Yeah, apologies for that Janice,” Draco said smoothly. “Mr. Potter here is here to do some check-ups for the you know what.”

She laughed at Draco and then narrowed her eyes at Harry. “Well, your office is nearly set up. I managed to get most of your things unpacked the way you like them. I even put the damn little cactus back on your windowsill. Couldn’t believe the thing was still alive after all these years. Mr. Potter should find everything is *in order*.”



Chapter 4:

A Safe House



“Some houses were made of brick and mortar. Theirs was built of pages, laughter, and the kind of love that made even war feel like a distant ghost.”

The morning before the trial broke over London in a haze of rain and thunderclouds—fitting, really, considering the looming judgement ahead. Clouds hunched low over the rooftops, heavy with promise and dread.

This Muggle suburb of Kensington was all chaos. The front garden was perfectly trimmed, the brick façade glowing warmly against the grey skies. The place looked like it belonged to a young, successful couple with a penchant for charmwork and warm tea. It smelled like cinnamon and old books. It *felt* like home.

It was anything but still.

“No, Draco. Absolutely not.”

Hermione’s voice rang loud and clear through the open-plan hallway, clipped with that familiar edge of indignation and disbelief.

“I am not—repeat, *not*—doing this again! We already have two children under the age of six, a marriage hanging by the legal equivalent of a thread, and a *fucking* Wizengamot trial tomorrow!”

“You say that like I’m asking for triplets,” Draco replied smoothly, far too amused for a man under verbal siege. “Which, for the record, I am not. I’m merely suggesting that four children is a *repetable* number. Five if we count Cassi’s inevitable evil twin.”

“I’m *pregnant*, you absolute menace!” Hermione hissed from the kitchen, the sound of clinking china punctuating her frustration. “I can feel *everything*. Including your smugness! And let’s not even get into Pansy’s little bet!”

“I think I’ve been very supportive—”

“Draco Malfoy, if you suggest one more time that we should start training our own Quidditch team, I will hex you into next week.”

Draco’s laugh echoed down the corridor. “I think I’ve been very supportive—”

“Draco Malfoy, if you suggest *one more time* that we should start training our own Quidditch

“You’re an angel, Janice.”

Harry blinked. Did this Janice know about Draco’s exile.

As they started walking towards Draco’s office Harry heard him mutter “I’ve known Janice since I did my practice. She’s a squib. She returned to London 2 years ago and when Hermione and I started preparing our return I contacted her. She was thrilled to go back into work and she really likes Hermione and the kids.”

Janice was a Squib. He hadn’t even noticed the faint magical pulse around her.

“She helps me juggle appointments and keep the Muggle world from collapsing into magical chaos,” Draco said as they walked. “Also brews the best tea this side of London. Bit of a legend, really. Especially back in Australia.”

They reached Draco’s office tucked down a quieter hallway. Harry stepped inside and paused.

It wasn’t grand. It wasn’t sterile. It felt... functional. Intentional. A desk covered in files and a laptop sat in the corner. A few framed certificates lined the walls. The tiny cactus leaned towards the sunlight filtering through the window. A Gryffindor mug sat on the desk.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

Draco followed his gaze and smirked. “It was a gift. She thinks she’s funny. Cursed it so I have to use it at least once a day if I’m in the office or it starts roaring. If I try to hide it, it’ll grow in size until I place it on my desk.”

“Sounds like her,” Harry said, a reluctant smile tugging at his lips.

Draco sat behind his desk and steepled his fingers. Harry didn’t speak at first. He looked around, taking it in. Then proceeded to do some spells and wand work for the inspection.

“So,” Draco said after Harry completed the perusal of his office, “ask your questions, Potter.”

“You’re truly not the man I remember.”

Draco shrugged. “Good. The boy you remember was a self-righteous, privileged bastard with a wand and no spine.”

Harry huffed a laugh. “True.”

A pause.

“What is it you actually do here? I mean... as a doctor. You mentioned something about trauma?”

Draco leaned back, thoughtful.

“I specialise in post-traumatic disorders and chronic magical injuries. For both Muggles and wizards,” he said. “Mostly mental health these days. The war didn’t just leave physical scars. There are veterans with curse residue in their bones and nightmares that still wake them screaming. I help where I can. Magic doesn’t fix everything. Sometimes, Muggle medicine does more.”

Harry watched him for a moment.

“How do you do it with your wand restrictions?”

Draco smiled faintly. “That’s the funny part. I can use it in emergencies, in healing protocols, or if a patient requires it. But otherwise? I’ve learned to function with limited magic. To be

honest, it's made me better at my job. More precise. More empathetic."

Harry studied him. "You won't miss your patients?"

Draco shrugged again. "I think I'll have more patients here. In a way."

They sat in silence for a while. The air was still, thick with unspoken thoughts. Harry did not have any more questions. Or better yet the ones he did he was afraid to ask.

Then Draco spoke.

"She still talks about you, sometimes," he said quietly. "Despite everything. I don't know if you deserve it. But she does. Because she's better than we'll ever be."

Harry swallowed. "I didn't mean to hurt her."

"But you did," Draco said. Calm. Cold. True. "By doing nothing. By always taking the Weasels' side. By assuming she'd always be there to pick up the pieces."

Harry bristled. "I never asked her to."

Draco stood, shrugging on his coat. "That was the problem, Potter. You never asked her anything at all."

Harry stood too. "Look, I don't hate you."

Draco laughed. "Likewise. I don't like you much either, but I'm grateful you're not standing in my way. I assume that has more to do with Kingsley than with me."

"You'd be surprised."

Draco gave him a measured look. "Maybe. But make no mistake—if you ever make her cry again, I know at least four ways to make someone disappear without magic. I've seen *him*."

Harry snorted. "Is that a threat?"

"Obviously. I'm married to a war heroine. I've got standards to maintain."

They shared a look. And for the first time since stepping into that townhouse, Harry felt something shift.

Not forgiveness. Not quite.

But a truce. Of sorts.

They walked toward the exit in silence. At the door, Harry turned.

"I'll write everything truthfully in the report," he said. "You're not a danger. Not anymore. I'll tell them that."

Draco nodded. "Appreciate it."

Harry hesitated.

"Malfoy... do you think she'll talk to me? I know I fucked up today more than I should have but I—"

Draco cut him off.

"Maybe," he said. "Just don't fuck up my hearing tomorrow and we'll see. I can't promise anything. She's stubborn as a bat."

Harry smiled faintly. "Yeah. She always was."

They stepped outside into the dusky London evening, the sky streaked with the colours of coming rain.

The trial was tomorrow.

And everything was about to change.

Harry stood. "That's not fair."

"Isn't it?" she challenged. "You could've written. You could've visited. You knew where she went. But it was easier to let her fade out than to actually face what she'd been through. What you did. What Ron did. And now you're surprised that she built a life without you? That she found someone who saw her?"

He sank back into his chair, face pale. "Saw her? He's Malfoy."

"And yet, he's the best thing that ever happened to her," Ginny said with conviction. "He adores her. Worships her. He learned how to live like a Muggle just so he could survive with her. He raised two kids while taking night shifts at a hospital and studying for his magical certification again. He had nothing to offer her but he worked hard to provide and give her all he had. And he never once asked her to choose between him and her purpose."

Harry was silent.

Ginny stood. "She's not your Hermione anymore. She hasn't been in a long time. And you'll never get that version of her back."

"You really believe he's changed?" he asked finally.

"I know he has," she said. "He's the goddamn father of my niece and nephew. And I'm his sons' godmother. Scorpius is kind and smart and good. And Draco is a better dad than most I've seen."

Harry swallowed.

Ginny's eyes hardened. "And before I go, let me give you some friendly advice, Auror Potter. Keep your partner in check."

Harry frowned. "What?"

"Ron was in George's shop today," she said, venom entering her tone. "He insulted Theo and Blaise. Told them he hoped Draco would rot in exile. He made Scorpius cry. A *five-year-old*, Harry. A child."

Harry closed his eyes, jaw tight. "I'm sor...he's not...I'll handle it."

"See that you do. Because if he pulls that shit during the hearing, or anywhere near Hermione or those children again, I will hex him so thoroughly he'll be spitting teeth for a week."

She walked to the door, then paused.

"We don't need the family who left us behind, Harry. We built our own. And it's better. Stronger."

He stared at her, shame a weight pressing down on his chest.

She gave him one last look.

"Good luck with whatever you think you're still holding on to," she said. "Because Hermione let it go a long time ago."

And then she left.

The door clicked shut.

Harry stared at it for a long time, the silence of the office deafening. He had no idea what hurt more—the fact that they had all moved on without him. Or the fact that they had been right to.

Ours To Keep

The door opened.

In walked *Ginny Zabini* like she owned the place.

Her hair was pulled into a sleek long ponytail beneath a fitted red coat, her wand tucked neatly in her belt. She walked with the sure-footed grace of a woman who had won three international Quidditch championships and broken five bones doing it. Confidence rolled off her in waves.

“Hello, Harry,” she said coolly, shutting the door behind her.

He stood up too quickly. “Gin—Ginny?”

She looked around his office as if inspecting it for dust. “You look like shit.”

Harry dropped back into his chair. “That’s fair.”

“So,” she said, sitting without asking, “you’ve seen him.”

“Yeah.”

“And?”

Harry stared at her. “You knew?”

She raised an eyebrow. “Of course I knew. I’m his adopted sister of sorts. Favorite in-law.”

He blinked. “What?”

Ginny smirked. “Surprise. If you couldn’t tell by my new last name I married Blaise six years ago after I left England, not long after Hermione, do you remember. She took me in, helped me with my quidditch career, and when she got together with Draco he was there for me. We fight like cats and dogs but he is very protective, brotherly, and took me under his wing of sorts. When Mum lost her mind and disinherited me because I broke up with you and went to follow my dreams. When Ron stopped speaking to me. When Percy wrote me out of the family tree. I was all alone. We all know Bill and Fleur disappeared to France and are never coming back. George, Dad, and Charlie are the only ones who still have some common sense but even then...”

“You married Blaise?”

“Is that the part you’re stuck on?” she laughed bitterly. “Not the fact that Hermione has been married to Draco Malfoy for like seven years, together for almost 10, and you didn’t even notice?”

Harry said nothing.

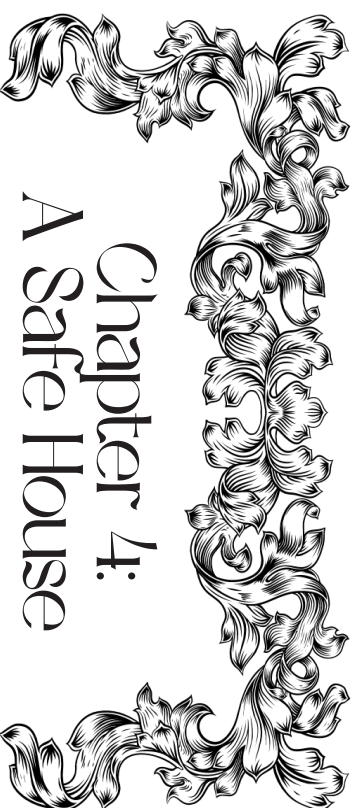
Ginny leaned forward. “Let me make something clear: the people who mattered *always* knew. Me. Pansy. Theo. Luna. Neville. Blaise. McGonagall. His parents. Her parents. Kingsley. We were at the wedding. We’ve held their babies. We spent Christmases, birthdays, and summers with them while you and Ron buried your heads in the sand.”

“All those people knew,” Harry said quietly.

“And you still didn’t,” she shot back.

He flushed. “Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“Because it wasn’t your story to know,” Ginny snapped. “Because you chose not to be part of Hermione’s life the second she left for Australia and you never went after her. You didn’t ask. You didn’t care. And now you’re angry because we didn’t hand it all to you like some bloody Prophet scoop.”



Chapter 4: A Safe House

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Hermione’s voice rang loud and clear through the open-plan hallway, clipped with that familiar edge of indignation and disbelief.

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“You say that like I’m asking for triplets,” Draco replied smoothly, far too amused for a man under verbal siege. “Which, for the record, I am not. I’m merely suggesting that four children is a respectable number. Five if we count Cassi’s inevitable evil twin.”

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“Draco Malfoy, if you suggest one more time that we should start training our own Quidditch team, I will hex you into next week.”

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Ours To Keep

“Draco Malfoy, if you suggest one more time that we should start training our own Quidditch team, I will hex you into next week.”

At that very moment, the front door creaked open.

Harry Potter stepped across the threshold cautiously, the wards shifting to let him through thanks to Kingsley’s clearance. He had expected nerves. He had expected awkwardness.

He had not expected screaming.

“I swear to Morgana, I am not doing this again, Draco!”

It sounded urgent. Angry. Dangerous.

Instinct overrode logic.

Harry didn’t hesitate.

He yanked his wand free from its holster, heart hammering, and charged inside.

“Stupefy!”

“BLOODY HELL!” Draco yelped as the red jet of light narrowly missed his ear and scorched the top of the sleek new espresso machine.

From behind the armchair in the sitting room, there was a sharp gasp and a high-pitched shriek.

Cassiopea, two years old, hair in messy pigtails, unicorn jumper glittering under the overhead lights, cradling a stuffed puffskein—burst into tears.

Hermione appeared in the doorway like a stormfront, eyes blazing, wand half-drawn.

“WHAT THE FUCK, HARRY!” Hermione thundered as she stormed in, eyes wild, wand raised and hair frazzled from whatever hex she had been threatening her husband with.

Harry stood frozen, wand still raised. “I thought—you were screaming—I thought he was hurting you!”

Hermione advanced, expression murderously incredulous, and snatched the wand out of his hand like it was a child’s toy. She jabbed her finger into his chest.

“You don’t storm into someone’s home throwing hexes, Potter! Is this what passes for Auror protocol these days? Or did you leave your training manual next to your common sense?”

You absolute arse.”

“You just tried to hex my coffee machine, Scarhead. That’s a declaration of war.”

Hermione spun on him. “Do not encourage him!”

“Yes, love,” Draco said immediately, lips twitching.

“I thought he was hurting you!” Harry protested. “You were yelling!”

Draco was bent double, hands on his knees, laughing.

“That’s marriage, Potter!” Draco said. “Occasional yelling, occasional shagging, lots of compromise. You’d hate it.”

Hermione jabbed another finger at Harry’s chest. “You could have hurt Cassiopea!”

Harry turned, stricken. The small girl had gone deathly quiet. Tears streaked her cheeks, her lower lip wobbling as she clutched her plush toy like a shield.

“I didn’t see her,” Harry said hoarsely. “I didn’t know.”

Hermione was already moving, lifting Cassiopea into her arms.

Harry looked at the little girl still sobbing behind the armchair, her huge silver eyes

Head over heels016

you have any say in what goes on in our lives? You think Ginny need you? You lost her the moment you thought your pride mattered more than her peace.”

George stepped between them, wand drawn, face pale with fury.

“That’s enough,” he said sharply. “Ronald Bilus Weasley, you’re drunk. You’re on duty. And you’re not welcome in my shop.”

Ron glared, jaw clenched. “George—”

“Go home.”

For a moment, no one moved. Then Ron turned and stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

The silence that followed felt like smoke after a fire.

George turned to Theo and Blaise, still fuming. “Take him home. Tell My she has nothing to worry about. He may be loud, but he’s nothing but noise now.”

Theo lifted Scorpius, who clung to his neck, sniffing.

“Don’t like that man,” Scorpius muttered into his jumper.

“Neither do we, starshine,” Theo murmured, holding him tighter. “Neither do we.”

They left in silence, Blaise pulling the door closed behind them with a flick of his wand.

George stood for a long moment, staring after them.

Then he turned the ‘Open’ sign to ‘Closed’ and locked the door.

War left wreckage. But sometimes, it also left survivors who remembered where their loyalties truly belonged.



The day after seeing Draco Malfoy walk into the Ministry of Magic with a small blond child in tow, Harry Potter still felt as if he’d been slapped in the face.

He sat in his office, staring at nothing, his wand spinning slowly between his fingers. Kingsley’s words echoed in his head like a curse.

She is Hermione Jean Malfoy now.

Every time he tried to focus, the image of Draco Malfoy in his simple charcoal robes, a child clutching his hand, rose before him. Calm. Grounded. Different.

And Hermione—his Hermione—was *his* wife.

Harry felt like he was drowning in everything he hadn’t said. Everything he hadn’t done. Kept Ron in line. The missed letters. The unanswered Floo calls. The way he’d let her slip away while he tried to pretend nothing had changed.

He was pulled from his spiralling thoughts by the crisp knock on his door.

“Auror Potter?” came his assistant’s voice through the enchanted intercom. “You have a visitor.”

“I’m not taking walk-ins today,” Harry muttered, rubbing his temple.

“She says her name is Mrs Zabini.”

Harry froze.

“Send her in,” he said after a beat.

some of my bubble-burping jellybeans?"

Scorpius nodded solemnly. "But Mummy says no sugar."

"Ah. Mummy is clever. But she's not here, is she?" George whispered conspiratorially.

Scorpius beamed, dimples flashing.

"It's good to see you three," George said, standing again. "I'm glad you're coming back. Properly, I mean. It's been too long."

"About damn time," Blaise muttered. "Ten years. Half the Wizarding World's forgotten what real redemption looks like."

George nodded, his expression sobering. "I know a lot of people won't be thrilled to see him back, but—Draco—he has my support. And Mf's, of course. Always. I'm looking forward to getting to know Scorpius properly. And his sister. I've only seen the little ones three or four times, and that's not enough for someone who gets to be the fun uncle."

Theo clapped a hand to George's shoulder. "Appreciate it, mate. You and your dad and Charlie—you've always done right by them. Unlike..."

"Don't," George said flatly, but there was a storm brewing behind his eyes. "He's made his choices. He's lost more than he realises."

As if summoned by hexed irony, the door slammed open.

Ron Wesley strode in, red-faced and stiff-backed in his Auror robes, wand holstered, badge gleaming. The scent of ale and sharp sweat followed him in.

Theo stiffened first. Blaise's smile turned razor-edged.

"Oh, look who it is. Still chasing shadows, Wesley? Or just here to pick a fight?" Blaise drawled.

"What the hell are *you* two doing here?"

Blaise turned, calm and smug. "Shopping, Weasel. Do you need a map?"

Ron sneered. "Should've known the Ferret's little entourage wouldn't keep quiet for long. What's next, you lot marching him back in like he never tried to destroy half the world?"

Theo's eyes narrowed. "Watch your mouth."

Ron stopped dead when he saw Scorpius. His eyes flicked to the boy, then to the men flanking him, and something bitter twisted in his expression. "And this must be the spawn, yeah? Figures. Poor kid doesn't stand a chance with that blood. Didn't expect to see *you* two with *him* but it figures. Traitors sticking together. What, bringing the brat here to soften the press before the trial?"

Scorpius blinked. "What's a brat?" he whispered, voice small.

Theo's face darkened. "Watch it."

Blaise took a step forward. "Say one more thing, Wesley. I fucking dare you."

"Oh come off it," Ron snapped. "Draco bloody Malfoy should've stayed in exile. He deserves nothing. And you—you lot broke my family apart. You think I don't know who you married?" He sneered at Blaise.

Scorpius tugged on Theo's sleeve, eyes watering. "I want Mummy... I wanna go home..."

"You absolute arse," Theo hissed, crouching beside the boy. "He's five. He heard you."

Blaise's voice dropped to a venomous whisper. "You think you're better than us? You think

swimming with tears.

Guilt crashed into him like a Hippogriff.

"I'm sorry," he said quickly, stepping back. "I didn't mean to frighten her. I just—you were shouting, and—"

"You thought he was torturing me with a pregnancy announcement?" Hermione snapped. "I... maybe?"

Draco was beside Cassi and Hermione in an instant.

"It's alright, princess. Just Uncle Harry..."

"Don't call him that," chastised Hermione while Draco gave her a look and continued speaking to Harry. Her former best friend though felt the rejection in his soul.

"...being a prat. He didn't mean it," Draco murmured. "You want to go upstairs with Mummy?"

Cassi nodded, sniffing against his shoulder.

Hermione took her wordlessly, pressing a kiss to her temple.

"I'll get her settled with Scorpius," she muttered. "Don't break anything while I'm gone. Including him."

Draco chuckled and saluted.

Hermione nodded once and swept past Harry without sparing him a glance. Her footsteps vanished up the stairs, softening as she reached Scorpius' room.

Harry stood in the ruins of what had once been a warm, buzzing room. He hadn't seen Hermione in ten years. And she hadn't looked at him once, not unless you count her threatening him.

Draco straightened his shirt, exhaled deeply, then turned.

"So."

Harry met his eyes. And for the first time, saw it. Not just the man he used to hate, but the man. Tired. Steady. Entirely rebuilt.

"She's pregnant," he said dumbly.

Draco's mouth lifted into a tired, amused smirk. "Yes. Again. I was suggesting five children total, but she's banned me from speaking for the next week about that particular subject or she'll hex me, so negotiations are at a standstill."

Harry rubbed the back of his neck. "I... I shouldn't have come in like that."

"You think?" Draco arched an eyebrow. "Fucking brilliant, Potter. Really. Welcome back after ten years, here's a Stunner."

Harry winced. "I just thought, never mind. I was wrong."

Draco walked over to the espresso machine, sighed, and tapped it with his wand. It sparked. Died.

"Well, at least now I don't have to listen to it make that horrible whirring noise anymore."

Harry swallowed. "She looks... older. Tired."

Draco bristled. "She's raising two children, running international diplomacy for postwar justice, and pregnant with possibly twins. She's earned every line on her face."

Harry nodded quickly. "I didn't mean—she looks amazing, just different."

Ours To Keep

“We all are,” Draco muttered. “But you didn’t come here to comment on my wife’s skin.”

“No,” Harry said. “I came to... check the premises. For the trial. For your reinstatement.”

Draco gestured around the room. “Feel free. There’s no basement, no shrines, and the only thing cursed in this house is the toddler when she’s denied biscuits.”

Harry walked a slow circle, trying to reconcile the old enemy with the man who lived here now. The house, he realised, was stunning.

Not in the cold, museum-like way of Malfoy Manor, but in the way that whispered comfort and chaos. Shelves of books lined every wall. There were toys scattered in corners, a blanket tossed carelessly over the arm of a velvet settee. A framed photograph of Hermione holding a chubby baby Scorpius sat beside a crooked drawing labelled Mummy & Daddy & Me + Dragons. There were photos on the mantelpiece. Of Draco holding a sleeping newborn looking adoringly at Hermione. Of Hermione at a podium with Cassi in her arms. Of Scorpius on Draco’s shoulders. Sun-soaked beaches, Draco in Muggle hospital scrubs holding a newborn Cassi, Hermione in her wedding gown alongside Ginny, Luna and Pansy, a candid shot of them dancing barefoot in the backyard with Scorpius on her shoulders. A life.

Built from ruin.

“How long?” Harry asked softly.

Draco didn’t pretend not to know what he meant.

“Eight years married soon. Ten years together. Friends before that.”

“You love her?”

Draco turned to him fully then, something ancient and immovable in his expression.

“With everything I have.”

Harry closed his eyes, the weight of years pressing down.

“You alright, Potter?” Draco said, arms crossed as he leaned against the kitchen doorframe.

Harry blinked. “Yeah. Just... didn’t expect any of this.”

Draco shrugged. “Most don’t. People assume we’re living in some crumbling ruin or dark lair. But Hermione’s always preferred warm colours and fresh lilies. We’ve had the house for about three years. She’s travelled back loads. Keeps it quiet. You know how the press gets. Nobody has seen the golden girl in a while, especially what they would say, especially if they got wind of who she married.”

Harry nodded numbly.

Draco went on. “She brings the kids every few months. Visits her parents, my parents, Pansy and Neville. Theo, Luna, Blaise. They all live here now, or close. You probably walked past Blaise and Ginny’s place and didn’t even notice.”

Harry’s jaw tensed. “Kingsley told me. About the... marriage.”

Draco gave a soft hum. “I know. He told me. He was at the wedding. There was a fountain. Too much food. McGonagall was singing with Poppy. Theo got drunk and proposed to Luna using a fork forgetting for a moment that he was gay and that Luna prefers more feminine wiles than male.”

Harry tried to laugh. It came out wrong.

Head over heels016

“And when Harry comes tomorrow?” she asked, arching a brow.

“We give him tea and cake and remind him that we don’t owe anyone a damn thing. That we are happy and have been. That you are my best friend and fully mine. My wife.”

Hermione smiled and rolled her eyes at her possessive romantic husband.

“Cassi will probably bite him.”

Draco grinned. “Even better.”



The sun was high and stubborn over Diagon Alley, casting warm light across crooked chimneys and magical storefronts. Families bustled past shop windows and secondhand cauldrons, laughter mixing with the occasional shriek of a rogue Fangled Frisbee.

Theo Nott and Blaise Zabini strolled through Diagon Alley at a leisurely pace, hands full of bags and books, a small blond whirlwind bouncing between them. Scorpius, every bit as curious as both his parents, had just emerged from Flourish and Blotts clutching a newly acquired pop-up book on magical beasts and a sugar quill he wasn’t supposed to have.

“Uncle Theo, did you know the Nundu has spots like a kneazle?” Scorpius asked, craning his neck to look up at him.

“I did,” Theo said solemnly, “and I also know they can sneeze poisonous clouds. So no keeping one as a pet, alright?”

“Not even a small one?”

“Especially not a small one,” Blaise chimed in, ruffling the boy’s hair.

They turned the corner past Quality Quidditch Supplies and made their way toward Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes, its vibrant signage glittering in the late afternoon sun. The shop, though a bit quieter than in its heyday, still buzzed with magical oddities and laughter.

“Think he’s in?” Blaise asked, nodding at the door.

“Let’s find out. Could do with something explosive and mildly irresponsible,” Theo replied dryly.

The bell above the door jingled as they entered, the scent of fireworks and burnt sugar thick in the air.

Behind the counter stood George Weasley, sleeves rolled to the elbows, red hair slightly dishevelled and spectacles perched on the end of his nose. He looked up and grinned.

“Well, well, if it isn’t the two worst influences this side of Knockturn. And you,” he said, kneeling slightly behind the counter to catch Scorpius’ eye, “my favourite little chaos gremlin. Hello, Mr Scorpius.”

Scorpius giggled. “Hi Mr George!”

George came around the counter and gave Theo and Blaise firm handshakes before crouching beside Scorpius. “You’ve grown loads since the last time I saw you. What’ve they been feeding you down under? Hippogriff streaks?”

Scorpius giggled. “Just toast and apples and pizza.”

“Sounds like a proper wizarding diet to me,” George said, ruffling the boy’s hair. “You want

Ours To Keep

Draco kissed her slow and deep, and she melted into it like muscle memory.

“Do you regret it?” he asked softly.

She pulled back enough to meet his eyes. “Which part? Choosing you? Leaving Britain? Raising two tiny hurricanes while teaching you how to use a toaster and sort whites from darks?”

He smiled. “The whites still confuse me.”

“Then no. I regret nothing. Especially not you.”

He exhaled, resting his forehead against hers. “You know we’re going to win this. Not because of politics or testimony. But because we’re solid. Because they can’t touch us where it counts.”

“Good,” she said, voice steel. “Let them come. I hope they see how happy we are. How far you’ve come. And how little power they have over us now.”

A flutter of wings interrupted the quiet, and a Ministry owl crashed unceremoniously against the kitchen window. Draco groaned and stood, helping Hermione back to her feet before crossing the room and retrieving the parchment.

He scanned it quickly.

“Well, fuck me sideways,” he muttered.

“Bad news?”

“Depends. The Wizengamot wants an Auror visit to verify I’m not secretly conducting blood rituals in the loo or hiding Dark artifacts under the nursery.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Of course they do. Did they specify who?”

Draco hesitated.

“Draco?”

He handed her the parchment.

Her eyes narrowed. “Kingsley picked Harry?”

“He did.”

“He knows.”

“Kingsley told him about us. Said he didn’t go into detail, but thought it best Potter didn’t walk in unprepared. Told me he was going to do it when I saw him yesterday.”

Hermione snorted. “Right. Because nothing says ‘prepared’ like finding out your estranged best friend married the ex-Death Eater you once hexed into unconsciousness in a school bathroom with a curse you found on an old potions book.”

Draco leaned against the wall and folded his arms. “Do you want to see him first? Warn him? Punch him in the face?”

She thought about it.

“Honestly, I want him to show up and see exactly what we are. I want him to look around and realise how little he knows me anymore. Because he let go. He walked away. And I have nothing left to explain.”

Draco crossed the room again and kissed her forehead. “Then we keep going as we are. We show them love. Peace. Messy hair and toddler tantrums and Nerida root stains on the sofa cushions. We show them us.”

Head over heels016

“Why didn’t she tell me?” he asked quietly.

Draco looked at him, really looked.

“Because by the time she needed you, you weren’t there. And when she left, she didn’t want anyone chasing her out of guilt.”

That stung. More than it should have.

Harry rubbed his hands over his face. “She treats me like a stranger?”

Draco sighed. “You are, mate. She doesn’t hate you. But she doesn’t trust you either. Not the way she trusts us. I don’t blame her.”

Harry nodded slowly. “She’s different.”

“She’s herself?” Draco corrected. “For the first time in years.”

Hermione reappeared then, stepping lightly down the stairs, barefoot now, her expression calm but distant.

“Everything alright?” she asked, her eyes fixed on Draco, not Harry.

“Fine,” he answered. “He didn’t hex the sofa. Yet.”

She nodded. “Then we can begin the inspection.”

Harry swallowed.

Ten years. And she looked at him like he was just another line on a report.

And maybe, in the grand story of her life, that was all he had become.

She gave Harry a look. “You want to see the house? Or do you need to hex a few more appliances for your report?”

Harry had the decency to look sheepish. “I’d... like a tour. Please.”

Draco raised an eyebrow but gestured for him to follow. “Right. This way, then.”

Hermione stood in the middle of the hallway, arms folded, eyes fixed on both of them like a hawk watching two particularly stupid pigeons. Draco reached out and brushed his fingers gently down her arm, a silent offer of calm.

“We’ll be fine,” he murmured.

“I should be here,” she said, although her voice had softened.

“You’re exhausted. Go to your office, love. Check your treaty updates or yell at someone over Floo. Let me handle this.”

Hermione sighed, letting her forehead rest against his for just a moment. “Don’t let him break anything else.”

“No promises.”

She kissed the corner of his mouth before pulling back. Harry looked away, suddenly very interested in the wallpaper.

“Auror Potter,” she said coolly, turning to face him. “You’re here in an official capacity, so do your job.”

“Hermione, can we talk?” Harry asked.

Her eyes didn’t flicker. “You’re not here as my friend. You’re here as an inspector. So inspect.”

And with that, she turned on her heel and disappeared into her office, the door clicking shut behind her.

Ours To Keep

Draco stared after her for a moment, a ghost of a smile on his lips and a slight frown on his face, almost unnoticeable. Then he clapped Harry on the shoulder. “Come on. Let’s get this over with.”

They moved through the ground floor—a space that radiated warmth and history. The kitchen gleamed, the copper pots and enchanted kettle humming gently. The dining room had mismatched chairs and a worn oak table carved with initials in three different styles: D.M., H.G., and a wobbly S.M.

“We brought some stuff from our home in Australia,” was the only detail Draco gave as an explanation.

The living room was all soft throws, enchanted fairy lights in jars, and a massive bookshelf that groaned under the weight of magical texts, Muggle novels, and toddler picture books. “Playroom’s in there,” Draco said, nodding at a door decorated with glittering letters.

“Prepare yourself.”

Harry stepped in and gaped.

The walls were a shifting mural of Cassi’s finger paintings, dancing unicorns, floating star charts, and a self-writing chalkboard currently spelling out “Mummy is the Queen of the Universe” in oversized letters.

“Scorpius did that last week,” Draco said with a smirk. “Bit of a flair for the dramatic. No idea where he gets it.”

Harry laughed despite himself. “Looks like a bloody museum of childhood.”

“It’s chaos. But it’s our chaos.”

They made their way upstairs next.

“Mostly bedrooms and bathrooms,” Draco explained. “One guest, one nursery, one each for the kids, and two offices. Hers is full of maps and Ministry folders. Mine’s mostly Muggle books and broken biro’s.”

“You actually use biro’s?” Harry asked, amused.

“I do. Badly.”

They paused outside a door. Draco opened it.

“My office,” he said simply.

It was smaller than expected, but every surface was covered in medical journals, old potion books, and sketches of anatomical diagrams. There was a framed photo of Hermione holding a newborn Cassi on the desk.

Before Harry could step in, they heard a chair scrape across the floor from the room opposite. Draco turned and knocked lightly on the half-open door.

“Love?”

Her voice filtered through, muffled but unmistakably sharp. “Still fuming.”

“I know,” he said gently. “I just... I’m heading out with Potter to the hospital. Need to show him my workplace too remember. Don’t forget to eat.”

There was a pause.

“Don’t forget to breathe, Malfoy.”

He chuckled. “Not without you.”

Head over heels016

Professor Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts and former Deputy Head of the Order of the Phoenix.

Herbologist Neville Longbottom, current Deputy Head of Hogwarts and celebrated war hero.

A senior healer from the Australian Magical Medical Guild, who has worked closely with Malfoy in recent years.

A high-ranking official from the International Confederation of Wizards, reportedly tied to several anti-war advocacy efforts.

And, most curiously, **an unnamed Muggle-born witch with cross-continental credentials and significant diplomatic influence**. Her identity is being kept strictly confidential—leading many to believe her name alone may sway the Wizengamot’s decision.

If successful, Malfoy would regain limited access to his suspended inheritance and the right to formally practise as a magical physician in the United Kingdom. Though his family vaults remain under scrutiny, sources close to Gringotts confirm that a reinstatement would restore some of his rights over private assets.

A Dangerous Precedent?

Public opinion remains sharply divided. While some believe Malfoy has paid his dues, others argue that reintroducing a former Death Eater into public life—particularly one who has avoided public scrutiny for so long—poses a dangerous precedent.

“Forgiveness should never become forgetfulness,” wrote political analyst Maria Edgecombe. “The Wizarding World deserves transparency. And Malfoy’s return feels anything but transparent.”

For now, speculation reigns.

Is this truly a redemption story ten years in the making? Or the carefully polished image of a man still steeped in secrets?

One thing is certain: when Draco Malfoy appears before the Wizengamot this Saturday, all eyes will be watching.

Hermione leaned back in her seat, folding her arms. “They act like you’re crawling back from the underworld to exact vengeance, not coming home so your kids can be near their grandparents and you can have a proper medical license.”

“They don’t care about facts,” Draco said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “They care about sensationalism. ‘Malfoy Ex-Death Eater Redeems Self Through Hot Wife and Toddlers’ isn’t quite the narrative they want, is it?”

She laughed, then stood and made her way around the table. Without hesitation, she climbed into his lap and curled against him, her arms looped lazily around his shoulders. He let out a quiet hum of contentment and buried his face in her curls.

“This was always going to happen,” she murmured against his throat. “They were always going to dig. Speculate. Turn our life into a bloody sideshow.”

“I know,” he replied, tightening his hold. “But I hate that it touches you. That they’ll question your judgement. Paint you like some tragic genius who lost her way.”

“I’ve been called worse,” she whispered, brushing her lips against his cheek. “By people who used to swear they’d die for me.”

MYSTERIOUS MALFOY RETURN SPARKS SPECULATION – REDEMPTION

OR RUSE?

By: Septima Lark, Senior Political Correspondent

London - After more than a decade of silence, scandal, and state-mandated exile, **Draco Lucius Malfoy**—the former Death Eater and sole heir of the infamous Malfoy family—has returned to Britain under highly confidential and suspicious circumstances.

Malfoy, sentenced in 1989 by the Wizengamot, one year after the Battle of Hogwarts, for his involvement in the Second Wizarding War and stripped of his inheritance, wand privileges, and right to practise magic, was seen entering the Ministry of Magic earlier this week. Eyewitnesses confirm that he was accompanied by a young child—a boy presumed to be his son—whose striking blond hair and unmistakable profile have already sparked public interest.

Sources within the Ministry confirm that **a full review of Malfoy's sentence and potential reinstatement is scheduled for this Saturday at ten o'clock**, before the full Wizengamot.

What remains uncertain, and deeply controversial, is **why** Malfoy has returned now—and who, exactly, is behind the closed doors supporting him.

A Doctor, a Husband... a Reformed Man?

During his ten-year exile in Australia, Malfoy is said to have completely abandoned Pureblood society. Instead, sources claim he entered Muggle academia and became a certified Muggle doctor, working in both magical and non-magical medical settings—a far cry from the boy who once strutted the halls of Hogwarts with a sneer and a Dark Mark.

There is also the matter of his **wife**, whose identity remains a tightly guarded secret. What we do know: the couple has been married for at least eight years, and the child seen with him—presumed to be their son—is approximately five years old. There is no public marriage certificate registered in Britain, suggesting the union occurred abroad.

The identity of Lady Malfoy remains the Ministry's best-kept secret. Theories range from a minor European pure-blood witch to an ambitious half-blood with international political ties. One particularly scandalous rumour even suggests she may have once been associated with the Order of the Phoenix.

"If Malfoy has truly reformed, why the secrecy?" asked Adalinda Bryce, commentator for **Wizarding Heritage Weekly**. "Why hide the name of his wife, unless it would stir controversy?"

What the Wizengamot Will Consider

At Saturday's hearing, the Wizengamot will determine whether Malfoy has fulfilled the terms of his probation, and whether the final restrictions on his magic, travel, and civic rights can be lifted. Additionally, a full lifestyle review has been quietly approved to assess the authenticity of his reformation.

The list of witnesses expected to speak on Malfoy's behalf has raised eyebrows. Notable names include:

Healer Poppy Pomfrey, longtime matron of Hogwarts and war medic.

Another pause. Then softly: "Be careful."

Draco leaned his head against the door for a moment, then turned back to Harry, a flicker of softness still clinging to his expression.

"Right," he said. "Let me just talk to her real quick and we'll go. It's time to terrify some Muggles."

Harry blinked. "Wait, your actual workplace?"

"Yeah, the Muggle hospital I'm starting at. Started my license transfer over six months ago. Things in the Muggle world take longer than in the magical so I've been preparing for the move for almost a year. The team knows. I already have an office set up and I should be able to start seeing patients as soon as the Wizengamot clears me. If they do. We can just have you poke around, cast your little spells, and confirm I'm not smuggling cursed artefacts into the morgue."

"I—I don't exactly blend in at a hospital."

Draco gave him a look. "You do remember how to transfigure your own bloody clothes, right?"

Harry sighed and waved his wand, transforming his robes into smart black trousers and a button-down shirt. "Happy?"

"I don't need to be happy. I need you to complete the task and have everything ready for the Wizengamot. Can't have you say I didn't comply." He did not mean to say it to arrogantly but Potter really is daft. "I'll be right down."

As he headed down the stairs, Harry took one last glance up toward the office Draco had disappeared into. Hermione's office.

The door had nearly clicked shut, but not quite. A sliver of warm lamplight stretched across the hallway carpet, just wide enough for shadows to dance through. Draco's lean frame stood close to hers, one hand resting gently on her waist, his thumb brushing back and forth in slow, absent-minded comfort. Hermione's arms were folded across her chest, her brow creased, her voice low.

Harry shouldn't have listened.

But he did.

"I don't trust him," Hermione murmured. "Not with this. Not when it matters."

Draco didn't respond immediately. When he did, his voice was steady, quiet.

"He won't ruin it. I don't think he came here to destroy anything."

"That doesn't mean he won't. You didn't see his face when he attacked you downstairs?"

Draco took her hand. "We have Kingsley. We have good people on our side. George.

Neville. Red. Pansy. Blaise. Theo. Luna. McGonagall. Poppy. Our parents. And you, love.

Melina, we have you."

There was a rustle, like her forehead pressing to his shoulder.

"I just want this to be over," she whispered. "You deserve to come home. Not just for a trial. Properly. Without hiding. Without looking over your shoulder."

"Then we'll win," he said. "Because I'm not going anywhere. I'm not leaving you here. Or the kids. You won't be alone. This—" he paused, and Harry could hear the emotion thicken

Ours To Keep

in his voice, “—this is the only thing I’ve ever wanted to keep.”
“Even after all the shit they put you through? You know I won’t come back fully without you.”

“Especially because of that. Let them see who I became in spite of it.”

There was a silence. Soft and heavy.

Then:

“You’re everything to me, Hermione. You know that, don’t you?”

“Of course I do,” she said. “Now go. Before I beg you to stay and make him go by himself.”

A kiss.

A door finally closing.

Harry continued down the stairs, quietly, heart twisting.

He had come here to investigate.

But all he had uncovered was how much they loved one another.

Not out of obligation. Not from some misplaced desperation.

But because they chose it.

Every single day.

And for the first time since Hermione left, Harry wasn’t angry.

He was just... sad.

And ashamed.

Because even after all this time, after everything they’d survived together, he’d never really seen her at peace until today.

And it wasn’t with him.



An hour later, Harry stood inside a bustling Muggle hospital in central London, feeling more out of place than he had in years. The sterile scent of antiseptic stung his nose, mingling with the low hum of fluorescent lights and the occasional beep from machinery he couldn’t name.

Draco moved through the corridors with a natural ease, dressed in dark slacks, a grey jumper, and a stethoscope draped casually around his neck. Not glamourous. Not hiding just... existing.

As they approached the hospital’s main reception desk, a middle-aged woman with sharp eyes and a kind smile looked up and beamed.

“Dr. M!” she called out. “You’re here. Thought you weren’t due until next week!”

“Yeah, apologies for that Janice,” Draco said smoothly. “Mr. Potter here is here to do some check-ups for the you know what.”

She laughed at Draco and then narrowed her eyes at Harry. “Well, your office is nearly set up. I managed to get most of your things unpacked the way you like them. I even put the damn little cactus back on your windowsill. Couldn’t believe the thing was still alive after all these years. Mr. Potter should find everything is in order.”



Chapter 3: Old Friends, New Secrets

“You can’t mourn what you abandoned. But you can regret it. And that’s what burns the most.”

Across London, in a quiet Muggle neighbourhood tucked behind overgrown hedges and enchanted glamour wards, the townhouse that housed the Malfoy family stood in perfect contradiction to its occupants’ reputations. The charmwork around it was subtle but impenetrable, designed by Hermione herself and warded with ancient Arithmantic precision that would make even Bill Weasley sweat.

Inside, the dining table was a battlefield of parchment and preparation: Ministry transcripts, court documents, floorplans of the Wizengamot chamber, and notes in both Hermione’s sharp handwriting and Draco’s angular scrawl. Quills, both magical and mundane, were scattered between teacups and ink pots.

It was the day after Draco’s return to the Ministry. The day after Harry bloody Potter had spotted him in the atrium, eyes wide and stunned at the sight of a little blond boy beside him.

Scorpius, now five, had been spared the fallout—Theo and Blaise had taken him to Diagon Alley for the afternoon, armed with galleons and a plan to spoil him rotten. Cassiopeia, two years old and chaos incarnate, was upstairs in her room napping under a stasis charm that ensured she wouldn’t wake up screaming about mermaids until dinner.

And the Daily Prophet had just arrived.

“Mysterious Malfoy. Return Sparks Speculation—Redemption or Ruse?” Hermione read aloud with a snort, tossing the paper onto the cluttered table. “What the actual fuck happened to journalistic integrity?”

Draco, sprawled in his chair with his sleeves rolled up and his fingers ink-stained, didn’t look up. “Died with Rita Skeeter. Or maybe her acid green quill finally ran out of venom.”

Ours To Keep

Neville stood smoothly, his voice calm but implacable. “He’s changed Ron. And he earned his place.”

“Earned it?” Ron barked out a humorless laugh. “He’s a bloody snake! You’re all traitors to everything we fought for, to everything we lost.”

Ginny’s eyes flashed dangerously. “Better a snake than a coward, Ronald. And you’ve been a coward for a very long time. Don’t make me speak of things you don’t want others to know.”

The tension crackled, heavy and palpable.

Ron’s gaze shifted, venomous, to Harry. “You too, mate? You didn’t even tell me you were the testifying auror. I had to hear from Robards that you didn’t want to partner anymore...for anything.”

Harry shifted uncomfortably, but met Ron’s stare without flinching.

“I haven’t spoken to you in years, Ron. I cut ties after you lost it over Andromeda and Teddy. I tried. You made your choices. This isn’t the place for this.”

The words hung between them, heavy as stone.

The atrium buzzed around them, the world continuing as if it wasn’t quietly falling apart in the space between old friends.

Draco watched silently, taking everything in—the bitterness, the sadness, the cracks that had splintered something once unbreakable.

Theo tilted his head, watching the confrontation with clinical amusement, while Blaise radiated thinly veiled disdain.

Luna, ever Luna, simply pulled out a packet of sweets and offered them around like nothing was wrong.

The final snap came when Ron sneered, “Defend your little Death Eater then. See where it gets you.”

Ginny, without even blinking, whipped out her wand.

In one swift, fluid motion, she cast her signature curse—the *Bat-Boggy Hex*—a furious, newly honed version of the classic hex that erupted in a spectacular display.

Shrieking, flapping bat-shaped bogeys exploded from Ron’s face, chasing him in furious loops around the atrium.

Ron stumbled back, slapping at his face, howling and swearing.

“Honestly,” Ginny said, lowering her wand with a graceful flick, “someone had to do it.”

Theo applauded mockingly. “Ten points to Gryffindor.”

Blaise smirked. “Brava, love. Truly.”

Harry watched Ron stagger off, a faint sadness flickering across his face before hardening into something resolute. The rest of the group gathered round Ginny but Draco turned slightly, his voice low as he spoke to Harry.

“You don’t talk to him anymore?” he asked.

Harry shook his head. “Not in years. I cut ties after he lost it over Andromeda...and well, the Black family in a way, including Sirius...and well, Teddy didn’t need to grow up around that kind of energy or prejudice.”

There was no bitterness in Harry’s voice now.

Only tiredness.

Loneliness.

Head over heels016

Draco didn’t say anything aloud. But internally, the words formed sharp and clear.

He’s alone. More alone than I ever realised.

He would tell Hermione tonight.

Not because she needed Harry.

But because he knew—*he knew*—that somewhere, despite everything, she still carried Harry in her heart. As a friend. As a piece of the family she had once fought so hard to protect.

She deserved to know Harry had finally seen it—too late, perhaps—but seen it all the same. Before Draco could say more, the first flash went off.

Then another.

The press had arrived in a frenzied, snapping swarm.

“Mr Malfoy! Who is your wife?”

“Is she British or foreign-born?”

“Is she the final witness?”

“Is it true your son is magical? Will he be raised pure-blood?”

More flashes. More shouted questions.

The circle tightened slightly around Draco, subtle but protective.

Draco lifted his chin, gaze steady.

“No comment,” he said calmly.

A woman in emerald robes pushed forward, quill flying. “Is it true she’s a Muggle-born?”

Draco smiled faintly—slow, dangerous, the smile of a man who had weathered storms and still stood.

Head over heels016

“She deserves sainthood, marrying you,” Pansy declared, tossing her hair. “A second bloody Order of Merlin, First Class.”

Ginny Weasley—no, Zabini now—sidled up next, her smile warm and bright in a way Draco hadn’t realised he needed until that moment. She slipped her arm through his without hesitation, squeezing lightly.

“Red,” Draco said, nodding in greeting.

“Drakey,” Ginny teased, grinning mischievously.

He rolled his eyes but smiled—a real one, small but genuine.

Neville clapped him firmly on the back, a quiet, solid presence that needed no words. The kind of support that said: *We’re here. We’ve got you.*

Luna Lovegood, all wild hair and soft humming, floated forward and pressed a tiny enchanted flower into Draco’s hand—a delicate thing, blue and silver, wriggling slightly before settling. It started humming what sounded suspiciously like the Muggle anthem ‘God Save the Queen.’

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Is it... singing?”

Luna beamed. “It’s encouraging you not to lose hope.”

“Brilliant,” Draco muttered, tucking the flower carefully into his pocket like a talisman.

Blaise Zabini approached last, as if unwilling to appear *too* sentimental. He gave Draco a single, perfunctory pat on the shoulder—brief but firm—before stepping back and showing his hands into his pockets with studied nonchalance.

“Still breathing, I see,” Blaise muttered, his expression unreadable.

“Unfortunately for you,” Draco quipped dryly.

Blaise’s mouth twitched, but he said nothing, simply returning to pretending he didn’t give a damn—even though his very presence here said otherwise.

Draco took a slow breath, letting the sight of them settle deep in his chest.

His people.

His family—chosen, battered, imperfect, but bloody unshakable.

The knot in his stomach eased just a fraction.

Harry arrived moments later, stepping cautiously into the circle of old alliances and new loyalties. There was a pause—stiff, but not hostile—and then a few brief handshakes were exchanged. Polite, if not warm.

Theo immediately swooped in to break the tension, leaning a little too close to Harry and purring, “You’re ageing well, Potter. If this thing with Draco ever fails, you know where to find me.”

Harry nearly dropped his wand. “That’s not—I’m not—”

“Oh, we know,” Pansy said flatly, inspecting her nails. “You wouldn’t be interesting enough anyway.”

“Oi!” Harry protested, half-laughing despite himself.

The easy teasing was short-lived.

Because, of course, Ron Weasley chose that moment to arrive, showing his way through the crowd with all the grace of a stampeding hippogriff.

His face was twisted into an ugly sneer.

“I can’t believe this,” Ron spat, loud enough for several nearby Ministry officials to hear. “All of you—*supporting him*. After everything he did.”

Ours To Keep

corridors, now tempered and sharpened into something adult. Something unbreakable.

Draco straightened his robes.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow they would hear from the only voice that mattered.

The voice of the woman he had built his new life with.

The voice that had once argued with him in dusty classrooms, had refused to let him fall apart when he deserved it, had loved him enough to choose him over a world that didn't understand them.

Hermione.

His Hermione.

His salvation.

Tomorrow, the Wizarding World would know the truth.

And they would not be able to deny it.



The atrium of the Ministry of Magic was a flurry of motion when Draco descended from the lifts, his robes swirling neatly around his ankles. Wizards and witches streamed past in every direction, voices buzzing, flashes of enchanted cameras going off near the main fountain. It was chaos, barely contained under a veneer of professionalism.

But Draco only had eyes for the group waiting near the centre—the ones who mattered.

“Draco!” he heard his name called.

Not, dressed like he'd rolled out of bed and straight into a bloody fashion magazine—dark jeans, dragonhide boots, a casually wrinkled but somehow expensive shirt, and a worn leather jacket slung over one shoulder—waved him over with an irreverent grin, his lazy confidence practically radiating across the polished marble floor.

“Oi, Malfoy! Get over here, you tragic fuck.”

Draco made his way toward them, his stride steady, shoulders squared, chin tilted up with that old familiar pride—the kind that had once been armour and now was simply who he was.

Theo didn't wait for formality. The moment Draco was within reach, Theo yanked him into a tight, back-thumping hug, ignoring Draco's half-hearted protest.

“Good to see you, you miserable bastard,” Theo muttered into his ear, clapping him firmly on the back before releasing him with a lopsided grin. “You look like shit.”

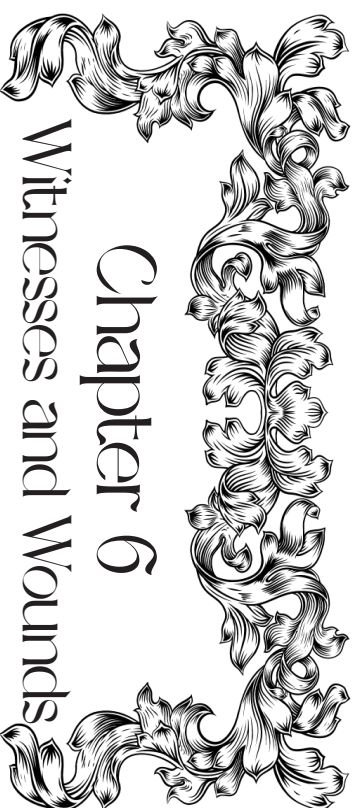
Before Draco could retort, Pansy Parkinson swooped in like a general inspecting her favourite but wayward soldier. She tugged at his collar sharply, smoothing imaginary wrinkles with the kind of irritation usually reserved for misbehaving house-elves.

“You look dreadful,” she said flatly, her nose wrinkling.

Draco lifted a brow, amusement flickering. “It was a very tense time, Pansy,” he replied mildly.

“Figures. You're a disaster without Hermione.” She sniffed dramatically, flicking lint from his sleeve. “Honestly. M! will go *mad* if she sees you like this.”

He smirked. “She usually does.”



Chapter 6

Witnesses and Wounds

“You can bury a man in his past, but it's the life he builds after that tells the truth.”

The second day of the trial dawned grey and sharp, the kind of day where the clouds hung heavy and low, as if the whole sky were waiting to collapse under the weight of its own bitterness.

Inside the Ministry, the air was no lighter.

The Wizengamot chamber thrummed with barely-contained anticipation, the ancient stones themselves seeming to hum underfoot. Robes whispered, quills scratched impatiently, and a dull buzz of murmurs filled the cavernous space as witches and wizards took their seats.

Draco stood tall in the centre of it all, flanked by Madam Crowsby and the ever-watchful figure of Kingsley Shacklebolt. His robes were simple once again—navy and unadorned, the phoenix feather pin the only defiant flash against the drabness. His hair was neatly combed back, wand tucked away, hands loosely clasped behind him.

His face betrayed nothing.

But inside—inside, he was burning.

Today, they would see him for who he was now. Not the scared boy they remembered. Not the scapegoat they had wanted him to remain. Whether they bloody well liked it or not.

The gavel rang out like thunder.

“We reconvene to hear witness testimony for the case of Draco Lucius Malfoy,” the presiding judge intoned, her voice slicing through the thick, tense air.

Percy Weasley immediately surged to his feet, parchment clutched dramatically in hand, his face the very picture of self-importance.

Before anyone could even blink, he was speaking.

“Your Honour, I present a formal motion.” His voice rang out clearly, thin with indignation. “Given the irregularity of the witness list provided, I hereby request the immediate disclosure of the full name and personal details of the final witness—known only to us at present as Mrs Malfoy.”

A collective rustle swept through the chamber—interested, scandalised.

In the gallery, Theo snorted audibly. Blaise rolled his eyes. Ginny muttered something under her breath that sounded suspiciously like, “Wanker.”

Draco remained motionless, watching Percy with narrowed, unimpressed eyes.

Across the room, Madam Crowsby rose smoothly, but before she could open her mouth, Kingsley Shacklebolt cleared his throat.

The Minister for Magic stepped forward with the easy authority of a man used to being obeyed, his dark robes swirling faintly around him like smoke.

“The Ministry denies that request,” Kingsley said evenly.

Percy’s face coloured, blotchy patches appearing on his pale skin. “On what grounds?”

“On the grounds of security,” Kingsley replied coolly. “The witness in question holds a high-security classification under the International Confederation of Wizards’ Magical Security Council. Revealing their identity prior to testimony would compromise not only the integrity of the proceedings, but also broader diplomatic operations.”

He let the words hang for a moment.

Several members of the Wizengamot shifted uncomfortably, whispering to one another.

Draco bit back a smirk.

For a Ravenclaw Kingsley could lie better than most Slytherins he knew—mostly because everything he said was technically the truth.

Percy’s mouth worked furiously for a moment, before he found his voice again.

“Very well,” he said, teeth gritted. “In that case, I request an interview with Hermione Granger—she is one of the Department Heads for the International Confederation. She can vouch for the identity and security rating of this... Mrs. Malfoy.”

At that, the air shifted—curiosity sharpened.

Across the gallery, Pansy raised an eyebrow and murmured, “Oh, this’ll be good.”

Neville looked vaguely alarmed. Luna just beamed serenely.

Ginny folded her arms, radiating fury.

Draco’s lips curled faintly. *You absolute idiot, Weasley.*

Kingsley, to his immense credit, didn’t so much as twitch an eyelid.

“Miss Granger is not available for questioning at this time,” he said smoothly. “She is presently preparing to present on a highly sensitive case directly tied to international magical security. Her time cannot be compromised for this proceeding.”

Madam Crowsby gave a little huff of amusement she didn’t bother to hide.

Draco let the corner of his mouth twitch into a near-smile.

Hermione Malfoy, currently tucked safely away in one of the Ministry’s witness rooms, writing her closing speech to utterly devastate this farce of a court.

Percy went purple.

“This is highly irregular! It’s outrageous—!”

The presiding judge rapped her gavel once, hard.

“Enough, Mr. Weasley. We have accepted the Ministry’s decision regarding the witness list. We will not adjourn to indulge your personal dissatisfaction.”

Percy sputtered, jaw clenching as he sat down far more heavily than necessary.

Draco could practically see the steam rising from his ears.

Serves you right, you sanctimonious twat.

presiding judge’s hand.

“The official witness list, Your Honour.”

The parchment unfurled with a soft hiss.

The judge—a tall, stern-looking witch whose spectacles perched precariously on the end of her nose—adjusted them and began reading aloud.

“The court will hear from the following witnesses in tomorrow’s session: Auror Harry James Potter... Headmistress Minerva McGonagall... Dr Daniel M. Chen, Chief of Magical Medicine, Sydney Royal Hospital... Professor Neville Longbottom... Healer Theodore Nott...”

There was a pause. Barely a second. But enough.

The judge frowned slightly at the final line.

“And the final witness...” she continued, voice unflinching.

“...the Head of the International Confederation of Wizard’s Magical Security Council, Mrs Malfoy. No first name listed.”

A sharp murmur sliced through the courtroom.

A ripple of confusion. Intrigue. Speculation.

Mrs Malfoy?

Percy Weasley stiffened visibly.

Harry shifted in his seat, fists curling against his knees.

Ron, sat hunched at the very back, suddenly leaned forward, face screwing up into something ugly and confused.

Mrs Malfoy?

His eyes darted instinctively towards the gallery.

Toward the row where Blaise, Ginny, Theo, Pansy, Neville, and Luna sat with deliberate, practiced indifference.

Ginny smirked lazily at him, as if daring him to figure it out.

Ron’s face twisted, throat bobbing visibly.

But he said nothing—yet.

The presiding judge cleared her throat pointedly, cutting through the rising whispers.

“No first name has been submitted. The title alone will suffice for now. Any objections must be filed in writing prior to the beginning of tomorrow’s session.”

Percy’s hand twitched as if he might object—but he thought better of it. He forced a thin, pained smile and bowed slightly instead.

Madam Crowsby simply inclined her head coolly, daring him.

The judge banged the gavel once more.

“This court is adjourned until tomorrow morning. Witness testimonies shall commence promptly at nine o’clock. Court dismissed.”

The great chamber erupted into noise—people standing, shuffling, talking in urgent whispers.

Above it all, Draco sat utterly still.

He could feel the attention snapping back to him like iron filings to a lodestone.

But he didn’t flinch. Didn’t move.

He just smiled—that cold, dangerous smile that once belonged to a boy in darkened

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was nevertheless a *known affiliate* of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. A *former Death Eater*. A participant—directly and indirectly—in events tied to the Second Wizarding War, including grievous violations of the Statute of Secrecy and crimes against Muggleborn citizens.”

He paused dramatically, letting the words settle over the room like acid rain.

Draco felt the weight of every eye shift to him.

He kept his face blank. Impassive.

Inside, something ancient and cold curled tighter in his gut.

Percy continued, voice dripping with self-satisfaction.

“Though granted conditional exile due to his youth and cooperation with the Ministry, the nature of his request today requires *extraordinary scrutiny*.” His eyes flashed. “Ten years of exile does not erase allegiance. It does not erase blood oaths. It does not erase the Mark still etched into his skin.”

A low murmur rippled through the gallery.

Theo muttered something obscure under his breath, earning a sharp nudge from Pansy.

From the corner of his vision, Draco saw Ginny lean forward slightly, murder glittering in her eyes.

Good.

Let them burn for him.

Percy placed both hands theatrically on the podium.

“We must ask ourselves: has Mr Malfoy truly changed? Or is this merely a more palatable mask for the same dangerous loyalties?”

He stepped back, nodding self-importantly at the presiding judge as if already awaiting a round of applause.

The air in the courtroom crackled with tension.

Madam Linette Crowsby, Draco’s solicitor, rose smoothly, robes rippling like silk around her wiry frame. She was older, sharp-eyed, and looked like she could disembowel a man with nothing but her quill.

She inclined her head with cool politeness before speaking.

“For ten years, my client has lived under strict exile. His wand use has been heavily monitored. His inheritance reduced to nothing but enough to survive reparations. His freedom severely curtailed. He did not flee. He did not offend. He *rebuilt*.”

Her voice rose, slicing through the chamber.

“In that time, Mr Malfoy has become a respected doctor, serving both magical and Muggle communities. He has received accolades from Australian magical authorities for his humanitarian work. He has dedicated his life to healing, to atonement, to the quiet, thankless labour of becoming *better*.”

She lifted a parchment.

“We will present witnesses—former professors, healers, international officials—who will attest to his transformation. We ask this court to recognise what true rehabilitation looks like. Not through grand gestures. But through ten years of quiet, persistent change.”

Madam Crowsby gave Percy a look of cool dismissal and sat down.

The presiding judge gave a small nod, recording notes with a sharp, precise quill.

Crowsby approached the judges’ podium and placed the parchment carefully into the

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The judge consulted the parchment again and then nodded sharply.

“We will proceed with the scheduled witness testimonies. The first witness: Auror Harry James Potter.”

Murmurs buzzed through the gallery again, and every head turned toward the figure rising from the benches.

Harry Potter stood, his black Auror robes pristine, his hair as unruly as ever. His green eyes, bright behind his spectacles, locked briefly with Draco’s as he made his way down to the floor of the courtroom.

For a heartbeat, it was just the two of them. The Boy Who Lived. The Boy Who Was Left Behind.

Two survivors of a war that had never quite ended for either of them. Draco’s hands tightened briefly behind his back, then loosened again.

Come on, Potter. Don’t fuck it up.

Harry stepped forward, swore the Oath, and took his seat. The Wizengamot leaned in. The courtroom leaned in.

Draco didn’t move.

The real battle had just begun.

Harry Potter stepped into the witness box wearing standard Auror robes, the dark fabric pressed but slightly rumpled—classic Potter. His hair, as ever, was a windswept disaster. But his green eyes were clear, serious, and anchored to something deeper than nerves.

He took the Oath, wand pressed to the battered oak rail, and straightened, facing the full weight of the Wizengamot.

For a brief moment, his gaze flickered across the chamber—skipping past Percy, past Molly Weasley’s tight-lipped fury, past Ron’s barely-concealed scowl—and landed, finally, on Draco.

It wasn’t hostile.

But it wasn’t exactly warm, either.

It was something in between.

Something honest.

Good, Draco thought grimly. I am work with bones.

Madam Linette Crowsby rose first, giving Harry a brisk nod of acknowledgement.

“Mr Potter,” she began crisply, “please confirm your role regarding Mr Malfoy’s case for the court.”

Harry cleared his throat slightly, but his voice rang out strong.

“I’ve monitored Mr Malfoy’s case personally over the past week as part of the Ministry’s standard review procedures,” he said, voice carrying clearly over the high benches and marble floor. “I visited his residence, inspected the premises, and conducted interviews relevant to his petition for reinstatement.”

“And what were your findings?” Crowsby asked smoothly.

Harry glanced briefly at the gathered judges—then at Kingsley, whose expression was as inscrutable as ever.

“Mr Malfoy has complied with every stipulation of his exile without deviation,” Harry said firmly. “His wand use remains minimal and properly documented. There are no Dark artefacts present in his home or on his person. No evidence of illegal magical practice. Blood

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Rituals—” he gave a faint, sardonic twitch of his lips, “—or hidden allegiance to any banned organisations.”

A few murmurs rippled through the gallery. Some disbelieving. Some intrigued.

Harry ignored them.

He kept speaking, steady and sure.

“In my professional opinion as a Senior Auror of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement,” Harry said, “Mr Malfoy poses no threat to magical society.”

A sharper buzz ran through the room, this time louder.

Draco remained utterly still, his face carved from marble.

In the gallery, Theo let out a low whistle under his breath. Pansy smirked approvingly. Blaise crossed his arms and leaned back, looking frankly bored—but Draco could tell he was listening intently.

Even Narcissa allowed the smallest, barely perceptible exhale.

Only the Weasleys—clustered like a clump of scarlet in the side benches - looked like they might spontaneously combust.

Ron’s face was dark red. Percy looked like someone had just pissed in his cauldron. Molly sat rigid, lips pursed so tightly they were almost white.

George sat alone, halfway between both worlds—not amongst his family, not with the others. His expression was blank, unreadable.

Later, Draco thought. Later I’ll figure out what side you’re truly standing on, Weasley.

Madam Crowsby allowed a beat of silence to stretch—let the weight of Harry’s words sink deep into the chamber’s stone bones—before inclining her head slightly.

“Thank you, Mr Potter.”

She sat down.

Percy Weasley wasted no time leaping to his feet, practically vibrating with contained fury. He stormed towards the podium with the air of a man desperate to *subjugate* something—anything—from the wreckage.

“Mr Potter,” Percy began, voice falsely polite, “you have a long-standing history with Mr Malfoy, do you not? A... colourful one.”

Harry shrugged. “We were at school together. We fought on opposite sides of a war.”

Murmurs.

Percy’s smile was shark-sharp. “Indeed. And yet, you expect this court to believe your judgment is not clouded by old animosities? Or, conversely, by guilt?”

Harry’s jaw tightened, but he said evenly, “I’m here to give facts. Not opinions.”

Percy’s eyes gleamed. “And what about the matter of Mrs Malfoy? You were in the residence, were you not? Surely you can confirm her identity?”

The entire room seemed to freeze.

Every gaze snapped to Harry.

Blaise sat up straighter. Theo’s grin sharpened. Pansy arched an elegant brow.

Draco didn’t move.

Harry’s mouth quirked faintly—a flash of defiance.

“I was there to inspect the home, not to conduct a family registry,” he said dryly. “My report concerns security, not gossip.”

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violations of his exile terms—all under review for remission and reinstatement of citizenship.”

The chamber went deathly still.

Draco inhaled slowly through his nose, steadying himself.

He caught movement in the corner of his eye—just in time to see a figure step quietly into the gallery.

Narcissa Malfoy.

His mother.

She moved with the grace of a woman who had once commanded ballrooms and diplomatic courts, draped in deep green robes with silver embroidery at the cuffs - understated, but undeniably regal. Her hair was coiled neatly at her nape, not a strand out of place, and her back was impossibly straight as she took her seat beside Luna and Neville.

There was no hesitation. No flicker of doubt.

Only quiet, fierce pride.

Draco’s throat constricted unexpectedly.

He had not asked her to come. He had told her she didn’t have to.

And still, she was here, just as she said she would. She had promised Hermione after all.

Narcissa met his gaze across the crowded chamber, and ever so slightly, she inclined her head.

It was not the grand, sweeping deference of a pureblood matron.

It was a mother’s vow: *I believe in you.*

Something inside Draco settled—a bone-deep steadiness that nothing, not Percy Weasley’s sneer, not the whispers in the gallery, could shake.

He turned his gaze back to the front, chin lifted, face neutral.

In the gallery, Blaise leaned closer to Ginny and whispered something that made her snort elegantly. Theo smirked behind his hand. Pansy rolled her eyes in theatrical boredom.

Draco almost smiled.

You’re not alone.

He thought of Hermione, holding Cassi and Scorpius close.

He thought of her vow: *We survived a war. We’ll survive this.*

He would not let them down.

By Merlin, he was coming home.

And the Wizarding World was bloody well going to watch him do it.

The hum of whispered speculation fell away to tense, expectant silence as Percy Weasley rose from the prosecutor’s table.

His Wizegamot robes were immaculate—not a crease, not a speck of dust, the gold embroidery at his cuffs gleaming under the torchlight. He straightened his already-straight parchments with a flourish before casting a quick, superior glance around the chamber.

And then, with the air of a man delivering a sermon, Percy began.

“We are gathered here today,” he said, voice echoing crisply around the ancient stone walls, “to evaluate the request for the full reinstatement of Mr Draco Lucius Malfoy into British magical society.”

He clasped his hands behind his back, pacing slowly before the seated judges.

“Let us not forget, ladies and gentlemen, the reason for his exile. Mr Malfoy, once a minor,

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Ron flushed an ugly, furious red.

“You left your family—” he started, but Ginny cut him off with a laugh that held no humour whatsoever.

“I left *you*. And Mum. And Percy. Because you couldn’t handle the fact that I chose happiness over blood prejudice.” Her voice dripped venom. “Because I married someone you thought beneath me. A ‘snake,’ wasn’t that what you called him?”

Blaise Zabini rose slightly in his seat, dangerous calm radiating from him.

“Careful, Weasley,” he said in a soft, cold drawl. “Say another word about my wife, and I’ll hex your bollocks so far up your arse you’ll taste your own fucking spleen.”

Theo chuckled low under his breath, not looking up from his Prophet.

Ron took a furious step forward.

The room shifted, tension crackling, magic humming at the edges of control.

Before anyone could draw wands, a sharp voice cut through the air.

“That’s enough!”

A senior Auror—grim-faced and furious—seized Ron by the shoulder and yanked him back.

“You’re here unofficially, Weasley. If you can’t behave, get the hell out. Last warning.”

Ron wrenched free, but for once, said nothing more. He retreated, seething, to a corner of the gallery.

Draco had seen the entire exchange out of the corner of his eye.

He didn’t react.

Not outwardly.

Inside, a tight knot of emotion coiled in his chest—pride for Ginny, gratitude for Blaise, amusement at Theo, and the quiet, steady knowledge that he wasn’t standing alone today.

He moved to his place at the centre of the chamber, standing tall before the great, circular benches of the Wizengamot.

Across the courtroom, he saw Harry.

Harry, dressed formally, sitting stiff-backed in the Auror’s witness box, his expression unreadable.

Draco offered no acknowledgement.

Neither did Harry.

The gavel struck with a resounding crack.

“All rise for the Wizengamot.”

The room rose in one solemn, shuffling movement.

The judges—ancient and resplendent in deep purple robes—filed in and took their places at the high dais.

Percy Weasley—smug, preening, arrogant—shuffled his parchments dramatically at the prosecutor’s table, casting Draco a disdainful glance over the top of his spectacles.

Arsé.

The presiding judge, an older witch with steel-grey hair and sharp blue eyes, rapped the gavel again.

“The trial of Draco Lucius Malfoy shall now commence. Charges: conspiracy to commit crimes against the Muggleborn community, previous affiliation with Death Eater activities, and

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A ripple of laughter spread faintly through the gallery—mostly from Draco’s side.

Percy flushed.

“So you *refuse* to disclose her name?”

Harry tilted his head, looking - for one glorious second—remarkably like Draco himself when faced with absolute stupidity.

“I’m following Ministry protocol. The witness remains classified until their testimony later today.”

“Surely you—”

“Protocol,” Harry repeated, sharper now. “You’re welcome to lodge a formal complaint.

Good luck with that seeing as you will be seeing the witness later today. Why not wait?”

A few stifled chuckles echoed around the chamber.

Percy’s face purpled.

The presiding judge rapped the gavel sharply. “Enough, Mr Weasley. You are badgering the witness.”

Percy ground his teeth audibly but retreated, glowering.

Harry sat back down, folding his hands neatly in his lap.

He didn’t glance at the Weasleys. He didn’t glance at Ron.

He just stared ahead, calm, composed, resolute.

Draco felt something shift inside him—something low and reluctant and not quite forgiveness, but maybe the distant, cautious blueprint of it.

He’s trying, Draco thought. *Finally. After all these bloody years.*

The judge made a note with a sharp flick of her quill.

“Thank you, Mr Potter. You are dismissed from the stand.”

Harry rose, gave a brief nod to the judge, and, in a flicker of something very nearly resembling respect, a short, almost imperceptible glance towards Draco.

Then he stepped away from the stand, the echo of his boots sharp against the stone floor. The second day of the trial had only just begun.

And already, the cracks in the old world were starting to show.

The judge cleared her throat.

“Headmistress Minerva McGonagall is called next.”

A hush swept through the Wizengamot like a rolling tide.

The heavy doors opened, and Minerva McGonagall swept into the courtroom with the grace of a queen entering her court. Her tartan robes flared behind her with each purposeful step, her square spectacles catching the torchlight like twin flashes of steel.

There was no hesitation in her stride.

No uncertainty.

Only iron.

Even some of the more hardened Wizengamot members shifted slightly in their seats under her gaze.

Percy Weasley visibly paled.

Minerva approached the witness box, took the Oath with a crisp flick of her wand, and seated herself, back straight, shoulders set.

She folded her hands atop the rail and waited—composed, unbending, utterly immovable.

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Madam Crowsby nodded respectfully at her.

Percy, however, rose with a certain frantic energy, smoothing his robes, trying—and failing—to muster his usual smugness.

“Headmistress McGonagall,” Percy began, voice carefully neutral, “while your reputation is beyond question, I must confess confusion as to your relevance in this matter.”

Minerva’s eyebrows arched sharply above her spectacles.

“Oh?” she said coolly. “Then allow me to clarify, Mr Weasley, before you tie yourself into knots trying to find fault where there is none.”

A tinkle of stifled laughter ran through the gallery. Theo practically vibrated with glee. Ginny elbowed him sharply but didn’t bother hiding her grin.

Minerva continued, tone clipped and precise.

“When Mr Malfoy was first sentenced to magical exile, I found myself.. troubled.” She leaned forward slightly, her voice low but carrying. “Troubled by how swiftly this court condemned a child, albeit an arrogant and spoiled one, to isolation and ruin—while far older, far guiltier men and women received mere slaps on the wrist.”

Her words hit like hammer blows.

Percy opened his mouth and shut it again.

Minerva pressed on mercilessly.

“With Minister Shacklebolt’s permission, I took certain steps,” she said, lifting her chin. “I created official Muggle certification for Mr Malfoy’s Hogwarts education - translating his magical studies into acceptable Muggle equivalencies, complete with documented coursework, grades, and recommendations.”

She paused, letting that sink in.

“Mr Malfoy’s academic background, even by Muggle standards, was superior to many of their finest preparatory students. His knowledge of sciences, languages, mathematics, and medicine was exemplary—thanks in no small part to the.. rather exhaustive private tutors his family had provided prior to his Hogwarts years.”

A faint note of decision coloured her voice at that.

“But more importantly,” she said, voice softening just slightly, “I wanted to ensure he had the chance to build something of his own. Free from legacy. Free from history. Free to make something worthy.”

A heavy silence settled across the room.

In the gallery, Luna beamed proudly. Neville looked down, visibly moved. Even Blaise inclined his head in silent respect.

Draco swallowed thickly, throat tight.

He hadn’t known the full extent of what she had done.

Hadn’t realised that someone—beyond Hermione—had believed in him from the very beginning.

Minerva shifted her gaze, skewering the room as if daring anyone to challenge her.

“I have observed Mr Malfoy over the years,” she said, voice ringing clear. “I have been invited to witness the milestones of his life. His marriage. The births of his children. I have seen him as a husband, as a father, as a healer.”

Her lips thinned.

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This wasn’t about him anymore.

This was about home. About Hermione. About Cassiopeia and Scorpius. About freedom. He paused outside the side room, where his solicitor was already waiting, robes crisp, parchments clutched tightly in hand.

“Mr Malfoy,” the woman said briskly, nodding. “All set. We’ve gone through the witness list thrice. The defence is solid. Stick to what we’ve discussed and everything will be fine.”

Draco nodded once, curt, and said nothing.

Words were weapons here, and he had learned—finally—when to hold them.

He squared his shoulders and entered the courtroom.

The public gallery was full. Rammed, really. It seemed half the bloody Wizarding World had come to see if a Malfoy could actually claw his way back from disgrace.

His gaze flicked up immediately to the gallery. The sight that greeted him was equal parts surreal and grounding.

There, in the front row, sat his people.

Pansy perched elegantly, legs crossed, wand tucked behind her ear like a vicious promise. Theo lounged next to her, thumbing through a battered copy of *The Daily Prophet*, a charmed scribble reading ‘FUCK OFF’ flashing brilliantly across the headline.

Blaise Zabini lounged in his seat, arms folded across his chest, wearing the kind of smirk that dared anyone to approach him.

Beside Blaise sat Ginny—her red hair twisted into a fierce knot, her robes deep crimson, a gold pendant catching the light at her throat. She looked composed, dangerous.

Neville and Luna were tucked into the second row—Luna serene and slightly eccentric in a pale green dress, a strange feathery hat perched jauntily on her head. Neville looked grim, fists clenched on his knees, his presence a silent statement of loyalty.

Draco’s throat tightened.

They came.

They weren’t just friends. They were family—stitched together out of battlefields, broken promises, and stubborn, relentless love.

And then there was Ron Weasley.

Lurking at the back like a bad smell, arms crossed over his Auror robes, jaw set in a clenched scowl. Not officially part of the trial. Not called as witness. Not needed. But very much present, his haired radiating across the chamber like a foul stench.

As Draco walked past the gallery, he caught movement out of the corner of his eye.

Ron had spotted Ginny.

The flare of rage was instantaneous.

“Fucking traitors,” Ron muttered, loud enough for the entire gallery to hear. His eyes burned with betrayal as they raked over Neville and Luna. “Bloody Death Eater sympathisers. What happened to Gryffindor loyalty?”

Ginny turned her head slowly, her expression like a blade honed on years of bitterness.

“What happened to family loyalty, Ronald?” she snapped back, her voice sharp as a Severing Charm. “You wouldn’t know. You disowned me before the ink was dry on my marriage certificate.”

The words cracked through the air like a whip.

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tight. “You won’t be alone.”

He nodded.

“Mother will be there too,” Draco said, pulling back just slightly. “She’s been waiting ten bloody years for this.”

Hermione smiled fondly. “Narcissa adores you. She pretends she doesn’t now that you’re all grown up, but the way she spoils the children gives her away.”

Draco chuckled. “She’ll deny it until her dying breath. But you... you gave her hope again. After Father was shackled to the Manor, I think she thought everything was over. Then you marched into my life—into ours—and refused to let us rot.”

Hermione’s smile softened. “Your parents love you, Draco. And they love our children. That’s what matters.”

He nodded. “Father’s still not allowed to leave the grounds, obviously, or do any magic. But he’s sent a letter to the Wizengamot, a formal statement of character. It’s the most Lucius thing imaginable. Forty-eight inches of impeccably penned remorse.”

Hermione laughed through her nerves. “Of course it is.”

He tucked a stray curl behind her ear. “You’re the key witness tomorrow, love. You’re the one they won’t be able to twist. So today... today, let me protect you a little longer.”

She closed her eyes and nodded against him.

He bent down to hug both children tightly, lingering a moment longer than necessary.

“You be good,” he told Scorpius. “And no enchanting anything without adult supervision.”

“Define adult,” Scorpius asked cheekily.

Hermione gave a watery laugh.

“Your mother, you little menace.”

Draco pressed a final kiss to Hermione’s lips, softer this time, lingering like a whispered prayer.

“Come home to us as soon as they are done for the day,” she whispered against his mouth.

“Always, love. Always.”

He pulled away, squeezing her hand one last time, and crossed the threshold.

The door shut with a quiet finality behind him.

Hermione stood there, arms wrapped tightly around her children, staring after him into the grey, wet London morning, her heart pounding a fierce rhythm against her ribs.

The Ministry of Magic was thrumming with tension by the time Draco arrived.

He moved with slow, deliberate steps through the Atrium, past the looming fountain of Magical Brethren and the huddled clusters of Ministry workers pretending not to stare. The oppressive weight of centuries-old marble and whispered prejudice pressed in on him from all sides.

The Wizengamot chamber had been reopened for public proceedings. Its high, arched ceilings flickered with torches enchanted to mimic stormlight, and heavy mahogany benches circled the floor like a coliseum of old. The atmosphere was thick and metallic, as if the stone itself was holding its breath.

He ignored the whispers as he passed. He ignored the click of cameras trying to capture his expression. He ignored the knot tightening in his gut.

Head over heels016

“He has grown. He has changed. And he should not be held hostage to the mistakes and manipulations of a boy who was abandoned by those meant to protect him.”

Percy, flushed and twitching, tried to interject. “But surely—”

Minerva cut across him like a whip.

“Enough, Mr Wesley. You may dress up prejudice in bureaucracy all you like—but it remains prejudice.”

Gaspes echoed from the benches. The judge let her speak uninterrupted.

Minerva’s eyes, cold and sharp, swept across the gallery.

“There are those who have refused to move forward. Who cling to old grudges like children to broken toys. I tell you this—if we do not allow change, then we do not deserve peace. If we condemn every man for the sins of his youth, we will find ourselves judged by the same merciless standard.”

She stood then, straight-backed and tall as a tower.

“Draco Malfoy deserves the right to come home.”

Silence thundered in the room after she spoke.

Even the staunchest sceptics shifted uncomfortably under the weight of her words.

Draco stood straighter, something fierce and bright curling in his chest.

Minerva McGonagall—the woman he had once feared, once resented—had stood for him without hesitation.

Without shame.

The judge finally stirred, tapping her quill against her notes.

“Thank you, Headmistress. You are dismissed.”

Minerva nodded crisply, adjusted her tartan robes, and swept from the witness box without a backward glance.

As she passed Draco, she paused just long enough to murmur, “Make sure you come home properly, Mr Malfoy.”

And then she was gone, leaving the room ringing in her wake.

The judge’s voice cut through the lingering murmur of Minerva McGonagall’s departure.

“Professor Neville Longbottom, please approach.”

Neville rose from the benches, adjusting his slightly rumpled teaching robes—plain dark green, patched at the elbow in true Herbologist fashion—and made his way to the stand.

He looked nervous at first, fiddling momentarily with the cuff of his sleeve, before he caught Draco’s eye.

For the briefest moment, something passed between them—not words, but a solid nod, an anchor.

Neville straightened his spine, squared his shoulders, and stepped into the box.

He took the Oath with a slightly shaky hand, then folded his arms atop the wooden rail, steadying himself.

Madam Crowsley rose smoothly, her tone gentler with him than it had been with the others.

“Professor Longbottom, could you explain to the court how you came to know Mr Malfoy outside of your school years?”

Neville took a breath, exhaling slowly.

“After the war...” he paused, gathering himself, “...after the fighting stopped, I couldn’t

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breathe anymore in Britain. Everything here—the walls, the streets, the faces - it all felt too full of ghosts. I needed to get away. I needed to breathe. To remember who I was without constant battle around me.”

The courtroom was silent, hanging onto every word. He glanced towards the gallery, eyes flickering briefly over the assembled faces—Ginny, Luna, Theo, Blaise, Pansy.

“So, I left,” Neville said simply. “An old friend—” he nodded briefly towards Luna, who gave him a serene little wave, “—suggested I go to Australia. To study plants. Muggle flora, magical flora. Just... breathe. Start fresh somewhere that wasn’t scarred by everything we’d been through.”

Neville shifted his weight slightly, gathering himself.

“So I went to Australia. It was supposed to be temporary.”

A pause.

A shadow of something old and painful flickered across his face.

“But it became more than that. It became... healing.”

He smiled, small and genuine.

“It was there I met Draco. Properly, this time. Not as an enemy. Not as a rival. Just as two people who had been broken by the same war, trying to piece something back together.”

Several heads in the gallery turned at that, whispering.

Ron’s scowl deepened, arms crossed so tightly his knuckles went white.

Neville didn’t falter.

“He was different. Rough around the edges, sure. Arrogant as hell still.” A few chuckles rippled through the room. Even Draco cracked the barest hint of a smile. “But he was building something. A life without bloodline, without legacy.”

Neville’s voice grew stronger.

“He didn’t owe anyone that. He didn’t have to change. But he did. Every bloody day, he chose to be better.”

Madam Crowsby nodded encouragingly.

Neville went on.

“I stayed longer than I meant to. I made friends. I met my wife.”

Pansy, sitting poised in the front row, gave an elegant little smirk and twirled a strand of hair around her finger.

Neville smiled at her, soft and fierce and so full of love it made something crack quietly inside Draco’s chest.

“I wrote one of my first books there, *Magical Botany in Subtropical Environments*,” Neville said. “Opened my first research nursery. Australia became home.”

He shifted again, slower now, more careful.

“But I came back now. I took the Herbology post at Hogwarts again—not because I didn’t love the life I’d made in Australia. But because I wanted to be close to my family.”

Neville’s voice softened, trembling with feeling.

“And because my goddaughter will be here.”

He smiled, small and fierce.

“She’s clever and stubborn and a little bit wild, and she means the bloody world to me and Pansy.”

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Hermione let out a soft laugh, though her eyes glistened with unshed emotion.

He cupped her face, brushing his thumb over her cheekbone. “But I need you here today, love. For the children. For you. And selfishly—selfishly I want you to have one more day away from it. One more day without their bloody scrutiny.”

Hermione pulled back enough to look at him, hands sliding down the front of his robes to smooth a non-existent crease. “Cass needs me anyway,” she admitted reluctantly. “And Scorpius will be impossible without someone keeping him from trying to hack the Floo system.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Hacking the floo system?...He’s five.”

“He’s *your* son. He was trying to enchant the telly to speak Parseltongue yesterday, using my wand. No matter how many times I’ve told him he can’t do magic like that.”

“You’re joking.”

She shook her head. “Nope. And this morning he said he was going to charm the toaster to spit out scones instead of bread.”

Draco let out a huff of laughter. “Genius. Completely unhinged.”

Hermione arched a brow. “Wonder where he gets *that* from.”

He smirked. “Clearly your influence Gryffindor.”

She rolled her eyes. “Go before I hex you for being smug.”

He kissed her, slow and reverent, pouring all the words he couldn’t say into it.

When they broke apart, Hermione rested her forehead against his, breathing him in.

“We survived a war,” she whispered. “We survived exile. We survived losing everything. I’ll burn the Wizengamot down before I let them keep you from me, from us. Kingsley already knows my terms. You stay or I go. Simple as that.”

His smile was crooked, fierce. “I know. That’s why we’ll win.”

“You’ll never be alone, Draco. Not again. Not while I’m breathing.”

They stood there a moment longer, their hands still linked, a silent promise forged stronger than any spell.

From the hallway came the sound of small, determined footsteps.

“Mummy,” Scorpius announced, appearing at the bottom of the stairs with his favourite dragon plush tucked under his arm, his wild curly blond hair sticking out in every direction. “If Daddy’s going to fight goblins at court, can I charm the telly now?”

Hermione laughed, ruffling his hair. “No goblins, sweetheart. Just very grumpy old men.”

Draco crouched and pulled his son into a hug.

“You’re in charge while I’m gone, yeah?” he said seriously.

Scorpius beamed. “I’m very responsible.”

“Terrifying,” Hermione muttered.

Scorpius tugged at Draco’s sleeve. “Promise you’ll win?”

Draco looked into his son’s earnest, clever eyes and smiled. “I’ll win because you’re here waiting for me.”

Cass toddled over and clutched his other hand. “No scones if no win!”

Draco laughed, standing and ruffling both their heads. “You lot drive a hard bargain.”

Hermione took his hand one more time, squeezing hard.

“Pansy, Theo, Ginny, Neville, Luna, Blaise—they’ll all be there,” she said, voice steady but

He kissed her forehead. “Always.”

Hermione moved closer, sliding her arms around his shoulders and tugging him up to her. Draco stood, pulling her flush against him, grounding himself in her scent—parchment and wildflowers and something uniquely hers.

“I hate this,” she murmured against his chest. “I hate that you’re walking in there alone.”

He pressed a kiss to her temple. “You’ll be there when it matters. You’re the one who will turn the tide. You always have been.”

“I still hate it,” she muttered, voice thick with feeling. “I should be standing beside you now.”

He leaned back slightly to look at her properly, grey eyes steady. “You will. Tomorrow. When it counts.”

Hermione’s hands twisted into the fabric of his robes, her grip betraying her fear. “They’ll tear me apart.”

“No, they won’t,” Draco said firmly. “You’re stronger than all of them put together. And besides—” he smiled faintly, brushing a strand of hair from her face, “—you’ve got a mean right hook when provoked.”

She gave a shaky laugh, then shook her head. “I’m serious, Draco. The moment they realise when they understand who I am to you—it’s going to be chaos.”

“That’s the point, love,” he said, voice dropping low with purpose. “I’ll blindside them. All of them.”

He tipped her chin up, his thumb sweeping gently along her jaw.

“Hermione Granger’s reputation as the ‘Golden Girl’ created a sort of collective blindness within the media. They built you into this pristine image—the war heroine, the Ministry reformer, the Muggle-born success story. Anything that didn’t fit that precious narrative was ignored, disbelieved, or dismissed. Even when the truth was staring them in the bloody face.” Her heart twisted painfully, but she nodded.

“No one ever questioned it,” he continued, voice bitter. “You living abroad. No public relationships. Me being in Australia the same time as you. They didn’t connect the dots because it didn’t fit the story they wanted to tell.”

Hermione bit her lip, hard.

“In Australia, in Europe—you *are* Malfoy, on paper. But here, you’re still Hermione Granger. You weren’t hiding, not really. You just let them misunderstand you.” He smirked, though it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “And after years of assumptions, the lie became the truth. Hermione Granger was single. Hermione Granger was unattached. Hermione Granger had moved on from the war.”

His hand moved to cover hers, steady and warm.

“Tomorrow, when you step into that courtroom, it will tear through their illusions. It will remind them that they don’t know half as much about you as they think they do. And it will remind them that you, Hermione *Malfoy*, are not someone they can control, or diminish, or use.”

Tears burned at the backs of her eyes.

“You’ll shock them,” he whispered. “And for the first time in a long time, they’ll have to *listen*.”

He paused, let it settle.

Draco stood motionless, a flicker of deep gratitude crossing his face.

Theo grinned broadly. Pansy dabbed at her eye with a handkerchief, pretending not to. Ginny watched Neville with glowing, teary pride.

“Malfoy’s children... they’re all ours in a way,” Neville said softly. “We all helped raise them. We all made sure they knew they were loved. But my goddaughter—” his voice caught slightly before he cleared it, “—she’s a reminder of everything good that can come from choosing love over legacy.”

He glanced briefly around the courtroom, daring anyone to challenge him.

“And I’ll be damned if I let fear and prejudice stop her—or her family—from living freely here.”

The weight of his words dropped heavy into the chamber.

The implication was unmistakable.

Draco Malfoy’s wife was no obscure Australian witch, no pureblood socialite hiding in the background.

She was someone *important*.

Someone entrenched in the British magical world.

Someone they all knew.

“I only came back because of them,” he said, jerking his chin towards Draco. “Because Draco, *Hermi*—”

He froze, blinking.

The gallery collectively inhaled.

Percy’s head snapped up. He fidgeted but remained silent, glowering behind his parchment. Ron leaned forward sharply in his seat, a predatory glint entering his eyes. His eyes darted from Draco to Neville to Kingsley to the witness list parchment before him, as if scrambling to assemble the puzzle that was rapidly, horrifically, falling into place.

Neville flushed scarlet to the tips of his ears but barreled on stubbornly.

“—because they’re my friends. Because they’re family.”

He met the judges’ eyes, steady and certain.

Silence fell again.

Heavy. Charged.

The judge finally spoke, clearing her throat delicately.

“Thank you, Professor Longbottom. You are dismissed.”

Neville rose, nodded once—to the court, to Draco—and strode back towards the gallery without a backward glance.

As he passed Pansy, she reached out and squeezed his hand briefly, proud and fierce.

Draco exhaled slowly, tension bleeding from his shoulders.

Neville had spoken the truth.

And with every truth laid bare, their enemies lost a little more ground.

The judge consulted the parchment again, tapping it lightly with her wand.

“We were meant to hear from Madam Poppy Pomfrey,” she said briskly, “however, due to an outbreak of Dragonpox amongst the third years at Hogwarts, Madam Pomfrey has sent a substitute witness, Healer Theodore Nott.”

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A ripple of interest swept through the gallery.

Theo strolled into the witness box with the casual arrogance only Theodore Nott could pull off—dark robes perfectly tailored, dark hair mussed just enough to look effortless, and a knowing smirk playing about his mouth.

He winked at Draco as he passed, earning a small shake of the head from his friend.

Draco bit back a grin.

This was either going to be very good—or a complete disaster.

Theo took the Oath with a lazy flick of his wand, then leaned against the rail like he was having a pint at the Leaky Cauldron instead of giving sworn testimony at a bloody trial.

“Well, isn’t this cosy,” Theo drawled, surveying the packed chamber. “So many old friends in one room. All we need is a pub and a few rounds of Firewhisky, and we could call it a reunion.”

A few titters ran through the public gallery.

“Healer Nott,” Percy said through gritted teeth, “please confine yourself to facts relevant to Mr Malfoy’s current standing and character.”

Theo gave him an exaggeratedly innocent look.

“Oh, absolutely. Wouldn’t want to waste anyone’s precious time.”

He shifted slightly, crossing one ankle over the other, completely at ease.

Percy, face already blotchy with stress, rose to question him, his mouth pursed like he’d bitten a lemon.

“Healer Nott,” Percy said stiffly, “you claim to be here in Madam Pomfrey’s stead. What exactly qualifies you to speak on Mr Malfoy’s behalf?”

Theo tilted his head, mock-thoughtful.

“Well, let’s see. Trained under Pomfrey herself, top marks at St Mungo’s Healer Programme, ran three trauma clinics overseas, and spent the better part of the last seven years patching this prat—” he jerked his thumb at Draco, “—back together after he tried to become a martyr by overworking himself.”

Another ripple of laughter.

Theo shrugged one elegant shoulder.

“Poppy—that’s Madam Pomfrey to you—personally asked me to come. I figured it was that or she’d hunt me down with a bezoar and a Bone-Mending Hex, so, here I am.”

Percy flushed. “And what, precisely, is your professional opinion of Mr Malfoy’s... rehabilitation?”

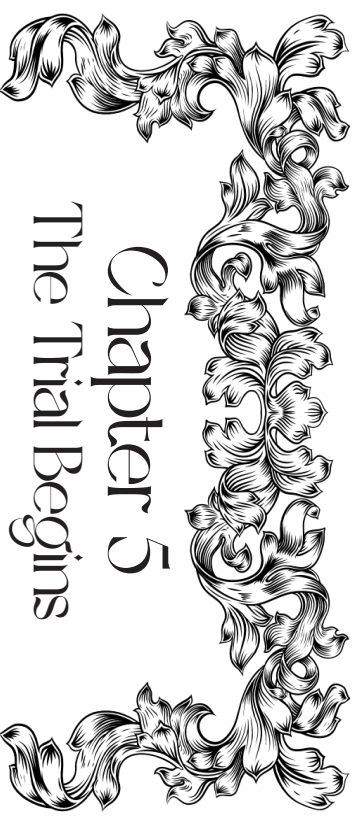
Theo adopted a deeply thoughtful expression, tapping his chin.

“Well, medically speaking? He’s in much better shape than most wizards his age. Stamina of a man twenty years younger, constitution of a bloody ox.”

Draco let out a soft, mortified groan and dropped his forehead briefly against the rail of the defendant’s table.

Theo grinned wider.

“Mentally? A bit of a stubborn git. Prone to overthinking. But stable. Healthy. Grounded. See, the thing about Draco Malfoy is - he’s a right git when he wants to be. Still has a mouth on him sharp enough to shave with.” Theo paused, flashing a grin. “But he’s also the most loyal bastard you’ll ever meet.”



Chapter 5 The Trial Begins

“The truth had never been kind. But this time, he was ready to meet it without apology.”

Draco Malfoy stood in the foyer of their townhouse, buttoning his navy robes with the precision of a man walking into war. The robes were plain, respectable. No embellishments. No wand holster. No family crest. No Malfoy silver weighing down his shoulders. Only a small pin on his lapel—a gift from Scorpius—shaped like a phoenix feather, charmed to shimmer faintly when the light caught it just right.

Behind him, the soft clink of ceramic drifted from the kitchen, accompanied by the unmistakable sound of Hermione muttering furiously under her breath.

“I should be going with you.”

Her voice was tight, trembling with that familiar stubbornness that had first drawn him to her. But he didn’t turn immediately. He stared out of the window at the heavy grey skies blanketing London, feeling the weight of expectation pressing against the glass. Only then did he turn to face her.

She stood framed in the kitchen doorway, arms crossed under her chest, her cardigan slipping from one shoulder. Her curls were tied up in a messy bun, loose strands escaping defiantly. Cassiopia, tiny and fierce, clung to her leg with one chubby hand, thumb firmly planted in her mouth, her big silver eyes sleepy but watchful.

Draco crossed to them in two long strides and crouched in front of his daughter.

“All right, little starlight,” he murmured, brushing a dark chestnut colored curl behind her ear. “You’ve got a very important mission today.”

Cassi blinked up at him, serious as any Slytherin planning world domination. “Watch Sco’rus?”

He nodded solemnly. “And help Mummy with the baby, yeah? Make sure she rests.”

Cassi considered this, then nodded sagely. “No yellin’. Mummy gets tickled.”

Draco smiled. “Exactly. No yelling. Only cuddles and biscuits.”

Cassi patted his cheek with sticky fingers and whispered, “You come back?”

His heart twisted painfully.

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honest, it's made me better at my job. More precise. More empathetic.” Harry studied him. “You won't miss your patients?”

Draco shrugged again. “I think I'll have more patients here. In a way.” They sat in silence for a while. The air was still, thick with unspoken thoughts. Harry did not have any more questions. Or better yet the ones he did he was afraid to ask.

Then Draco spoke.

“She still talks about you, sometimes,” he said quietly. “Despite everything I don't know if you deserve it. But she does. Because she's better than we'll ever be.”

Harry swallowed. “I didn't mean to hurt her.”

“But you did,” Draco said. Calm. Cold. True. “By doing nothing. By always taking the Weasels' side. By assuming she'd always be there to pick up the pieces.”

Harry bristled. “I never asked her to.”

Draco stood, shrugging on his coat. “That was the problem, Potter. You never asked her anything at all.”

Harry stood too. “Look, I don't hate you.”

Draco laughed. “Likewise. I don't like you much either, but I'm grateful you're not standing in my way. I assume that has more to do with Kingsley than with me.”

“You'd be surprised.”

Draco gave him a measured look. “Maybe. But make no mistake—if you ever make her cry again, I know at least four ways to make someone disappear without magic. I've seen films.”

Harry snorted. “Is that a threat?”

“Obviously, I'm married to a war heroine. I've got standards to maintain.”

They shared a look. And for the first time since stepping into that townhouse, Harry felt something shift.

Not forgiveness. Not quite.

But a truce. Of sorts.

They walked toward the exit in silence. At the door, Harry turned.

“I'll write everything truthfully in the report,” he said. “You're not a danger. Not anymore. I'll tell them that.”

Draco nodded. “Appreciate it.”

Harry hesitated.

“Malfoy... do you think she'll talk to me? I know I fucked up today more than I should have but I—”

Draco cut him off.

“Maybe,” he said. “Just don't fuck up my hearing tomorrow and we'll see. I can't promise anything. She's stubborn as a bat.”

Harry smiled faintly. “Yeah. She always was.”

They stepped outside into the dusky London evening, the sky streaked with the colours of coming rain.

The trial was tomorrow.

And everything was about to change.

Head over heels016

He let that hang in the air, before continuing, tone turning slightly more serious.

“When he was exiled, when everyone else turned their backs, some of us didn't.”

He shrugged casually, but Draco could see the tightness in his jaw.

“I was there. Helped him find his first flat in Sydney—which, by the way, was a complete shithole. The sort of place where you're more likely to befriend a giant spider than your neighbour.”

The courtroom rippled with quiet laughter.

Theo smirked. “Bought it outright because he had no access to his Gringotts accounts. Then wasted a frankly ridiculous amount of money on Portkeys every few months, just so I could come see the idiot when I wasn't training.”

He leaned forward a little, voice dropping into something quieter—less mocking.

“Because he's my best mate. My brother. And you don't leave family to rot just because it's easier.”

Draco looked down for a moment, throat burning.

Theo straightened again, tossing a wink toward the gallery where Pansy, Ginny, and Blaise sat grinning.

“And, of course, if I hadn't stuck around, I'd have missed the bloody spectacle of watching Draco Malfoy, Slytherin Pureblood Prince, fall ass over elbow in love.”

A few snickers rippled through the gallery.

Theo smirked.

“Most entertaining thing I've ever witnessed, by the way. Man went from ‘I trust no one' to ‘I'll murder the sun if it so much as looks at her wrong' in about a fortnight.”

Draco covered his mouth with his hand, shaking his head faintly.

Pansy absolutely howled with laughter.

Theo grinned wider, undeterred.

“And now?” he said, softer again. “Now I get to see the stubborn bastard be the daftest, happiest sap in existence. I get to watch him raise two brilliant kids. One of whom”—he added, voice catching slightly, “—is my godson. Best title I ever earned. And believe me, I have plenty.”

There was a silence then, heavy and golden.

Theo shrugged once more, almost sheepish.

“So yeah. I'd say he's changed.”

He gave Percy a winning smile.

“And hypothetically, if his wife happened to be someone absolutely terrifying, brilliant, and better than the rest of us combined? Well, it just proves he's not as thick as he looks.”

The courtroom broke into murmurs again, louder this time, eager, straining.

Percy tried—and failed—to regain control.

“You will refrain from—”

Theo cut him off lazily, waving a hand.

“Relax, Weasley. I'm just saying facts. Facts and hypotheticals. You lot can piece it together yourselves—if Mr Malfoy's wife were, say, an absolute legend in magical humanitarian circles, and smarter than the rest of us put together, and terrifying when annoyed... well, it would certainly have done wonders for his character development, wouldn't it?”

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More laughter rippled, louder now.

Pansy coughed violently into her fist to hide her snigger. Ginny openly grinned. Blaise wore the expression of a man being *greatly* entertained.

Only Ron Weasley looked like he might have a stroke on the spot. He was leaning so far forward he looked ready to vault the benches, his face a furious, splochy purple.

Theo caught it and, because he was Theo Nott, turned *right into it*.

“And hypothetically,” he went on blithely, “if said wife happened to be someone with more titles and degrees than the lot of us combined—someone you lot used to know quite well—well, wouldn’t that make for a delicious little scandal?”

The murmurs in the courtroom became a low roar.

Even the judge looked mildly intrigued.

Percy bristled. “This court is not here for your hypotheticals, Healer Nott.”

Theo smiled, all sharp teeth.

“Of course not. You’re here for truth, justice, and making complete asses of yourselves when it finally comes out in, oh, about thirty minutes or so.”

Draco coughed loudly to cover his snort. Pansy fanned herself dramatically, looking like she might faint from joy.

Blaise muttered under his breath, “Merlin save us, he’s going to get hexed.”

Ron finally exploded, leaping to his feet.

“Enough of this bloody farce!” he roared. “Just bloody say it! *Say her name!* You’re all cowards!”

Theo raised one languid eyebrow.

“Temper, temper, Weasley. Maybe that’s why *she* didn’t pick *you*.”

Dead silence.

The judge slammed her gavel three times, magic crackling through the chamber.

“Order! I will have order in this court!”

Ron was forcibly hauled back into his seat by a furious Ministry official, still shaking with rage. Theo gave a little bow—insolent and unapologetic.

“Your Honour, my apologies. I was merely offering a professional opinion, as requested.”

The judge glared at him but said tightly, “You are dismissed, Healer Nott. Immediately.”

Theo strolled out of the box with a smirk, tossing a wink at Draco and a two-fingered salute at Kingsley, who pinched the bridge of his nose as if fighting a headache.

Draco sat back, feeling his first real wave of relief since the trial had begun. They were chipping away at it. Slowly. But surely.

And if Ron Weasley’s purple face was anything to go by, the best—or worst—was yet to come.

The clerk called out the next name.

“Dr Daniel M. Chen, Chief of Magical Medicine at Sydney Royal Hospital, please step forward.”

A murmur swept the chamber. It was rare enough to have international testimony, rarer still for someone from the Muggle medical world to be summoned before the Wizengamot.

The heavy oak doors swung open.

Dr Chen strode into the courtroom with a kind of calm, easy authority that immediately

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“You’re an angel, Janice.”

Harry blinked. Did this Janice know about Draco’s exile.

As they started walking towards Draco’s office Harry heard him mutter “I’ve known

Janice since I did my practice. She’s a squib. She returned to London 2 years ago and when Hermione and I started preparing our return I contacted her. She was thrilled to go back into work and she really likes Hermione and the kids.”

Janice was a Squib. He hadn’t even noticed the faint magical pulse around her.

“She helps me juggle appointments and keep the Muggle world from collapsing into magical chaos,” Draco said as they walked. “Also brews the best tea this side of London. Bit of a legend, really. Especially back in Australia.”

They reached Draco’s office tucked down a quieter hallway. Harry stepped inside and paused.

It wasn’t grand. It wasn’t sterile. It felt... functional. Intentional. A desk covered in files and a laptop sat in the corner. A few framed certificates lined the walls. The tiny cactus leaned towards the sunlight filtering through the window. A Gryffindor mug sat on the desk.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

Draco followed his gaze and smirked. “It was a gift. She thinks she’s funny. Cursed it so I have to use it at least once a day if I’m in the office or it starts roaring. If I try to hide it, it’ll grow in size until I place it on my desk.”

“Sounds like her,” Harry said, a reluctant smile tugging at his lips.

Draco sat behind his desk and steeped his fingers. Harry didn’t speak at first. He looked around, taking it in. Then proceeded to do some spells and wand work for the inspection.

“So,” Draco said after Harry completed the perusal of his office, “ask your questions, Potter.”

“You’re truly not the man I remember.”

Draco shrugged. “Good. The boy you remember was a self-righteous, privileged bastard with a wand and no spine.”

Harry huffed a laugh. “True.”

A pause.

“What is it you actually do here? I mean... as a doctor. You mentioned something about trauma?”

Draco leaned back, thoughtful.

“I specialise in post-traumatic disorders and chronic magical injuries. For both Muggles and wizards,” he said. “Mostly mental health these days. The war didn’t just leave physical scars.

There are veterans with curse residue in their bones and nightmares that still wake them screaming. I help where I can. Magic doesn’t fix everything. Sometimes, Muggle medicine does more.”

Harry watched him for a moment.

“How do you do it with your wand restrictions?”

Draco smiled faintly. “That’s the funny part. I can use it in emergencies, in healing protocols, or if a patient requires it. But otherwise? I’ve learned to function with limited magic. To be

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when her heart still felt raw and bloody and stripped to the bone.

Instead, she stepped into the witness box, raised her right hand, and gave her oath.

Hermione Jean Granger, war heroine. War survivor. Wand snapped in torture, spine bent in shame, rebuilt in silence.

Her voice, when it came, was steel wrapped in silk.

“Miss Granger, do you confirm your presence at Malfoy Manor during the events of April 1998?”

“I do.”

“Can you confirm the accused, Mr Draco Malfoy, was present at the time?”

“I can.”

“Did Mr Malfoy actively participate in the torture inflicted upon you by Bellatrix Lestrange?”

“No.”

“Did he try to prevent it?”

Silence.

Hermione’s fingers gripped the edge of the stand.

“No. Not effectively. But he didn’t join in.”

“Did he *speak* against you?”

Her voice dropped lower. “No.”

“Did he ever raise a wand against you or Harry Potter or Ronald Weasley during the final months of the war?”

“No.”

A pause.

“Do you believe Mr Malfoy to be a threat to the public?”

Hermione raised her eyes then—not to the gallery, not to the Wizengamot, but to the ancient stone columns that surrounded them.

“I believe Draco Malfoy was a child handed an impossible task by a family drowning in fear. I believe he was raised in a world that taught him to hate people like me, and still, when it mattered, he *did not kill*. He ran. He hesitated. He made mistakes. But he didn’t become what they wanted him to be.”

Murmurs rippled through the chamber.

“Do you believe he should be granted exile over imprisonment?”

“Yes,” she said, voice firm. “Not because he deserves pity. But because he deserves the *chance* to prove who he’s become.”

“And if he fails?”

“Then let the law handle him. But don’t sentence him for what he might be. Sentence him for what he *did*. And what he *did not* do.”

There was no dramatic finish. No flourish.

She stepped down.

She walked past Ron without a glance, though he muttered something cruel under his breath—something about bleeding hearts and snakes. She didn’t hear it.

But Theo Nott did.

He was seated in the back, arms crossed, one leg over the other like he was barely tolerating the entire spectacle. He watched her walk down the aisle, silent, contained, and so clearly *done*

Head over heels016

with all of them.

And his eyes narrowed when she passed.

Ron was too busy scowling to notice Theo’s slow, deliberate glare.

The courtroom reconvened after an hour.

Hermione wasn’t there to hear the sentence.

Draco sat still in his chair, expression unreadable.

The robes of the Wizengamot rustled like leaves in wind as the judge rose.

“In recognition of his role in the war, his cooperation during the reconstruction efforts, and the testimony presented here today, this court offers Mr Draco Lucius Malfoy two options.”

The list was read slowly, clearly.

Option One: Permanent magical confinement at Malfoy Manor under constant monitoring for life. All wand and magic access revoked for the remainder of your life. All travel restricted. Inheritance permanently seized.

Option Two: Ten-year exile to a country of his choosing, limited wand use, monitored medical and occupational permissions, inheritance suspended during the full term.

Reparations to be paid are to be determined by the Wizengamot and may be reviewed yearly upon needed. Reinstatement possible upon review after the full term is met.

“You have twenty-four hours to decide, Mr Malfoy.”

Draco stood.

“I don’t need twenty-four hours,” he said, voice steady.

Gasps echoed.

“I choose exile.”

The courtroom erupted—half in disbelief, half in outrage.

But Draco didn’t flinch. He turned, nodded once to his solicitor, and sat back down.

The sky outside the Ministry was bruised with stormlight when Hermione finally slipped away. She didn’t speak to the press. She didn’t return to Grimmauld Place. She didn’t even go home.

Her feet took her somewhere safe. Somewhere true.

Kingsley Shacklebolt’s townhouse in Notting Hill had once belonged to his great-aunt. The door was always unlocked for her. The wards always allowed her through.

By the time she arrived, her robes were soaked and her boots heavy with London rain. She didn’t knock. She didn’t have to.

The front door opened on its own.

Kingsley stood in the hallway, tea already in hand, eyes filled with knowing.

“I was wondering when you’d come,” he said gently.

“I need to leave,” she said without preamble, her voice rasped from the courtroom and the ache she hadn’t let herself feel. “I need to go to Australia. I need to start the memory reversal protocol. I need to—bloody hell—I need to be someone other than this.”

Kingsley didn’t flinch. He stepped aside to let her in and closed the door behind her with a soft click.

The warmth of his sitting room wrapped around her like a blanket. The fire was already lit. Jasmine-scented steam curled from a waiting mug.

Ouns To Keep

"I've already filed the paperwork," he said, as if they were discussing something as simple as parchment requests.

Hermione blinked. "What?"

He smiled. Not wide—soft, sad. "You were never going to stay, Hermione. Not after everything. Not when you've been bleeding for a country that kept asking you to bleed more."

She swallowed hard. "I—"

"I know," he said. "I know."

He handed her the tea. She didn't drink it. Her hands trembled too badly to hold the cup steady.

"Today after the trial..." she began, voice barely audible. "It felt like everything came undone."

Kingsley lowered himself into the armchair across from her. "Because it did."

Hermione looked up at him. "I heard they asked him to choose between *exile* and *house arrest*. And they expect me to sit here and clap because at least it wasn't Azkaban."

Kingsley's jaw tightened. "They wanted to make an example of someone. And he was the last one left."

"I thought I was helping," she whispered. "I thought if I spoke—if I stood up there and told the truth—they'd listen."

"They heard you," Kingsley said. "But hearing doesn't mean understanding. And understanding doesn't always mean doing the right thing."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I'm so tired, Kingsley."

He leaned forward and took her hand, strong and grounding. "You've done enough."

The words landed like a balm. The kind she hadn't realised she needed. Not from Harry. Not from Ron. Not even from her parents.

But from someone who *saw* her.

"You have *always* been my favourite," he said, smiling faintly. "Don't tell the others. I'll deny it."

Hermione laughed—wet and hoarse and real. She looked down. "I feel like I've been breaking into pieces for months. For years."

"Then it's time to put yourself back together somewhere else," he said. "Somewhere that doesn't expect you to fix everyone else's mess while burning your own life to ash."

She took a shuddering breath. "You really think I should go?"

"I think," Kingsley said slowly, "that it's about bloody time you stopped asking permission."

He stood, walked over to his desk, and returned with a thick parchment scroll sealed with deep blue wax.

"The International Confederation of Wizards' Magical Security Council sent this two weeks ago. They've requested you join their leadership team in Australia. Help them rebuild what war destroyed. They want you to help shape policy, assist in reparations, build protective frameworks for vulnerable magical populations across borders. Their homebase was here, close to the Muggle UN but after Voldemort they decide to move it to a less hostile country with bigger opportunities for negotiations."

He paused. "They want *you*, Hermione."

Her mouth fell open. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Head over heels016

He looked pained. "He didn't mean to throw it—"

She laughed. It was a horrible sound. "He *did*. And you *watched*. Next time it'll be his fist at my face."

Harry looked helpless. "Don't say that. I-I didn't know what to do—"

"You never do," she shouted. "Not when I needed you. Not during the war. Not when the papers started tripping me apart. Not when I begged for your help!"

"I'm tired too, Hermione!" Harry exploded. "Why do I always have to be the one who fixes things? Who mediates? Who takes the blame? What about you, huh? When have *you* ever done enough?"

The words landed like a slap.

Hermione stared at him, stunned.

She took one step back. Then another.

"When have I ever done enough?" she whispered. "Is that what you think?"

She looked at both of them, hollowed out.

"I brew polyjuice for you when I was twelve. Fought a werewolf at thirteen. Helped you with the triwizard tournament when everyone else turned their backs on you. Almost died at the Department of Mysteries when you didn't listen to me. I planned the Horcrux hunt. I took the fall for your mistakes. I got tortured for being born because you couldn't resist saying a stupid name. I erased myself from my parents' lives to protect them, and then I stayed here—for *you*."

Neither of them said a word.

"You want to know when I haven't done enough?" she whispered. "When I stayed. I'm going to Australia. I'm going to find my parents. And I'm going to fix what I broke."

Ron sneered. "Fine. Run. That's what you're good at."

She looked at him for the last time and said: "I'm not running. I'm *leaving*. There's a difference."

With one last glance at Harry and with tears in her eyes, she apparated.

The next morning, the Ministry of Magic was draped in silence, the air still as if mourning what it had become. The final Death Eater trial had drawn not just reporters, but witches and wizards from every corner of Britain. It was the end of a war they could not seem to bury—and the boy at the centre of it, the last remnant of a once-feared name, was about to receive his sentence.

Draco Malfoy.

Hermione Granger entered the courtroom without preamble.

Her robes were plain black, unfitted and severe. Her curls were scraped back into a knot, her face bare, her wand hanging limp at her side. There were no Ministry escorts. No friends at her heels. No smile for the photographers outside.

She was done smiling.

She didn't look at the front row where Harry sat flanked by Kingsley and two senior Aurors. She didn't glance at Ron, seated beside Percy with a familiar sneer already twisting his face. She didn't even look at *Dylan*.

Not because she didn't want to—but because she couldn't. Not after the day before. Not

Ours To Keep

"I'm saying you're got *me*," Ron said, taking a step forward, eyes shining with something dark. "You've got my family. That's enough, isn't it? What more do you need? You don't have to go chasing after ghosts."

"Ron, don't," Harry tried, already uneasy.

Ron's mouth twisted. "No. She needs to hear it. She's always so fucking high and mighty—*Saint Hermione*, smartest witch alive, but still doesn't know when to stop."

Hermione's hands curled into fists at her sides. "I defended *you*."

Ron's expression faltered for a moment.

"I stood by you. I saved your arse. Again and again."

"Well, congratulations," he said bitterly. "Want another medal?"

Harry stood, stepping forward. "Alright, that's enough."

"You think you're too good for me now, is that it?" he exploded. "After everything we've been through, everything I gave up for you, and you want to run back to those Muggles like we never mattered!"

She recoiled as though struck. Her voice came out cold, detached—too calm for how much she was shaking. "Don't you *dare* compare what I did to protect my family to your bleeding ego. I broke off our engagement because I couldn't marry someone who doesn't *see* me. Who doesn't *respect* me. You didn't *love* me, Ron - you loved the idea of *me*, the one who stuck around when no one else would."

"Rubbish," he growled. "You're *mine*. You always were!"

"And only because Lavender Brown is too traumatized to be with you!" she shouted. "You settled for me. And now you want me to be grateful for it!"

Ron's face went blotchy red.

"FUCK YOU!"

He turned and grabbed the nearest thing—a photo frame of the three of them at Grimmauld Place—and hurled it across the room. It shattered against the wall with a thunderous crack, glass skittering across the floor.

Hermione flinched. Hard.

Harry surged forward. "RON! What the *fuck* is wrong with you?!"

Ron pointed at Hermione, trembling with rage. "*She* is what's wrong. She always *has* been. Twisting things. Playing victim. Acting like she's the only one who's ever suffered!"

Hermione's voice broke. "I loved you. I tried."

"You *lied* me."

"I *survived* you."

The words hung in the air like a curse.

Ron was panting now, chest heaving, nostrils flaring. "You think you're better than me. Better off alone, then fine. Be childish. Be alone."

Hermione met his gaze. "No. I think I've grown. And I think you're still the boy who ran from a tent in the middle of a war because things got hard."

Silence.

Harry looked like he'd been winded.

Ron's mouth opened, but no sound came.

Hermione turned to Harry. "And you. You stood there. Again. Just like always."

Head over heels016

"Because I knew you wouldn't believe you deserved it. Not until now."

She stared at the seal in her hands. "It's too much."

"No," he said, stepping back. "It's exactly enough."

The rain outside slowed to a hush against the windows.

"I'll leave in three days," she said quietly. "After I've packed. After I've sent letters."

Kingsley nodded once. "And when you're ready to return—if you're ready to return—the Council's projects will be accepted. You can bring it back. And I'll make sure their doors are open here in Britain, if that's where the tide turns next."

She looked up, eyes rimmed red. "You'll really do that?"

He smiled. "You're family, Hermione. You will *always* be family."

And that—that was when she finally cried.

Not from exhaustion.

Not from guilt.

But from the kind of relief that came when someone you trusted *finally told you it was okay to stop bleeding*.

Head over heels016

missed my parents' location tracker appointment *twice* because you two wanted me to go on some fucking interview for *Witch Weekly*."

Her voice rose. "I've been trotted around like a war trophy for a year! Galas, press junkets, bloody Ministry ribbon-cuttings—"

"We all had responsibilities—"

"I didn't *want* them!" she cried. "I wanted to leave. To go to Australia. To undo the spell I *cast* to protect the only family I had left. But you both—you *both* *stopped* me. Again and again. I stayed for *you*!"

Harry shifted, uncomfortable. "Hermione—"

She turned to him. "Don't pretend you don't know. I begged you both to let me go to Australia. I asked, and every time, I got told to wait. Just one more event, Hermione. Just one more bloody ceremony. You needed me to stand behind you so people didn't forget we were a trio. So you both didn't sound like idiots everytime you opened your mouths to speak."

Harry looked stung.

"You made me choose between being a hero and being a daughter," she whispered. "And I chose you. Again."

The room was silent.

A knock came at the window—sharp, rhythmic.

An owl, large and proud, was tapping impatiently on the glass. Hermione walked over stiffly, unlatched the pane, and took the letter it held.

The seal was unfamiliar—embossed with a southern star and a golden wand.

Her hands shook as she opened it.

Dear Ms Granger,

Your parents have been located. They are currently residing in Melbourne under the names Wendell and Monica Wilkins. Their health is stable. Should you wish to begin the memory reversal protocol, the Department of Magical Wellness is prepared to assist.

Please respond at your earliest convenience.

Counsellor Mireya Fortesque, Australian Division

She stared at the parchment for a long time.

"I can get them back," she whispered. "I can bring them home."

Ron snorted. "You're still on about that? Stupid."

Hermione stared at him.

"They're your *parents*, Hermione. We won. This is your world now."

Her lip trembled, but she didn't cry. "You think I should *forget* them?"

Ron shrugged. "They were never really part of this world. Why drag it up again?"

"You selfish, *ignorant*—"

"Alright, that's enough," Harry cut in, voice strained.

Hermione turned to him, eyes blazing. "No. Don't *do* that. Don't protect him. Not again. Not like always."

Harry stepped back, frowning. "He's not well. He's grieving."

"So am I!" she shouted. "But I'm not using it as an excuse to be cruel. All the time."

She looked between them, shaking.

Ours To Keep

Harry was across from her, slouched on the edge of the armchair, a half-empty mug of tea going cold in his grip. His wand lay forgotten on the table. His eyes were red-rimmed, though not from tears.

"You know the truth," he said again, quieter this time. "You know what he was. Will always be."

Hermione's jaw clenched. "I know *a* truth. I know *his* truth. And I know the truth that no one wants to say aloud: that he was a child, Harry."

"A coward," Harry muttered.

"A pawn," she corrected. "Manipulated. Terrified. Desperate."

"He still had a choice."

"And so did you. So did Ron. So did I. We all made choices that year that we're not proud of. Did unimaginable things."

Harry flinched.

"I'm not defending his actions. I'm defending the fact that he's not the monster the world wants to remember him as. He didn't kill. He didn't torture. He didn't run when he could have."

"You know that. You saw it. He gave you his wand."

Harry looked down at his hands.

"You've always defended him," he said eventually. "Even during sixth year."

"No," she replied. "I defend the *truth*."

Before Harry could respond, the door creaked open behind them.

Ron entered, eyes bloodshot, robe collar skewed, the scent of fireworks clinging to him like regret.

Hermione went still.

So did Harry.

Ron took them in with a bitter smirk. "Still arguing about your favourite Death Eater?"

Hermione didn't speak.

Ron's voice slurred slightly as he leaned against the wall. "What's there to debate? He's guilty. Filth, like the rest of his lot. Should've stayed in Azkaban, the little ferret."

"Ron—" Harry warned.

"No. Let him," Hermione said, tone flat and distant.

Ron's eyes narrowed on her. "What, defending him now too, are you? You always were the bleeding heart. Couldn't help yourself. First the house-elves, then Snape, now Malfoy. Maybe you've got a type."

Her spine stiffened.

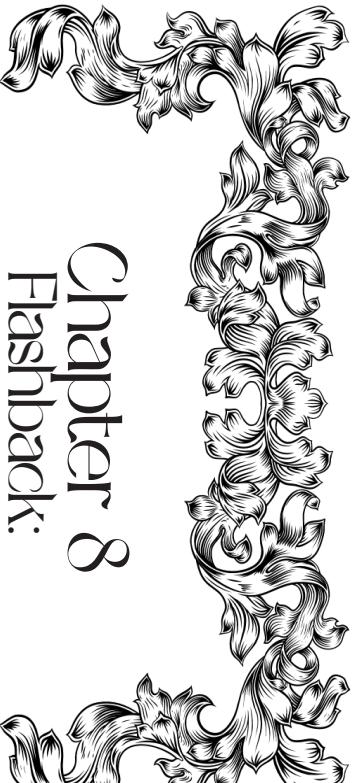
"You've got no idea what you're talking about."

"Oh, don't I?" he scoffed. "You spent half the war talking about 'justice' and 'fairness,' and now you're the Ministry's pet. The puppet. Doing interviews, waving your wand at gals, giving press statements like it means anything. Meanwhile, my family suffers and I'm sent to Auror training like if I didn't just fight in a bloody war. You don't see anyone asking me for interviews or to rewrite some stupid law."

"I didn't ask for any of it," she said through her teeth.

Ron laughed, a low, unpleasant sound. "You could've said no."

"I *did*," she snapped. "But they guilted me into it. You guilted me into it. Both of you. I



Chapter 8

Flashback:

Fight Paths and Foundations

"Exile isn't just a place. It's the quiet between everything you were and everything you're forced to become."

Three days after the trial

Ministry of Magic – Department of Magical Justice

Three days after his sentencing, Draco sat in a cold, under-lit chamber two floors beneath the Ministry's Department of Magical Law Enforcement. The walls were lined with ageing records and surveillance ledgers, and the only sound came from the steady scratch of quills and the faint hum of the enchanted lighting above.

Before him sat a thick manila folder marked in bold, crimson ink:

RELOCATION & SURVEILLANCE - CLASS 3: MALFOY, DRACO L.

It looked as though someone had spilled blood across the cover, which felt, frankly, appropriate.

Draco didn't fidget. He didn't pace. He sat unmovingly still—shoulders squared, jaw locked, chin raised in the defiant posture of a man whose pride refused to be exiled even if he was.

To his right sat two administrative clerks from the International Relocation Office, both so bland they seemed conjured out of policy parchment. Across from him, taking up far too much space with his swollen ego and over-polished boots, was Calder Flint—Ministry-appointed Liaison Officer for Exiled Magical Citizens.

Flint tapped his wand against the table, flipping through a stack of placement parchments as if sorting out where to send expired potions ingredients.

"France is off the table," he announced. "Too many familial links. Your mother's bloodline still has influence over the Lyons Council. Would be considered a political risk."

Draco nodded curtly. "Expected."

Ouns To Keep

“Bulgaria?” one of the clerks offered, not looking up.

“Absolutely not,” Draco replied, voice clipped. “I’ve no intention of freezing to death while being politely loathed by an entire village of Durmstrang devotees. Or worse—playing Quidditch to pass the time.”

“Russia?” the other clerk asked without enthusiasm.

Draco gave them a look that could have melted stone. “Do I look like I’d survive a Siberian winter?”

“Brazil rejected the application outright,” said a woman named Greaves, her tone dry as dust. “They’re rather against housing anyone tied to the Second War. Especially... well.” She gestured vaguely at him.

“How delightfully progressive of them,” Draco muttered.

“That leaves us with three viable options,” Flint cut in, ignoring the sarcasm. “Canada, the United States, or Australia.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed. “What are we working with?”

Flint tapped his wand, and three parchment maps floated in the air before them.

“Canada is heavily warded. Cold winters. Magical communities are small but stable. Regulated by the Royal Magical Agency out of Ottawa. Strong Muggle integration. Might be difficult for someone like you.”

Draco didn’t flinch.

“The States?” Flint continued, “are...chaotic. Fragmented. Too many jurisdictions. You could get lost there—literally or legally.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Templing. And Australia?”

“Australia is distant. Quiet. Magical community is relatively modern. Strong ties to the British Ministry, but independent in most regulatory affairs. Excellent security, low Death Eater sympathies, and—most importantly—they’re willing.”

Greaves leaned forward. “It’s also strictly monitored. You’d be expected to follow a high-surveillance lifestyle as stated by the Wizengamot and they will follow these regulations. Regular liaison check-ins. Minimal wand access. No active magical employment unless specifically approved. Muggle job placements are handled through the Department of Integration.”

Draco considered it. The sunlight. The sea. The silence. The distance from everything—and everyone—who would look at him like a shadow of his father.

“Australia,” he said finally. “Send me there.”

Flint raised a brow. “Any particular reason?”

Draco met his eyes. His voice was low but steady.

“I want to go somewhere no one will follow me.”

Greaves nodded and pulled a stack of parchments from her satchel, each lined with formal runes and signatures.

“Stipend will be issued monthly in Galleons,” she began, voice crisp and practiced, “converted through Gringotts’ international bureau. Travel is restricted to Commonwealth territories. Wand access is limited to personal use: hygiene, medical self-care, and minor protective charms in case of direct threat. Active magical employment is prohibited unless formally approved under the Muggle Integration Programme.”

She glanced up to make sure he understood. Draco nodded.

Head over heels

Granger—what happened to you, to your friends, to your world—was not lost on me. I carry it with me. Every day.”

Her voice cracked, just barely.

“I raised him to be proud. I didn’t raise him to survive a war.”

Hermione swallowed the lump in her throat. “He *did* survive. So did you.”

Narcissa met her eyes. “Yes. And now we must all live with the aftermath.”

She stepped back, nodded once, and turned without another word.

Hermione stood alone in the corridor, the envelope cold in her hand.

She opened it slowly, heart thudding.

The letter inside was brief. Straightforward. No embellishments.

Miss Granger,

I understand you've chosen to speak on my behalf. I do not know why you
do. I presume to leave it.

I will not beg the Wizengamot for forgiveness. I will not make excuses for
what I was or what I did.

I will accept the consequences of my actions—as a man should.

But I wanted to... acknowledge your courage. Not just in this, but always.

Thank you.

—D.L.M.

That was it.

No sentiment. No emotion. No explanation.

He wrote to her like she was a stranger.

And maybe she was. Maybe they all were now.

But something about it—about the calm resolve in his words, the lack of bitterness or self-

pitry-bultered her.

She didn’t understand why he’d written it.

Didn’t understand why *she* had been the one he asked for.

But tomorrow, she would stand in front of the court anyway. Her and Harry.

Not for him.

But because someone had to remind them that people could change—and that justice required more than punishment.

And as she folded the letter and slipped it into her folder, Hermione realised something else:

This trial wasn’t just about Draco Malfoy.

It was about all of them.

And what they chose to become in the ashes.

The lamps in Grimmauld Place flickered low, the walls saturated with shadows that felt heavier than usual. It was still too quiet in the spaces Sirius once haunted, and though they’d scrubbed the curses from the floorboards and banished the Black family’s toxic artefacts, nothing could scrub away the past.

Hermione stood near the hearth, arms crossed so tightly her fingers had gone numb. She hadn’t sat down once. Not since she’d arrived.

Because someone had to speak for mance. For truth. For the *chill* who had been conscripted into darkness by the very people meant to protect him.

Because justice without compassion was just vengeance dressed in law.

And yet...

The whispers followed her like Dementors.

“Granger’s gone soft.”

“She must’ve lost her bloody mind.”

“Defending a Malfoy-what next, kissing Snatchers on the mouth?”

A flashbulb went off to her left—a reporter from *The Prophet*, scribbling notes with a Howler-inked quill that shrieked every time it made a punctuation mark.

“Hermione, love! A quote for the readers? How does it feel to be the Ministry’s favourite pet project and the Dark Lord’s newest defence team all in the same breath?”

She didn’t stop walking. Didn’t flinch. Just lifted her chin higher and kept moving.

Behind her, she could hear someone hiss, “Bloody disgrace, that one. War hero to traitor in twelve months flat.”

She turned the corner and nearly collided with a figure dressed in sleek, dark green robes.

Hermione froze.

Narcissa Malfoy stood before her, still regal despite the ash of war clinging to her aura. Her hair was pulled into a severe chignon, her gloves delicate lace, and her wand tucked visibly at her side—not in defiance, but duty. She looked thinner, older, and entirely different from the woman who had once glared at her across a crumbling drawing room.

They stared at each other for a long moment.

Then Narcissa inclined her head.

“Miss Granger.”

Hermione, caught off guard, gave a slight nod. “Mrs Malfoy.”

There was a quiet beat between them. Heavy. Measured.

Narcissa finally spoke, her voice low and even.

“I know what they’re saying. About you.”

Hermione didn’t answer.

“I know what they’ll say about you tomorrow.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Hermione said quietly. “It’s not about them.”

A small smile ghosted across Narcissa’s lips. Tired. Grateful. Sad.

“Nevertheless... I wished to thank you.”

Hermione blinked. “You don’t owe me thanks.”

“No,” Narcissa agreed. “But you deserve it.”

She reached into her bag and withdrew a parchment envelope. The seal was simple—no crest, no wax, just his name in small, neat script across the front.

“My son asked me to give you this. He wrote it yesterday. He... I think he didn’t expect you to read it, but hoped you might.”

Hermione hesitated, then took the letter.

Narcissa’s gloved fingers brushed hers.

“I don’t expect your forgiveness. I don’t even ask it. But... I want you to know, Miss

“Annual reviews will determine if additional liberties can be extended. However, the terms of exile—namely, geographical restriction and partial magical suppression—will remain for the full duration unless officially lifted by Ministerial order.”

“Charming,” Draco muttered under his breath. “All that’s missing is a numbered robe and a collar.”

Flint offered a thin smile. “You’re lucky we’re not tattooing it on your arm.”

Draco said nothing. He simply picked up the Ministry quill, signed his name at the bottom of the relocation contract, and pushed the parchment back across the table.

Australia it would be.

Far enough from his sins to build something new.

Or at the very least, to stop them from following him.



The Portkey platform sat just beyond the Ministry’s international travel wing—tucked between a tired statue of a Welsh Green and a plaque commemorating magical cooperation during wartime. It was ironic, really, how many things were named for peace and unity in a building that had seen more blood and silence than either.

Draco stood quietly at the edge of the terminal, his fingers clenched around the thin handle of the one trunk he was allowed to take. Inside were basic clothes, an assortment of letters, a few worn books, and a flask of brandy hidden beneath layers of parchment. He was leaving behind everything else.

The heels clicked before he saw her.

“Mother.”

“My dragon,” Narcissa whispered, her voice catching like thread on rough stone.

She was wearing navy robes—dignified, understated—and her platinum hair was swept into a bun that strained against her temples. A stark brooch in the shape of a camellia glinted against her chest. It had been her sister’s, once.

They embraced. Not as the world had always seen them—pure-blood aristocracy, aloof and severe—but as a mother and her only child saying goodbye.

“I thought he’d come,” Draco murmured into her shoulder.

Narcissa’s fingers stilled on his back. “They wouldn’t allow it. Not after last month.”

Lucius had tried to petition for visitation. The Ministry had denied it. One too many letters with bitter ink and prideful phrases. One too many reminders of a world they were all trying to forget.

Draco pulled away gently. “Is he...?”

“He’s quiet now,” she said. “Reads in the garden. Watches the wind. He talks of you often.”

Draco nodded tightly. “I don’t hate him.”

“I know.”

They stood like that for a few more seconds—two people suspended in the space between failure and forgiveness.

Ours To Keep

Narcissa finally pressed a small folded piece of parchment into his palm. “From me. Open it when you arrive.”

“I will.”

“And write. Even if it’s just to tell me you hate the heat.”

Draco almost laughed, a rasp of breath through his nose. “I’ll miss you.”

“You’d better,” she whispered, eyes bright. “And if you ever feel like it’s too much—remember what I told you. You are not him. You never were.”

They didn’t say goodbye. Not truly.

The Portkey operator, a squat wizard with an oversized watch, cleared his throat loudly.

“Next departure. Step forward, Malfoy.”

He nodded once, pressed a hand over Narcissa’s fingers, and stepped toward the humming rune circle.

Behind him, a pair of junior Ministry clerks were whispering, too loud and too smug for the solemnity of the moment.

“Did you hear? Granger’s gone. Vanished last week. No forwarding contact. Not even Potter knows.”

“Probably sick of all the arse-kissing,” the other muttered. “You’d leave too if they made you read her press releases one more time.”

Draco didn’t react.

But the name stayed with him.

Granger Gone?

A flicker of something moved in his chest—not quite curiosity. Not quite relief. Just... pause.

And then, with a final breath of London air and a flash of magic beneath his boots, Draco Lucius Malfoy vanished.

He didn’t look back.

And the world he left behind didn’t stop to watch.



One Week Later - Inner Sydney

The sun was melting over the jagged outline of Sydney’s cityscape, casting long orange streaks across the cracked concrete and rusted steel of the neighbourhood Draco now called home. The air was thick with the scent of smog and distant ocean salt, a strange and uninviting blend. Somewhere nearby, a tram groaned by, trailing sparks from its magical conductor lines.

Theo Nott stood outside a building that looked like it had once been condemned—and had somehow missed the memo. The brick facade was chipped and stained, the iron staircase leading to the upper flats twisted slightly, like it had weathered a dozen bad spells and refused to fall apart out of spite. The number on the door was scrawled in what looked suspiciously like blood.

He climbed the stairs, each creak echoing in the dusk, and knocked twice.

When the door opened, Draco Malfoy stood behind it, looking... well, not like Draco



The Breaking Year

“Some endings come not with a bang, but with a slow, relentless ache—until the silence is the only thing that still feels like yours.”

One year after the Battle of Hogwarts June, 1999

The halls of the newly rebuilt Ministry of Magic still echoed like a war memorial.

The ceiling might have been polished, the marble repaired, the portraits re-enchanted to smile again—but nothing could scrape away the stain that still clung to the walls. The war had bled into every corner of magical Britain, and the Ministry bore the worst of it. The ghosts here weren’t spectral—they were memories. Faces. Headlines. Names etched into the stone steps by grieving families who refused to let them be forgotten.

Hermione Granger walked those steps like she was walking into battle.

Again.

The day before the final Death Eater trial and she was already exhausted.

It had been a year. A year since Voldemort had fallen. A year since Hogwarts had been reduced to rubble and rebuilt in shadow. A year since Fred died, and Remus, and Tonks, and Colin, and—

She swallowed.

Her hand tightened on the folder in her grip. Inside were her notes, transcripts, statements. Every page she’d compiled in her preparation for *Draco Malfoy’s* trial.

The last one.

The one that would either close the chapter—or rip it open again.

And she was going to defend him.

Not as a friend. Not as a sympathiser. Certainly not as anything sentimental. But because it was the right thing to do.

Head over heels016

Malfoy at all.

His hair was flat and uneven, his shirt creased and faded, and his jeans hung on him like they hadn't been washed—or filled out—in weeks. He literally looked like someone who never had to survive by themselves and lived life with a silver platter. The flat behind him smelled faintly of burnt toast, rotting takeaway, and something Theo couldn't quite place but suspected was either a dead Kneazle or despair.

"You look like someone shaved a moody ghost and taught it to stand upright," Theo announced.

Draco blinked at him like he wasn't sure if he was real. "Theo?"

"You were expecting the fucking Prophet?" Theo shoved past him, looked around the room, and groaned. "Merlin's bollocks, Draco. What is this place?"

"My prison," Draco muttered. "What are you doing here?"

"Sighseeing. Obviously." He turned, arms crossed. "I told you I'd check on you."

"I didn't expect you to mean it."

Theo scoffed. "Yeah, and yet, here I am. Mad, rich, and clearly suffering from a hero complex."

Draco tried to close the door. Theo stuck his foot in.

"Don't even start," Theo warned. "I brought supplies."

He shoved a magically expanded duffel bag into Draco's chest, nearly knocking him back onto the mouldy armchair. "Clothes. Books. Two bottles of Firewhisky. And a loaf of actual bread. I checked the cupboards—you're living off dry cereal and bitterness."

"I don't need—"

"I don't care," Theo snapped. "This place is a shithole, and you look like you've been sleeping in a bloody grave. Pack up. You're coming with me."

"I can't afford anything else," Draco said quietly. "This is it. I don't have a job. I'm not allowed to use magic for work. They barely let me use my wand for shaving, let alone conjuring fucking housing."

Theo's jaw tightened. He stepped forward and jabbed a finger at Draco's chest.

"I don't give a flying fuck about your pride, Malfoy. You've got one friend willing to fly halfway across the world and drop more Galleons on your sorry arse than I spent on my last broomstick. You think I'm letting you rot in this misery cave because you're too stubborn to say thank you?"

Draco flinched, just barely.

And Theo saw it—the exhaustion, the quiet grief, the self-loathing bleeding out through his silence.

"This isn't charity," Theo said, softer now. "This is what you do for family. So shut up, take the bag, and come see the flat I found. It's not exactly Malfoy Manor, but at least it doesn't smell like murder."

Draco looked down at the worn duffel in his hands. Then up at Theo.

"... You're not staying," he said eventually. "You've got a job. A life. You're not supposed to—"

Theo barked a laugh. "Mate, I spent half my gold on shiny Portkeys and customs bribes just to make sure you hadn't hexed yourself into a coma. I'm staying long enough to get you set

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up. And if I have to smuggle in actual Muggle vitamins and sunshine, I will.”

Draco, despite himself, gave the faintest huff of amusement. “You’re ridiculous.”

“And you’re depressing,” Theo replied. “Come on. Let’s fix that.”

They moved into a modest, clean one-bedroom on the quieter side of Newtown—an up-and-coming part of the city with just enough magical footprint to let Draco blend in, and enough Muggle bustle to drown out his memories. The walls were freshly painted. The plumbing worked. There was a bed that didn’t creak like a death knell.

Theo covered the deposit with a flourish and hexed the old blinds into blooming lavender curtains. Draco grumbled the entire time.

“I’m not taking your money.”

“It’s not a loan,” Theo replied, tossing a throw pillow at his face. “It’s an investment in not watching you die of passive misery. I’m doing this for me.”

Draco unpacked a few tattered books and set them on the shelf with care.

“You’re serious about this, aren’t you?” he asked quietly.

Theo paused in the doorway, leaning against the frame.

“I watched you break in that courtroom,” he said. “I watched you walk into exile like you’d earned every bloody scar. So yeah. I’m serious. You’ve got more to live for than rotting in some Ministry-approved hovel.”

He tossed Draco a cold Butterbeer from the fridge.

“Besides. I want to be there when you fall in love like a sap and make a fool of yourself. It’s coming. I can feel it.”

Draco caught the bottle and gave him a look. “You’re delusional.”

“And you’re overdue for some ridiculous happiness. So shut up and drink.”

Draco stared at the bottle for a long moment.

Then he popped the cap and took a swig.

The first real drink in this second life.

It didn’t fix everything.

But it was a start.



26 Hours Earlier—Heathrow Airport, London Muggle Terminal, Gate 43

Hermione Granger sat alone, legs crossed at the ankle, her fingers curled tightly around a worn copy of *The Ethics of Magical Governance in Post-War Societies*, charmed to look like a muggle romance novel. It was a book she’d read before—more than once—but tonight, the words blurred uselessly across the page.

Her boarding pass peeked out from between the pages like a quiet accusation:

Flight 462 | LHR → SYD | Seat 2A | First Class

A one-way ticket. No return date.

The fluorescent lighting overhead hummed too loudly. The Muggle announcements on the

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The judge hammered the gavel, magic sparking from its base as she barked for order.

“Silence! The witness will be heard in full before any further outbursts!”

But the damage was done.

The court, the country, the very air had shifted.

Hermione Granger—Hermione Malfoy—had shattered whatever fragile expectations remained.

And standing across the room, Draco Malfoy couldn’t look away.

He could hardly breathe.

There she was.

Everything he’d ever fought for.

Everything he’d ever been terrified to hope for.

His wife.

His anchor.

His impossible, unstoppable miracle.

And she was standing before the whole of Wizarding Britain, not hiding. Not apologising. Not begging for forgiveness.

Claiming him.

Declaring it without shame, without hesitation.

His.

Hermione turned, catching his gaze across the courtroom.

And she smiled.

Soft.

Fierce.

Unbreakable.

We’re not afraid anymore, her eyes said.

Not of the world.

Not of their past.

Not of anything.

Draco’s chest burned with something wild and painful and beautiful.

Mine, he thought, overwhelmed.

She’s mine. And I’ll always be hers.

The judge banged the gavel again, calling for silence with mounting desperation.

But the chaos roared around them.

Hermione turned back to face the uproar, standing tall, unbreakable.

The world had changed.

And she was leading the charge. Forever.

Ours To Keep

She walked forward, each step measured and deliberate, her magic crackling softly in the air around her like a gathering storm.

Unbending.

Unwavering.

Unapologetic.

The Wizengamot watched, entranced and horrified all at once, as she moved to the centre podium without hesitation.

The reporters tipped over themselves to start scribbling.

The judge, caught visibly off guard, gestured her to proceed.

Hermione's chin lifted.

Her voice rang out, strong and clear as a bell across the ancient stone chamber.

"Hermione Jean Malfoy, née Granger," she declared, every syllable deliberate, deliberate enough to leave bruises. "Head of the International Confederation of Wizards' Magical Security Council."

She paused, the silence aching.

"And I am speaking on behalf of my husband, *Draco Lucius Malfoy*."

For a split second—no more—absolute silence.

And then the courtroom *exploded*.

The room *exploded*.

A cacophony of gasps, outraged shouts, scraping quills, frantic whispers.

Someone dropped a camera—the crash echoing off the high ceilings.

Percy Weasley shot to his feet, stuttering so hard he nearly swallowed his own tongue.

"This-this is outrageous!"

Ron bellowed something unintelligible, scrambling to his feet, only to be yanked back down by two startled Aurors.

"WHAT?"

His scream ricocheted off the chamber walls.

He looked as if someone had hexed him between the eyes.

Furious colour rose in his cheeks, a deep, blotchy red of rage and disbelief.

"You can't—I You-she's—I!"

He couldn't seem to form a full sentence.

Theo was grinning like Christmas had come early.

Pansy had both hands pressed dramatically to her chest, pretending to faint—only to open one eye and wink at Neville.

Blaise leaned back in his chair, smug as a Sphinx with a secret.

Ginny was grinning ferociously, as if daring anyone to speak against it.

George simply sat still, lips pressed into a faint, sad smile.

"*Married?*"

"*To Malfoy?*"

"*That's impossible—*"

"*How-when—?*"

The press surged like a flood, flashbulbs going off wildly, desperate for a better glimpse. Kingsley remained impassive, watching the chaos unfold with a grim sort of satisfaction.

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loudspeaker cut across her thoughts like dull knives. Her shoulders ached from the tension she'd carried for weeks.

Everything she knew—the chaos of post-war Britain, the walls of Grimmauld Place, Ron's words still echoing in her skull, Harry's silence cutting deeper than any hex—she was leaving it all behind.

Without saying goodbye.

When they called first-class boarding, she stood quickly, tucking the book and her identification into the satchel slung over her shoulder. Her fingers brushed over the enchanted seam Kingsley had stitched into the bag himself—for protection, he'd said.

No one needed to know she was leaving. Not the press. Not the Ministry. Not even the boys who'd once been her family.

She boarded in silence, heart pounding. No magic. No wand drawn. Just breath and resolve. Seat 2A was by the window. She slid into it, adjusted the armrest, and pulled the blanket over her lap. Her eyes closed.

She didn't even hear the man sit down beside her until—

"Well, well. The Golden Girl in hiding. And flying Muggle, no less. Revolutionary."

Her eyes snapped open.

The man was settling into 2B like he owned the bloody seat, his dark coat perfectly pressed, his boots polished, and a knowing smirk tugging at the edge of his mouth. He wasn't unfamiliar, but Hermione couldn't quite place him at first. He looked older now, like all of them—war-aged, quiet-eyed, sharp.

"You're—"

"I'm not here to hex you," he said easily, loosening the collar of his jumper. "Relax. I'm travelling on business."

She stared at him warily. "Business"

"Nothing sinister," he promised. "Mostly boring. And vaguely international."

Silence followed.

"I didn't want anyone to know where I was going," she said eventually.

"I gathered." He tapped the overhead light off and reclined just enough to appear relaxed, but not enough to be rude. "Don't worry. I don't make it a habit to gossip about war heroes."

Her eyes narrowed. "Why call me that if you don't mean it?"

He glanced over. "Because it still gets a reaction. I'm not used to seeing famous witches looking this.. mortal."

She huffed. "I'm tired."

"I imagine," he said, and for the first time, there was no teasing in his voice. "You're allowed to be."

They didn't speak for a while. Dinner came and went—both picked at it in silence. Hermione pushed the mashed potatoes around her plate. Her seatmate scrawled something in a leather-bound notebook with a self-inking quill.

"Why Australia?" he asked finally, tone casual.

"Restoration work," she said. "They offered me a post with the International Confederation of Wizards. Magical trauma support. Rebuilding trust. Restructuring laws. Something real." He whistled low. "Quite the job."

Ouns To Keep

"It's far enough to breathe," she murmured, "and close enough to still care. Plus, my parents are here, during the war I sort of forced them here for protection."

He didn't comment on that.

"What about you?" she asked, not out of politeness, but genuine curiosity.

The corners of his mouth quirked. "You could say I'm... checking in on someone."

Hermione arched an eyebrow.

"Someone who's trying to start over," he added. "Badly."

She paused. "Why help them?"

He looked at her then—really looked at her—and said, "Because they're the only family I've got left."

Her expression faltered, something unspoken shifting between them.

She studied his face for a moment—sharp, still unreadable, but not cruel. Never cruel.

"I always thought you hated everything Muggle," she said quietly. "And me, by extension."

He snorted softly. "Because I was a Slytherin?"

"Well, that, and... you know. The robes. The sneering. The general disdain."

He laughed—properly this time, rich and low. "Gods, Granger. Slytherin doesn't come with a blood-purity contract."

She arched an eyebrow.

"Alright," he admitted, "maybe it used to. But not all of us were screaming about Mudbloods from the ramparts. Some of us actually read books, you know."

She let out a short, surprised laugh.

He tilted his head toward her. "Being ambitious doesn't mean being evil. Being cunning doesn't mean cruel. It means surviving. Playing the long game. Watching the room before speaking in it."

Hermione considered that. "So what were you doing at Hogwarts then?"

He smirked. "Mostly surviving. Trying not to get hexed in the hallways. Betting on which Gryffindor would punch Malfoy next."

She chuckled despite herself. "I always assumed you were quietly judging me from your corner."

"I was. But respectfully."

She rolled her eyes. "That's comforting."

They sat in silence for a moment before he added, "You never hexed me."

Hermione blinked. "Pardon?"

"Not once," he said. "In seven years, you hexed every other Slytherin in our year. You turned Montague's eyebrows inside out. You sent Harper flying through a bookshelf. Even gave Zabini that jelly-legs jinx in fifth year."

He shrugged. "But not me."

Hermione frowned thoughtfully. "You were never...mean. Not to me."

He gave her a half-smile, almost sheepish. "You were terrifying. I had self-preservation instincts."

She smiled, small and honest. "That's a Slytherin trait, isn't it?"

"Among our finest."

He looked down at his hands, fiddling with the strap of his watch.

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slightly. It was rare for a sitting Minister to personally introduce a witness

Rarer still for that witness to have been protected by such secrecy.

Kingsley's deep voice filled the chamber, steady and deliberate.

"Our final witness," he said, "was not initially announced for security purposes. Given her current position within the International Confederation of Wizards, and the sensitive nature of her duties, it was deemed necessary to safeguard her identity until this moment."

He paused, allowing the words to settle.

An electric hush fell across the room. You could have heard a pin drop on the marble floor. Theo leaned forward on the bench, eyes alight with wicked glee.

Pansy and Blaise both straightened, sharp-eyed and ready.

Ginny, lips pressed tight, stared toward the great oak doors, already smirking faintly.

Neville nudged Luna, who simply smiled dreamily, as if she'd known all along.

Ron fidgeted in his seat like he was sitting on a cursed cushion, eyes narrowing in suspicion.

George—sitting awkwardly apart from both sides—rubbed the back of his neck and braced himself.

Kingsley turned to the double doors at the back of the chamber.

"She will now testify on behalf of Mr Malfoy."

The doors swung open with a slow, heavy creak.

And she walked in.

The room seemed to tilt on its axis.

Hermione Jean Malfoy—née Granger—the brightest witch of their age, the war heroine, the girl who had stood side-by-side with Harry Potter and toppled the Dark Lord's reign—stood framed in the doorway, stood framed in the doorway, and for a moment, no one moved, no one breathed.

The Hermione Granger they had once known—frizzy-haired, book-clutching, stubbornly brilliant—was gone.

In her place stood a woman transformed.

Her deep navy robes shimmered subtly with fine silver thread, the insignia of the International Confederation of Wizards stitched over her heart like a badge of war. Her hair was swept back into an elegant twist, but tendrils still rebelled and curled wildly around her face - a reminder that she would always be a little untamable.

She carried herself with effortless grace—not the shy, uncertain grace of youth, but the formidable, unyielding strength of a woman who knew *exactly* what she was worth.

And she looked *rich*.

Not just in the gleam of her robes or the fine cut of her boots—but rich in life, in purpose, in victory.

There was a glow to her skin that no glamour could fake. A softness to her figure that spoke, unmistakably, of new life growing within her—a quiet but undeniable sign of pregnancy, finally visible for all to see.

She wore her family, her future, her triumph—*unapologetically*.

Hermione Granger had once carried books and rules and hopes on her narrow shoulders.

Hermione Malfoy carried *power*.

And she wore it like a crown.

Ours To Keep

decided to be a healer, he didn't just learn. He dedicated himself to it. To every patient. To every bloody case file. To saving lives no matter where they came from."

Chen smiled again, softer this time.

"And let me be very clear: nobody wanted to mentor him at first. They knew who he was. Knew his history. I knew too."

He tapped the parchment in front of him.

"I just didn't bloody care."

Murmurs of surprise ran through the Wizengamot.

Chen went on, voice steady.

"I'm a Muggleborn wizard. Grew up half my life without magic. I know what it's like to be judged for something you can't change. And I saw—from the first moment—that Draco Malfoy was fighting every day not to let the world make him into something he didn't want to be."

Draco looked down at his hands, blinking hard.

Theo sat up straighter, face unusually serious.

Pansy's mouth was tight with restrained emotion.

Blaise merely nodded once, very slowly.

Ginny wiped at her eye subtly, blanning it on the dust.

"And you know what?" Dr Chen continued, lifting his chin slightly. "If I had to do it again, if he walked through that door tomorrow needing a second chance? I—do it all again in a heartbeat."

He thumped the rail lightly with his fist for emphasis.

"I'd trust him with my life. I *have* trusted him with my life. And if you lot have any sense left at all, you'll let him come home."

The courtroom was so silent that the enchanted torches seemed to flicker louder.

Even some of the stoniest-faced Wizengamot members shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

Draco sat frozen, every word crashing over him like a slow-moving tidal wave.

Chen smiled once more—wide and fierce.

"I'd hire him again tomorrow," he said. "In fact, I'm bloody furious he's leaving us."

Laughter broke out properly this time, unforced and genuine.

Even the presiding judge smiled faintly before banging her gavel.

"Thank you, Dr Chen. You are dismissed."

Dr Chen gave a respectful nod, turned—and as he passed Draco's table, he clapped a warm, steady hand on Draco's shoulder.

No words.

No need.

The weight of it was enough.

The judge banged the gavel lightly, though the tension coiled through the air like a living thing.

"The final witness," she announced crisply, "will now be introduced by Minister Shacklebolt." Every head turned as Kingsley Shacklebolt rose slowly from his seat at the Ministry bench. The air shifted—even the most jaded among the Wizengamot members straightened

Head over heels

"I always thought you were... formidable," he said, voice lower now. "Even when we were kids. You never backed down. Even when they laughed at you."

Hermione's throat tightened.

"No one ever said that," she murmured.

"Well," he said, leaning back as the plane began its slow descent, "Slytherins aren't great at compliments. But we remember things."

As the landing announcement buzzed over the speaker, she glanced sideways at him—truly looked.

A Slytherin who never mocked her. Who'd survived the war intact. Who was now travelling halfway across the world for reasons she didn't understand.

Not an enemy. Maybe not a friend. But... something else.

"I still might hex you, you know," she said lightly.

He grinned. "Wouldn't dream of tempting fate, Granger."

"Hermione, you can call me Hermione."

By the time the flight landed in Sydney, it was still early morning. The sky outside the airport windows was the soft pink of dawn, and the terminal was quiet, charmed discreetly by the Australian Ministry to allow witches and wizards to pass without Muggle interference.

They stood beside one another in the arrivals hall, neither speaking.

Hermione clutched her satchel, heart suddenly heavy. The choice she'd made—to leave, to start again—felt real now. Not just a promise, but a path.

"You need a lift?" she asked, surprising herself.

He shook his head. "No. Someone's expecting me. You?"

She hesitated. "I don't think anyone knows I'm here yet."

"Good," he said with a slow nod. "Then you'll actually get some work done."

A ghost of a smile passed between them.

He turned to go.

"Wait," she said.

He glanced back.

"Will you tell anyone you saw me?"

"No," he said softly. "Some secrets are worth keeping I think."

There was a beat.

Then she smiled—tired, cautious, but grateful.

"Take care of yourself."

"You too Hermione, don't be a stranger," he replied. "I have a feeling I'll be seeing you around."

She looked at him curiously and then took a step toward the enchanted exit.

He turned again, starting toward the opposite terminal.

Just before she crossed into the international wing, she called over her shoulder.

"Hey Theo. You too."

His hand lifted in parting—a half wave, more a promise than a farewell.

And then they were gone.

Each stepping into the unknown.

Each chasing the only version of peace they had left.

set him apart from the tense, stiff air clinging to everyone else. His dark hair was threaded liberally with silver, his robes sharply cut and clearly Australian in design—less traditional, more practical. When he moved, it was with the unhurried confidence of a man used to command—and compassion.

He stepped into the witness box, took the Oath without flourish, and offered the courtroom a polite nod.

The judge raised an eyebrow at the parchment in front of her.

“You are aware, Dr Chen, that this testimony will be binding under both the International Magical Confederation and the Department of Magical Law Enforcement?”

Dr Chen smiled broadly.

“Good thing I believe in what I’m about to say, then, eh?”

A few startled chuckles rippled through the gallery.

Theo, still lounging in the front row, nudged Pansy and muttered, “I like him already.”

Pansy smirked. “He’s more useful than half the Ministry.”

Draco sat still, hands folded tightly together. His heart thudded strangely in his chest.

He hadn’t been sure if Dr Chen would come.

But here he was.

Madam Crowsby rose smoothly. “Dr Chen, could you please explain how you came to know Mr Malfoy?”

Dr Chen chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Well, let’s see. About nine years ago, we ran a series of accelerated medical training programmes in Sydney for promising young candidates—magical and non-magical alike. It was meant to bridge gaps between our worlds.”

He leaned casually against the rail, addressing the court like it was a room of colleagues rather than a sea of judges.

“And in walks this skinny, grim-faced kid—” he nodded toward Draco, who immediately scowled, “—who looked like he hadn’t eaten a decent meal in a year and could out-glare a Dementor.”

Snickers echoed.

Chen smiled fondly.

“Graduated ridiculously young. Brilliant on paper. Knew anatomy and magical theory better than some of our senior healers. Bloody sharp.”

The room stilled, attention sharpening.

“But he didn’t know the difference between a Muggle IV drip and a blood replenishing potion,” Dr Chen said, winking. “Had no clue about Muggle protocols. About our systems. The ethics we live by.”

He sobered slightly.

“That’s where I came in.”

Chen straightened, hands clasped loosely behind his back.

“I took him under my wing. Helped him sort out the mess between the two worlds. Helped him see healing as something bigger than wands and spells.”

His gaze swept the room, direct and unwavering.

“Because that’s the thing about Draco Malfoy—he doesn’t do things halfway. Once he

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Draco waited outside the café they always met at on Thursdays, hunched into his coat despite the Sydney warmth, tapping his wand absently against the table leg like it might solve everything.

It didn't.

The shadows beneath his eyes weren't from late night textbooks or long shifts anymore. This was bone deep—the kind of tired that clung like smoke and regret.

Hermione spotted him immediately.

"You look like shit," she said brightly, sliding into the chair across from him.

He didn't even look up. "Your charm continues to astound me."

"Please," she replied, waving down the server. "I'm the best part of your week, no, days."

Draco's mouth twitched, but no smile followed. He stared down at the half-empty coffee cup before him like it might offer answers. His hair was messier than usual, his collar wrinkled.

Her brow furrowed.

"What is it?"

"Nothing," he said too quickly.

"Don't lie to me, Malfoy." She tilted her head. "I know your 'I'm fine' face. It's just a more miserable version of your 'I'm about to punch a wall' face."

Draco snorted quietly. "And yet, somehow, I still look better than Weasley."

She arched a brow, but he didn't meet her gaze.

Hermione reached across the table, touched his hand briefly. It was an anchor more than a comfort—solid, real.

"Talk to me."

He inhaled slowly, held it. Then let it go all at once.

"It's the programme," he said, voice low. "Dr. Chen wrote this morning. The rest of the scholarships came in. Everything that could've been approved, was. And it's still not enough."

She blinked. "Define *not enough*."

"I did the maths," he said bitterly. "Over and over. If I keep paying my half of Theo's flat, I'll be bankrupt by term two. If I move to that fucking Ministry allocated box, I'll go mad. And if I try to work more hours, I'll fail out."

He gave a hollow laugh. "So. The options are: homeless, hexed into insanity, or burnt out before I even begin."

Hermione's eyes searched his face, her expression unreadable. Then, firmly: "Let me help."

"No."

"You let Theo help and he doesn't even live here."

"It's not the same. I said no."

"Don't be a tosser."

"I *mean* it, Granger," he snapped. "I'm not your bleeding charity case. I won't have my life funded by your guilt or Gryffindor nobility."

"It's not charity, you prick," she hissed. "It's friendship."

"Yeah, well, I've never been particularly good at that."

They stared at each other, the noise of the café around them fading into static.

Finally, Draco's shoulders slumped. He rubbed a hand over his face. "I just wanted one thing to be mine. To earn it. On my own."

Head over heels016

Hermione looked at him with something he couldn't recognize and before he could question her she opened her bag and pulled out a crumpled letter, sliding it across the table.

"Distraction," she offered with a curious smile.

He picked it up warily. Recognised the last name on the signature.

"G. Weasley," he muttered. "Which one?"

"Ginny."

He unfolded the parchment and read in silence. His eyes paused over a few phrases—*left him, another man, Mum won't speak to me, I don't think I belong here anymore*.

Draco looked up. "She left him."

"Yep."

"He's *still alive*?"

Hermione smiled faintly. "Yes."

"I figured he'd murder the bloke."

"She's in love, Draco. Properly, I think, not some infatuation like it was with Harry. With someone she never expected. And no one's taking it well. She won't even write me who it is."

"Typical."

"She's coming next month. Needs space. And honesty... I think she needs friends"

Draco didn't say anything, but his lips pressed into a thin line.

"You don't have to like it."

"Oh, I don't," he said. "But if she's *your* friend... I'll try not to hex anyone."

"That's the best I can ask for."

He nodded. "You and Scarehead still not speaking?"

Hermione's smile was tired as she rolled her eyes. "I stopped trying. And Ron... I won't even bother thinking about him."

Her voice went cold then, clipped. Final.

Draco didn't push—he never had—but he watched her carefully. The way her hand gripped her glass. The way her jaw tightened when she said his name. The way she always paused when someone raised their voice near her.

She never talked about it, not directly. But the evidence lived in her body like scars.

Draco had seen enough to know what guilt looked like. What fear looked like. And it fucking enraged him.

"You two still write?" he asked after a moment, keeping his voice low.

"Harry?" she nodded once. "A few letters. Cold. Stiff. We're... polite. He updates me on Teddy. I pretend to care what he's doing at the Auror office. That's about it."

A pause.

"I think he still thinks I'll come back eventually. Just pick up where we left off. As if none of it happened."

"But the Weasel—?"

"No." Her tone cut like glass. "I don't write to him. I don't read anything if he tries. I won't even say his name unless absolutely necessary. He made his bed."

Draco gave a small nod, gaze unreadable.

"Good."

He didn't say more. He didn't need to.

Ouns To Keep

But he didn't stop thinking about the way Hermione's shoulders curled in on herself when certain names came up, or how her smile never quite reached her eyes when she spoke about Harry. How the brightest witch of their age had been dimmed by people who should've protected her.

He might've been exiled.

But she was the one who'd been abandoned.

And for the first time in a long while, Draco Malfoy felt something unfamiliar bloom in his chest.

Not pity. Not guilt.

Just... a quiet, furious kind of loyalty.

One she hadn't asked for.

But that he intended to give, all the same.

They fell quiet for a moment. The server dropped off their drinks. Draco stared into his coffee like it might contain the future.

Then he asked, quietly, "How are they?"

Hermione looked up.

"Your parents."

She hesitated. Her fingers tightened slightly on the edge of her mug.

"Theo's been helping," she said finally. "He's read everything. Cross referenced French, German, and bloody Scandinavian memory research. The latest reversal worked—partially. But... there's damage."

Draco said nothing, waiting.

"Some days, they know me," she whispered. "Mum calls me her 'bookworm girl'. Dad remembers my seventh birthday. Then other days... they just look at me like I'm a stranger."

Her voice cracked at the edges. "It's like losing them over and over again."

Draco didn't speak. He reached out, fingers brushing hers again—this time more deliberately.

Hermione didn't pull away.

They sat like that for a long moment. Not healer and patient. Not survivor and pariah.

Just two broken things learning how to hold each other up.

Hermione laughed quietly, wiping at her eye. "Bloody hell, we're a mess."

"I'm not crying at dinner, so technically I win."

"Give it time."

He smirked, and finally—*finally*—it reached his eyes.

"I meant what I said, by the way," she added, voice softer now. "About helping."

"I know."

"And if I help you, it won't be out of pity, Draco. It'll be because I believe in you. Because I know you're going to be brilliant—and the world will be better for it."

Draco leaned back, blinking hard.

"Well fuck, Granger," he muttered. "You trying to ruin me?"

She grinned, wicked. "Just trying to keep up."

They finished their dinner slowly, talking of other things—magical tomatoes in Luna's garden, Theo's latest chaos theory on bedside manner, Pansy's obsession with Neville's flannel shirts.

Head over heels016

About ethics. About policy. About the bureaucracy choking magical recovery. But he loved every second of it—not just because it made him feel alive, but because it made him feel like an equal. Like he wasn't just someone to be forgiven, but someone who could be useful.

And slowly, in those arguments and laughs and quiet moments between, they built something neither of them had expected.

Not a romance.

Not yet.

But something dangerously close to the beginning of one.

Meanwhile, everything else around them had shifted too.

Pansy had, unsurprisingly, moved in with Neville a month ago. It had shocked no one—they had bickered for weeks before finally giving in to the slow-burn sexual tension and signing a lease together in a quiet suburb. She now worked at a wizard-Muggle boutique hybrid called *Silhouette & Sars*, and Neville had dedicated himself to finishing his Herbology textbook, muttering things about cross-pollination and his "bloody useless editor."

Theo still visited, now once a month, dragging scandal and chaos in his wake. He was currently interning under Madam Pomfrey through a joint initiative between Hogwarts, St. Mungo's and the Australian Magical Medical Corps, and while he pretended not to care, it was clear he was actually thriving. He always made time for Draco, always stayed long enough to check he was eating properly and hadn't died of boredom or existential dread.

Draco had never said it aloud, but the three of them—Pansy, Theo, and now Granger—were the reason he'd lasted this long.

And as for Hermione... Granger... he wasn't sure where she fit yet.

Only that she did.

She was brilliant and beautiful, with those ever curious eyes and that maddening voice of reason. But there was something softer, too—something brittle beneath the surface. Her grief over her parents lingered like smoke, thick and choking. Despite months of effort, countless charm sequences, and long hours spent with Theo poring over obscure magical texts and memory reversal theory, they hadn't succeeded. Her parents remained strangers. Alive. Safe. But unreachable.

That quiet failure lived in her every sigh.

Her growing distance from her old friends only made it worse. She rarely spoke of Harry or Ron, and when she did, her tone was clipped, defensive, as if preparing for an argument that never came. And then there were the owls, each one making her flinch before she'd even broken the wax seal. News from home rarely meant anything good.

Draco recognised all of it. That fracture.

One night, over burnt pasta and cheap wine, she'd looked up from her book and said, "I think I've forgotten what it's like to be... safe."

And he'd replied, without thinking, "Me too."

They hadn't spoken of it again.

But he hadn't stopped showing up.

Not once.

And that, for Draco Malfoy, was the beginning of something new. Or so he thought.

Ours To Keep

without even trying, and staying late to help others revise for their exams.

He hadn't told anyone who he really was.

He liked it better this way. A clean slate. A world that didn't know what he'd done.

But there was one person who saw right through all of it—and she had an annoying habit of stealing his chips during their Wednesday lunches at the pier.

Hermione Granger had become... unavoidable.

Ever since they'd run into each other at the bookshop three months ago, they'd become frequent fixtures in each other's lives. At first it was awkward—all hesitant nods and side-eyes and polite bullshit. But it hadn't lasted long.

Granger was incapable of keeping things surface level. And Draco—for all his sarcasm and disdain—craved that depth more than he'd ever admit.

They started studying together. Shaming coffee. Picking apart magical theory for fun, and then comparing it to Muggle scientific principles. She challenged him in every conversation, and he, infuriatingly, rose to meet her each time.

There was a pull between them now. Tenuous. Unspeakable. A connection that neither of them dared label—not yet.

He knew she was still wary of him. She didn't forget easily, and she shouldn't. But she no longer looked at him like he was a threat. And that was... enough. For now.

Most nights, he ended up at her flat, legs stretched across her tiny sofa, both of them half asleep and mid argument about some obscure medical procedure or magical legislation.

And it terrified him...how much he looked forward to it.

It had become a ritual of sorts. He'd bring takeout from the Thai place around the corner, she'd brew tea that was always far too strong, and they'd end up knee deep in discussion. Lately, their conversations had turned to Granger's work—the kind of work that made headlines in international circles but went unnoticed in the chaos of their old world.

She'd been with the International Confederation of Wizards' Magical Security Council for just a few months when they reconnected, but already her flat was overrun with parchment reports, glowing orbs of secured international messages, and half-translated policy drafts strewn across her kitchen table.

"They've put me on trauma response and legal review for displaced magical children," she'd explained one evening, feet tucked under her on the sofa as she poked at a half-eaten box of noodles. "Mostly post-war or cross-border cases. The laws are outdated, and I think they forget Muggleborns exist when they write this shit."

Draco had laughed—not at her frustration, but at how familiar it felt. The fire. The way she paced the room when she spoke, hands gesturing wildly, brilliance burning just behind her eyes.

"They're lucky to have you," he had said once, quiet and honest. She hadn't replied, but the flush in her cheeks had lingered longer than the conversation.

Some nights, she'd hand him a document—"Tell me if this phrasing makes sense in Muggle legal language?"—and he'd edit it beside her, half amused that she actually wanted his opinion. Other times, she'd quiz him on anatomy for his coursework while he mocked her handwriting in the margins of her spellcraft essays.

They argued. Constantly.

Head over heels016

They left the little café after splitting the bill—though Draco had tried to pay and Hermione had nearly hexed him for it. The city was quieter at night, its warmth tempered by a soft breeze that smelled faintly of sea salt and eucalyptus. They walked slowly, side by side, their footsteps almost in rhythm.

Neither said much.

Draco stole glances at her now and then. She wasn't smiling anymore. Her brow had tightened in that familiar way it always did when she was thinking too hard, her arms crossed like she was holding herself together.

When they reached the corner near her building, she hesitated at the bottom step.

"Granger?" he said gently.

She didn't answer, just kept staring at the uneven crack in the pavement like it held some kind of answer.

"Hermione, are you alright?"

Her shoulders tensed, but her voice came out soft. "I don't know."

She looked up at him, and that's when he saw it.

Tears—not falling, but right there, trembling in her lashes, waiting to spill.

"I think I am," she whispered. "And then... I'm not. I'm not okay at all."

Draco stepped forward, his expression losing all the snark and defensiveness he usually wore like armour. "Talk to me."

She shook her head. "I can't."

"You can."

Her lip wobbled. "If I do, I'll fall apart. And I've been holding it together for so bloody long, Malfoy. I don't know what happens if I stop."

He reached for her—not thinking, just moving—and wrapped his arms around her without a second thought.

She didn't freeze. She didn't flinch.

She broke.

Her breath hitched, and her hands clutched at the fabric of his shirt as the sobs came fast and quiet, like she was afraid the night might hear her shatter.

"I'm so tired," she said between gasps. "And I miss them. I miss the way things used to be, even when they weren't perfect. I hate the war. I hate the aftermath and its consequences. And I hate that I still expect people to help when all they ever do is leave."

Draco held her tighter. He hated the war too. He missed his family too. "I'm not going anywhere."

She cried harder at that, because maybe that was what she had been waiting to hear all along. Someone choosing to stay.

"I'm glad you're here," she whispered into his shoulder. "I don't know how to say it without sounding like a, to quote you, 'a fucking Hufflepuff', but I'm really glad you're here."

Draco huffed softly against her temple. "We'll keep it between us."

She let out a watery laugh, hiccupping. "Sorry."

"Don't be. I'm surprisingly good at this." He paused, then added dryly, "I've got strong arms. Excellent for hugging war scarred geniuses who refuse to cry in public."

That got another laugh, shaky but real.

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They stood there like that for longer than either of them intended, the world narrowing down to shared warmth and muffled emotion. No confessions. No declarations. Just a moment.

A moment that meant everything.

And Draco—arrogant, exiled, trying-to-be-better Draco—felt something shift.

This was no longer survival.

This was connection. Real, raw, and maybe... the beginning of something more.



The next day, at the hospital.

Draco found Dr. Chen waiting for him outside the exam wing, leaning casually against the bulletin board plastered with faded posters about Muggle CPR training and hospital hygiene protocols. The older man wore his usual no nonsense expression, arms crossed, lips twitching into something suspiciously like amusement.

“You’ve got that look,” Chen said, pushing off the wall.

Draco scowled. “What look?”

“The ‘I cried last night but I’m pretending I didn’t’ one. Seen it on med interns. Usually after their first pediatric trauma rotation.”

“I did not cry,” Draco muttered, rubbing the back of his neck.

Chen didn’t push, just handed him a sealed Ministry envelope marked with both the Australian Magical Liaison Office and the IME Board’s gold-embossed sigil.

Draco blinked down at it. “What’s this?”

“Confirmation,” Chen replied. “You’ve been accepted into the programme full-time. Starting Monday.”

Draco opened the envelope with shaking fingers, reading the contents once. Then again.

“Tuition is paid in full,” Chen added. “Congratulations.”

His vision blurred for a moment. “How? I haven’t... The scholarship—”

“You’ve got a private sponsor,” Chen said simply. “Anonymous. No interest charged. No repayment required. Just one condition.”

Draco swallowed. “Let me guess. I finish top of the class.”

Chen grinned. “See? You are catching on.”

Silence stretched between them before Draco whispered, “I don’t know if I can.”


Chen’s voice was steady. “You can. And more importantly—someone out there believes you will.”

Draco’s throat felt tight. His fists curled at his sides. “I’m not a bleeding charity case.”

“No,” Chen said, his voice kind but firm. “You’re not. But not everything good in your life has to be something you earn by punishing yourself. Sometimes, people just want to help you do better. Don’t spit on it because you’re afraid it means you didn’t deserve it.”

He turned to leave, then paused.

“You’re not a lost cause, Malfoy. Not to me. Not to whoever paid for this either. Don’t waste the chance.”



Chapter 10

Flashback

Friendship in Bloom

“Somewhere between healing and survival, they found something neither had dared to hope for—a quiet kind of love, blooming like wildflowers in the ruins.”

Six months into exile, Draco had found a rhythm.

It wasn’t graceful. It wasn’t easy. But it was his.

He woke before dawn most days—not because he had to, but because the silence helped. Sydney’s early light filtered through the cheap curtains of his modest flat, accompanied by the muffled hum of trams and gulls. It was a strange comfort. He’d learned to make tea without magic, burn toast properly and actually make some decent meals, and fold his laundry with an almost neurotic precision. Granger assisted him by providing the most obscene and complicated chart he had ever seen but he had to admit that at least his whites didn’t end up green anymore. Some days, he even felt proud of that.

Then he’d pull on scrubs, catch the tram, and vanish into the humming world of the hospital—first as a janitor, now as something more.

Dr. Chen had bent the rules in every direction imaginable to get him into the accelerated Muggle medical programme. Officially, Draco had graduated from a private boarding school overseas with exemplary marks. His Hogwarts transcripts had been transfigured, enchanted, and rewritten to fit into Muggle bureaucratic neatness. They’d filed him under “Drake Malfoy” and no one batted an eye.

He has been waiting for final approval from a couple of scholarships and has been seating in and attending a couple of the in-hospital courses until he can officially join and complete the programme. That is... if he can afford it.

At first, the other students had avoided him, wary of his accent, his aloofness, the way he didn’t understand half the slang thrown around in the cafeteria. But Draco learned fast. He always had. Within a few weeks, he was answering questions in lectures, charming professors

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“Exactly,” Pansy said darkly. “Hideous.”

Draco didn’t hear any of that.

He was too busy watching Hermione laugh—a soft, startled sort of laugh that crinkled her eyes and made her look younger. Lighter. Like maybe the war hadn’t completely hollowed her out.

And Hermione—though she told herself not to—found herself watching his hands. The way he held his glass. The slight tremor in his thumb. The way he never quite relaxed, like his entire life had taught him to expect the worst.

She wondered what it would be like—not to fix him, not to save him—but simply to know him now. As he was.

“Let’s try again,” Draco said suddenly.

She blinked. “What?”

He cleared his throat. “Let’s try... starting over. Not forgetting. Just... moving forward. Without burning every bridge we stand on.”

Hermione tilted her head. “That’s very mature of you.”

“I’m in exile. Growth is the only fucking hobby I can afford.”

She laughed again, and this time, he laughed with her.

Somewhere behind them, Theo began singing a sea shanty.

Luna clapped enthusiastically.

Neville blushed as Pansy whispered something scandalous into his ear.

And at the heart of it all, Draco and Hermione sat side by side—not enemies. Not strangers.

Maybe not yet friends.

But something better than what they had been.

Maybe, finally, something real.

Head over heels016

Draco didn’t need to guess. He knew.

And it made his chest ache more than he’d expected.

That evening, he turned up at Hermione’s flat—two takeaway bags in one hand, a folded medical folder in the other.

The door swung open before he had the chance to knock.

“You’re early,” Hermione said with one arched brow, lips curved slightly in surprise. She wore joggers and a faded Celestina Warbeck t-shirt, and her hair—that wild, magnificent hair—was piled on top of her head in a half-hearted bun. She looked tired, and warm, and so unmistakably *Hermione* it made something in Draco’s chest twist.

“You’re underfed,” he said by way of greeting, lifting the takeaway bag in his hand. “And I brought lentil soup.”

She blinked at him. “That’s... unexpectedly nurturing.”

“I’m full of surprises,” he muttered, stepping past her into the flat like he belonged there. The place smelled faintly of old parchment and lavender oil, and the overhead lighting cast a golden glow over the small kitchen. It was cosy. Real. Lived in.

He moved to the counter and unpacked the soup and two buttered rolls. “You’ve been running on toast and spire for weeks. It’s a miracle you’re still upright.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. “It’s called dedication.”

“It’s called bloody unhealthy.”

She leaned against the doorway, watching him like he was something new she hadn’t decided on yet. “You’ll need full access to my kitchen to keep doing this, you know.”

“Already sorted.” He smirked, tapping his wand against the spice rack. “I labelled the jars last time you weren’t looking.”

Her mouth fell open. “You what?”

“Alphabetized. Colour coded. Even cursed the cayenne to hiss if someone grabs it without gloves.”

“You’re insufferable.”

“I’m practical.”

He pulled out a folded parchment from his pocket. “Meal plan. One week. Balanced. Designed to combat stress, magical fatigue, and whatever deficiency you’ve developed from eating burnt toast and anxiety.”

Hermione stared at the parchment. Then at him. And for a moment, neither of them said anything.

“Draco,” she said carefully.

“Granger.”

She bit her lip, hesitating—and he knew, *he knew*—whatever came next would shift the earth beneath them just a little.

“I’ve got a spare room,” she said at last. Casually. Like she wasn’t offering him a piece of herself in the process. “You need a place. I need someone who can use the stove without setting it on fire.”

Draco blinked. “You want me to move in?”

She didn’t look away. “You’re drowning in debt. Your hours are about to go mad. Theo’s flat is too big and too bloody expensive for one person. You’re already here four times a week.

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"This makes sense."

He opened his mouth. Closed it. Ran a hand down his face.

"I'm not sure *me* living with *you* is a good idea."

"Why not?"

"Because..." He struggled. "Because it's *you*. And I still feel like I owe you something. You've helped me, more than I deserve."

"You don't owe me anything," she said gently. "And this isn't about debt. It's about...support. You don't have to keep punishing yourself to prove you're changing."

He looked away. "I don't want to be your burden."

"You won't be," she said simply. "You'll pay in chores. Cooking. Making sure I get at least six hours of sleep a night. I'll bill you for every time I catch you reorganising my spice cabinet."

He gave a soft, disbelieving laugh. "You're terrifying."

"You've said that before."

They stood there for a long time—her leaning in the doorway, him by the counter—the air thick with unspoken things. Something cracked open between them. Not a romantic confession. Not yet. But something *closer*. Something quieter.

He took a step toward her.

"You're sure?" he asked, voice softer now. "About this?"

Hermione nodded. "I owed your liaison this morning."

Draco blinked. "You—"

"Your address change was approved in six minutes," she added with a pointed look. "I think someone's been expecting this."

He gave her a slow, narrow-eyed smirk. "Did you—"

She returned the look with one of her own. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

He reached for the soup, breaking the moment with a shrug. "Guess I should start packing."

"I already wrote Theo," she said. "He said he's going to charm your old room into a walk-in closet and claim it's his meditation room."

Draco laughed, for real this time. "Of course he did."

When they finally sat down at her tiny kitchen table, mismatched bowls streaming between them and the faint buzz of a magical wireless playing soft jazz from the corner, Draco felt something he hadn't felt in a long time.

Peace.

They weren't perfect. They weren't healed. But here—in her warmth and her steady presence—he wasn't drowning.

And maybe, just maybe... this was what it felt like to breathe

Head over heels016

empty, but saturated—with ghosts neither dared name, regrets left half-buried, and a shared ache for the people they might've been if things had gone differently.

Draco's fingers rested lightly around his glass, his thumb tracing a ring of condensation over and over again. The quiet murmur of their friends blurred into the background—Neville laughing at something Pansy said, Luna humming to herself and twirling her straw, Theo dramatically arguing with the bartender over the lack of proper firewhisky.

But Draco only saw her.

Granger.

He leaned in just a little, elbows brushing on the table, voice low and stripped of its usual drawl.

"You don't owe me kindness, Granger."

His tone wasn't defensive. It wasn't bitter. It was honest. Bare. He meant it.

Hermione turned to look at him, her features softening at the vulnerability in his voice. She held his gaze, and for a moment he thought she might look away, or scoff, or remind him of all the reasons she *shouldn't* be sitting beside him at all.

Instead, she said—quiet, certain, and unwavering:

"And you don't owe me guilt, Malfoy."

The words didn't land like a slap. They didn't scald. They *relieved*.

He exhaled slowly, as if he hadn't realised he was holding his breath. Her words gave him permission to *stop* carrying the shame like armour, if only for a second.

She wasn't letting him off the hook—Merlin no. But she wasn't chaining him to it either.

They were two people who had broken and rebuilt themselves on foreign soil, with no map but instinct.

Her lips twitched in something close to a smile.

"I let's call it a truce."

Draco blinked. "You think we're still at war?"

"I think we never really stopped fighting," she said, lifting her glass slightly.

He lifted his in response. "Then here's to losing the plot. And rewriting it."

They clinked their glasses together—a soft, barely audible sound—but it echoed between them like a vow.

Somewhere in the background, Luna had set one of her drink umbrellas on fire.

Neither of them noticed.

They were too busy watching each other like maybe—just maybe—they'd found the first quiet corner in their new lives where something could grow.

Not forgiveness. Not friendship.

But something.

Something else.

Something *theirs*.

Across the table, Theo raised an eyebrow and nudged Pansy. "You seeing this?"

Pansy smirked into her cocktail. "Merlin help us all. They're doing the thing."

"What thing?" Neville asked, mildly alarmed.

"The thing where people talk like they're not in love yet but will be. It's disgusting."

Neville blinked. "It's... nice."

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felt something strange settle in his chest.

Not peace. Not yet.

But maybe the beginning of it.

A start.

And beside him, Hermione walked with her head high, the future uncertain but hers to claim.



Later, in a low-lit Muggle pub near the harbour, the six of them sat tucked into a crooked corner booth that smelled faintly of beer, sea salt, and old wood polish. Fairy lights blinked lazily above them, draped over exposed rafters, and the faint hum of a jazz cover band spilled through the speakers overhead. Conversation flowed freely now—buoyed by cheap cocktails, firewhisky disguised in ginger beer, and the strange relief of reunion after war.

Luna sat perched at the end of the bench, her arms elbow-deep in a bowl of honey-roasted peanuts, occasionally humming to the firewhisky like it might respond. Pansy was curled beside Neville, legs thrown over his lap, lazily twirling a strand of his hair as if daring him to object. Theo lounged like a lounging had been invented for him, halfway between slouched and sprawling, telling a wildly inappropriate story about a cursed toothbrush and the French Minister for Magical Sanitation.

Draco found himself beside Hermione—not by design, but by the casual rhythm of how people sat when it was no longer a battlefield.

She smelled like vanilla and old parchment. Like she had before the war, before the trials, before she'd become more steel than skin.

“Strange, isn't it?” she murmured, eyes fixed on the swirling remnants of her drink.

“What?”

“How we both ended up here. Out of all the places in the world.”

Draco took a sip of his drink—something citrusy and sharp that Theo had insisted on ordering. “Fate?”

Hermione's lips curled around the rim of her glass. “Maybe. Or maybe we just ran far enough that we finally stopped running into walls.”

He turned his head and studied her.

There were freckles on her cheeks he hadn't noticed before. Her curls were sun-streaked and wind-mussed. But she sat straighter than anyone he knew—like she still carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. Like she'd learned not to crumble under it.

“You seem... different,” he said softly.

“So do you.”

“Better?”

She looked at him. Really looked. “I think so.”

The silence between them wasn't awkward. It was full—brimming with the kind of weight that only two people who had survived the same war on opposite sides could understand. Not



Chapter 11 Flashback Rooms for Two

“Sometimes love begins in the softest way - with a knock at the door, a shared meal, and the ache of a word left unsaid.”

It had been a month since Draco moved into Hermione's spare room.

A month of burnt toast, shared books, late-night debates over transfiguration theory versus Muggle medicine, and a slow, tentative pulling of threads that neither dared to name.

Hermione had established exactly three rules upon his move-in: no loud music after ten, no clutter in shared spaces, and absolutely no walking around shirtless unless she was warned in advance.

He had violated the last one by day three.

“Honestly, Malfoy,” she'd said, covering her eyes as he emerged from the bathroom in only a towel. “Put your torso away. Some of us are trying to maintain a civilised pulse.”

He had only smirked. “Thought you were a Healer at heart Granger. Isn't this educational?” And that was how it had been: all banter and boundary testing, quick looks over teacups, soft laughs echoing from the kitchen. Their friends were starting to notice.

Of course they were.

Evenings had settled into a comfortable rhythm. Draco would return from the hospital, his scrubs slightly wrinkled, a tired but content expression on his face. Hermione would be nestled on the couch, a book in hand, her hair pulled up in a messy bun, glasses perched on her nose.

“Long day?” she'd ask, looking up as he entered.

“Long enough,” he'd reply, dropping his bag by the door. “But I did manage to not kill anyone, so I'd call it a success.”

She'd chuckle, marking her page. “High standards, I see.” They'd share dinner, often something simple that Draco prepared—he had taken over the

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kitchen with an efficiency that Hermione found both impressive and mildly infuriating. The man had a knack for spices that she couldn't quite replicate.

Afterwards, they'd sit together, sometimes in silence, sometimes engaged in spirited discussions about magical ethics or the latest Muggle medical advancements. The lines between friendship and something more had begun to blur, but neither had the courage—or perhaps the foolishness—to cross them.

One night, as a storm raged outside, they found themselves sitting on the floor of the living room, a bottle of wine between them.

"Do you ever think about what could have been?" Hermione asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Draco looked at her, his grey eyes reflecting the flickering candlelight. "All the time."

She nodded, taking a sip of wine. "It's strange, isn't it? How life turns out."

He leaned back against the couch, stretching his legs out. "Stranger still that we ended up here, together."

A silence settled between them, heavy with unspoken words.

"I'm glad you're here Malfoy," she said finally.

He turned to her, a soft smile playing on his lips. "Me too Granger."

As days turned into weeks, their connection deepened. Small gestures—a cup of tea left on the counter, a note reminding the other of an appointment, a shared smile over breakfast—spoke volumes.

They began to anticipate each other's moods, offering comfort without words. A gentle touch on the arm, a reassuring glance, a shared laugh. The flat had become a sanctuary, a place where the past could be set aside, if only temporarily.

Yet, despite the growing intimacy, both remained cautious. The scars of the past were still fresh, and the fear of ruining what they had built held them back.

But in the quiet moments, when the world faded away, they allowed themselves to hope.

Their friends were starting to notice.

The change was subtle, at first. A longer glance over a dinner table. The quiet intimacy of inside jokes. Shared spaces became shared silences, the kind that felt companionable, not awkward. The kind that held breath rather than filled it.

But they weren't touching. Not quite.

And that was what drove their friends mad.

"Have you fucked her yet?"

Draco nearly choked on his flat white.

"Pardon?" he sputtered, eyes watering as he glared at Pansy.

She leaned across the table at their favourite café in Surry Hills, unbothered by his scandalised reaction. Her sunglasses were perched on top of her head, and her nails were blood red.

"Granger," she said, voice honeyed and mocking. "You know, the one you live with. The one you cook for. The one you stare at like she holds the fucking Philosopher's Stone in her mouth."

Draco groaned and rubbed the heel of his palm into his eyes. "She's my best friend, Pans."

"And that's why you follow her around like a lovesick Crup?"

"She's my person," he said, so quietly it surprised even him. "She's...it."

Head over heels016

confundus. "You two know each other?"

"Besties," Theo said, slinging an arm around Hermione's shoulders with casual confidence. "Almost twenty hours in a tin can. We bonded. And she didn't hex me, which I consider an emotional breakthrough."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Barely."

"We've met up a couple of times since. Special case."

Draco clocked the look they exchanged—quiet, familiar, layered in something unspoken. It twisted in his chest in a way he wasn't ready to examine. Theo? And Granger? Friends? The concept felt strange. Not wrong, just.. unfamiliar.

He turned to Hermione again. She looked different. Older, somehow. Grounded. Her curls were wilder than he remembered, but tamed in that way that screamed she had more important things to worry about than hair. Her eyes were still bright, though shadowed by something quiet and lingering. She looked like someone who'd been broken, then rebuilt herself with sharper edges and softer walls.

Draco found himself watching the way she stood. Like she had no doubt she belonged in any room she entered.

Theo clapped his hands together. "Right! Now that all the heart-wrenching tension is done, we're going out. Drinks, food, possibly karaoke if I can bully Luna into it."

"I don't sing unless the stars ask me to," Luna said dreamily.

"And if they do?" Theo asked.

"Then I'll bring the tambourine."

Pansy, who had taken to trailing her fingers along the spines of books like she was choosing which soul to ruin next, turned with a raised brow. "We are *definitely* going out. I need a drink. Or seven. Neville," she added, eyeing him up and down, "Ever worn tailored robes?"

Neville flushed to the tips of his ears.

Neville sighed. "Are we all actually doing this?"

"You need it more than anyone I think," Hermione said, not unkindly. Her voice was quieter now. "And we all need a break from who we used to be."

He looked at her again, properly. She was everything he remembered and completely changed all at once. And maybe that's what drew him in—not the ghost of their past, but the idea that in this unfamiliar place, surrounded by chaos, grief, and reluctant healing, maybe they could all be something else.

Draco Malfoy was still arrogant, still snide, still drawn to sharp corners and sharper tongues. But he was also tired. Tired of holding onto bitterness. Tired of running from redemption.

"Alright," he said, stuffing his hands in his pockets. "But I'm not buying the first round."

"We never expected you to," Pansy smirked. "You still owe me for that failed hangover draught in fifth year."

"I told you not to drink it."

"You also told me Nott was straight. Forgive me if I've learned to doubt."

Neville coughed awkwardly. Luna beamed at a book that had begun to hum softly in her arms.

As they stepped into the fading Sydney sunlight, a mismatched group of war survivors stitched together by grief, change, and a desperate need for something resembling joy, Draco

Ouns To Keep

Neville chuckled and gave her a once-over too. "You've changed Parkinson."

"Don't push it," she warned, though her lips twitched.

Luna drifted over to Hermione and whispered something in her ear. Hermione blinked and then laughed—soft and genuine.

Draco blinked.

Pansy nudged him with her elbow. "Careful, darling. You're staring."

"I am not."

"You are. And it's bloody weird."

He looked away, scowling faintly, but the damage was done. Something in him had shifted. He just wasn't sure what to call it yet. Or if he wanted to.

Before either could say more, Pansy stepped forward and walked towards Hermione. She blinked at Luna, then at Neville - who was trying very hard to pretend he hadn't just been charmed by every bat of her lashes—and finally settled her gaze on Hermione.

The witch raised an eyebrow. "Parkinson."

Pansy gave her a once-over, lips pursed, heels clicking as she came closer. For a moment it seemed she might say something cutting. But then her shoulders fell, and to everyone's surprise—including her own—she spoke plainly.

"Alright, look," Pansy said, voice brisk but oddly sincere. "I was a complete cow in school. A nightmare. A petty, rude, elitist nightmare. And I'm still a nightmare, obviously, but not for the same reasons."

Hermione's expression gave nothing away. She said nothing.

Pansy hesitated, tugging slightly at her sleeve. "I'm sorry. For all of it. I don't expect forgiveness. Merlin, I wouldn't forgive me either. But I'm trying. And I figured, well, I'd rather not keep acting like a twelve-year-old when I'm pushing thirty in four-inch heels."

Luna gave a soft hum beside them. "I think your magic changed," she said lightly. "People do that. Shift. Like moon-dusted kelpies."

Pansy blinked. "I...thanks?"

Hermione let out a breath and gave a small, tentative nod. "Alright."

Pansy stared. "Wait...really?"

Hermione shrugged. "I've had worse apologies. And I've grown tired of carrying old grudges."

"Bloody hell," Pansy muttered, then cleared her throat, flicking her hair back. "Well then. In that case, we're going out tonight. Drinks on Theo. He should be around here somewhere."

"Theo? Theodore Nott?" Neville asked, just as a familiar voice floated in from around the corner.

"Me, unfortunately."

Theo Nott emerged from behind a bookshelf, a worn copy of *The Ethics of Emergency Healing* tucked under his arm, and that maddening Slytherin smirk firmly in place.

Hermione smiled. Really smiled. "You're late Theo. I was waiting for you at my place."

"Went by Draco's first," Theo said, easy and unapologetic. He then turned to Draco and smirked. "Your flat still smells like hopelessness and off-brand disinfectant. I assumed you were dead or taking a shower."

Draco blinked and then looked at both Hermione and Theo like he had been cast with a

Head over heels016

Pansy blinked.

Draco stared out the window. "And she deserves everything. Everything I'm not."

Pansy frowned now, softer. "Draco...she doesn't see it that way. She never has."

He shook his head. "I look at her and all I see is the girl I mocked for years. The one I let them torture. I can't look at her and not think of that. And if I can't forgive myself, how the fuck can I ask her to?"

Pansy stirred her coffee, her expression unreadable. "That girl is either going to save you or break you, love. Or both."

Across town, in Hermione's warm little flat, Theo was folding socks with exaggerated care while Hermione matched hers by colour.

"So," Theo said, holding up a pair of Draco's very expensive monogrammed dress socks, "are you shagging him, or just doing his laundry out of devotion?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "We're not shagging."

"That wasn't a denial about devotion."

She let out a small laugh and sat on the sofa, folding a tea towel with more intensity than it deserved.

Theo sat beside her. "Look, you're giving the man room and board. He lets you steal his jumpers. He makes you soup. Are we preparing for a wedding or a volcanic emotional implosion?"

Hermione looked down. Her voice was quiet. "He's become my person."

Theo went still.

"But every time I think we're about to cross that line..." she trailed off. "It's like something stops me."

"Fear?"

She nodded slowly, her gaze fixed on the folded jumper in her lap. "He's never apologised. Not to me. He's apologised to everyone else—Luna, Neville, even you. But not me. And it's not that I need the words. I just..." She paused, breathing in sharply. "I think I need to know he sees what he did. That he understands what it cost me. Because..."

Theo tilted his head, silent.

Hermione looked at him, eyes suddenly bright. "Because it reminds me of everything Harry and Ron did. Or didn't do. All the times they hurt me, emotionally, carelessly—and never once said sorry. I always had to be the one to move past it, to forgive without being asked. And I swore to myself I wouldn't let that follow me here."

Theo's expression softened, the smirk he usually wore replaced with something quiet. Real. "He sees it, Granger," he said gently. "He just hasn't figured out how to forgive himself yet. And maybe he thinks he doesn't deserve yours until he does."

Hermione's eyes glistened. "He's the first person I've trusted in a long time. The first who's seen me the way I want to be seen. Not the Golden Girl. Not the martyr. Just...me."

Theo nodded slowly. "Then you wait. And he will tell you. Because he's falling for you, Hermione. We all see it. And eventually, he'll see that he's worth it too."

She smiled faintly.

"Just promise me you'll hex him if he takes too long."

"Already planning it."

Ours To Keep

They shared a laugh, but the air between them was full of the unspoken. Because some truths didn't need to be voiced to be real. And some love stories began in whispered forgiveness, in folded laundry, in soup shared across a quiet kitchen. And this? This was only the beginning.



It was a lazy Saturday evening when everything changed.

Hermione's flat was full—Luna and Neville sprawled across the sofa sharing a book of strange magical flora, Theo flipping through a recipe book in the kitchen with dramatic sighs, and Pansy perched on a barstool with a glass of elderflower wine, arguing with the witless as it stubbornly refused to play Celestina Warbeck.

Draco was sitting on the arm of Hermione's chair, halfway through teasing her about her tragically bland tea collection. "You have eight boxes of chamomile, Granger. Eight. It's like you're trying to be the least fun person alive."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "I'm a woman of consistency."

"You're a woman of terrible taste," he shot back, smirking.

Then—a knock at the door.

Draco stood up and stretched lazily. "I've got it! Probably another one of Granger's sad tea deliveries."

He strode over and pulled open the door and froze.

A familiar mop of red hair. Brown eyes. A face full of cautious confusion.

"Er... Ginevra?" he said, blinking in surprise.

Ginny blinked right back. "Malfoy. I'm sorry—is this... Did I get the wrong address?"

He smirked at her, turned his head and yelled, "Granger! We've got a Weasley at the door!"

Hermione came around the corner, her face breaking into a wide, delighted grin. "Ginny!"

She ran to the door and wrapped her old friend in a tight hug. Ginny melted into it instantly, the tension bleeding from her shoulders.

Draco stepped aside to let her in, and Ginny's eyes swept over the chaos of the flat: Theo in the kitchen, Pansy sipping wine, Luna was now flipping through an upside-down magazine, while Neville was holding a cat that definitely hadn't been there ten minutes ago.

"Okay," Ginny said slowly, laughing through the tears rising in her eyes. "What in Merlin's name is going on in here?"

"Welcome to the snake pit," Pansy drawled, lifting her wine glass. "Neville darling, you may need to leave. There's too many Gryffindors now and not enough venom."

Neville chuckled. "Pansy you know Hermione balances us out. She's the perfect hybrid of snake and lion, plus Luna's a Ravenclaw, we're evenly matched."

Hermione shook her head affectionately and turned back to Ginny. "You made it. I was waiting for you to write me."

"I wasn't sure I would," Ginny admitted, wiping at her eyes with the sleeve of her jumper. "I almost didn't get on the bloody plane."

Head over heels

"Oi," Neville said. "Bloody hell. Malfoy?"

Draco groaned under his breath. "Of course. Why not?"

Neville clapped Draco on the shoulder with the kind of ease that only came from shared battlefield trauma. "Been here a month. Came for research, stayed for the quiet. You look... well, you look like you survived."

"Only just," Draco muttered, eyeing him with something between suspicion and reluctant fondness. "You?"

Neville glanced sideways, first at Luna—who was gently rearranging the herbology section by the vibrational energy of the spines, apparently—and then at Hermione. He shrugged.

"Better now."

Draco raised a brow. "The tropical air suits you?"

Neville smiled faintly, his expression tinged with something heavier. "Luna wrote to me. Said she was in Australia studying magical fauna—bunyips, drop bears, spectral bilbies. You know Luna." He looked toward her with a warmth Draco hadn't seen in years. "I needed to breathe. Everything back home was... too loud. Too much."

Luna chose that moment to drift closer, balancing a copy of *Taming Thorn-Willed Wombats* on her forearm. "The animals here don't lie," she said cheerfully. "They bite you if they don't like you. I admire that."

Neville cleared his throat. "When I arrived, I found her living in a little guest flat next to a magical wildlife sanctuary—and, well, Hermione was there having tea and I learned she lives her in Sydney."

"I wasn't expecting anyone to ever come here," Hermione interjected with a small smile. "But Luna showed up one day and never left. One morning she was just... in my kitchen. Brewing tea. Wearing a hat shaped like a puffskien. Now she works at the Sanctuary and Neville invested in it and works there too."

"I felt drawn here," Luna said serenely, brushing her fingers along a shelf. "Like something important was waiting. And I was right."

"You've been staying with her? Luna?" Draco asked Neville, his curiosity slipping past his usual guarded tone.

"Yeah," Neville admitted. "At first, just for a week or two. Then I saw how... much she's been doing. What she's been carrying. I wasn't ready to go back yet anyway. Plus, the work there is rewarding."

Draco let the silence stretch between them. Luna was humming quietly to a pile of books—apparently soothing the nervous ones—while Neville picked up a nearby tome and flipped it open absently. Hermione was browsing with the kind of focus she'd always had in the library—head tilted, fingers brushing gently down every spine, lips moving ever so slightly as she read the titles.

She looked... real. Not the war hero. Not the Golden Girl. Just Hermione.

And for a moment, something beneath Draco's ribcage ached.

He cleared his throat, voice a touch hoarse. "Well. That explains the Gryffindor infestation."

Neville laughed softly. "Could be worse. We could've brought Seamus."

"I'd have hexed you both," Pansy said. She gave Neville a deliberate once-over. "Although I'm now realising Gryffindors age well. That's annoying."

“Right.”

She turned to him, leaning against the counter. “You’re going to be alright, you know.”

He didn’t answer immediately. Just looked around the shop, then down at his hands—no longer shaking, no longer blood-stained. Just hands.

“I think I want to help people,” he said quietly. “For real. Not for atonement. Not because anyone told me to, just because it feels... right.”

Pansy was quiet for a moment.

Then she smiled, soft and rare. “Good. Because the world’s a bloody mess, and someone’s got to fix it. Might as well be you.”

He looked at her, his oldest friend, now rooting through her purse for an enchanted credit card while muttering about currency conversions and whether she’d get flagged for suspicious purchases.

It wasn’t redemption. Not yet.

But it was something.

And it was his.

The bell over the door chimed again.

A gust of cooler air swept into the shop, along with the unmistakable sound of polite inquiry.

“Excuse me,” a voice asked the clerk softly, “do you have *Triuma Healing Theory: A Non-Verbal Approach to Grief Recovery?*”

Draco stiffened.

That wine.

Familiar and dangerous in equal measure. He knew it like he knew his own breath.

Hermione Granger. The Hermione Granger.

He turned before he could stop himself, and there she was—standing just past the entrance, curls pulled into a soft twist, Muggle jeans and a collared top tucked neatly into her coat. Her bag was slung over one shoulder, her fingers curled around a notebook, as if she’d been scribbling something just moments ago.

Her eyes met his, and everything else fell away.

“Malfoy?” she said, blinking in surprise.

He flinched. As if hearing his surname from her mouth still carried weight.

“Granger,” he returned, voice stiff and dry.

She stepped closer, cautiously. “What are you doing here?”

“Trying to disappear,” he said honestly.

Hermione crossed her arms. “You’re shite at it.”

He smirked, the briefest flicker of the boy she remembered. “Apparently. I could ask you the same.”

“I live a few blocks away. This is my local shop.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed. “Australia’s a long way from the Ministry.”

Hermione gave him a half-smile—polite, not warm. “I’ve... changed jobs.”

Before either could say more, two figures flanked her: Luna Lovegood, arms full of alchemical herbal texts, and Neville Longbottom, who grinned like this was a reunion picnic instead of a minefield.

“Well, I’m glad you did.”

Ginny laughed nervously, then looked down at her shoes. “Um... I brought someone with me. I know I said I’d come alone, but... I couldn’t. I had to bring him.”

Hermione tilted her head. “Him?”

Ginny nodded. “I’ll just... I’ll get him.”

She stepped back into the hallway, and a few seconds later, re-entered—with Blaise Zabini. Draco dropped the glass he was holding.

Pansy choked on her wine.

Theo let out a long, low whistle.

Luna clapped delightedly. “Oh, I was hoping it would be Blaise. He sounded guilty in the last letter he wrote me.”

Everyone looked at her questioningly. *How on Merlin’s mum does Longbottom know Blaise?*

Neville just muttered, “Knew it. I knew there was something going on when the Carrows were at Hogwarts.”

Ginny straightened her shoulders and faced them all head-on. “Yes. Blaise. Deal with it.”

Blaise grinned like a man who had won a very smug bet. He slipped an arm around Ginny’s waist and said, “Evening, all.”

Draco recovered first. “You couldn’t resist, could you, Zabini? Always had a thing for redheads.”

“Please,” Blaise replied. “It’s the fire. The chaos. The potential hexes in the middle of a kiss.”

Ginny flushed but didn’t pull away. “You lot were the only ones I wanted to see. The only ones who didn’t look at me like I’d betrayed a legacy.”

Hermione stepped forward and took her hand. “You didn’t betray anything. You chose happiness.”

Pansy raised her glass. “To scandal, then. And the death of dynasties.”

“Here, here,” Theo added with a smirk.

They all laughed—too loud, too much—but it was the kind of laughter that made the air easier to breathe.

Draco looked around the room. At Blaise and Ginny tucked into the corner like they belonged there. At Theo cracking open a bottle of firewhisky. At Hermione, her smile soft and warm, her fingers brushing his wrist as she passed him a refilled glass.

And for the first time in a very long time, he felt something dangerously close to peace.

Whatever came next, he thought, they’d face it together. As a family.

Later, after too many biscuits and a bottle and a half of red, the flat buzzed with laughter and leftover pizza. Luna was enchanting the saltshaker to sing lullabies, Theo was making a dramatic pitch for a group holiday in Tasmania, and Neville, bless him, had fallen asleep with his head on Pansy’s lap.

Draco found himself in the kitchen, rinsing plates and stacking them with a precision born of nervous energy. Ginny slid in beside him, bumping his hip with hers. She handed him a tea towel and leaned back against the counter, arms crossed.

“You’re different,” she said quietly.

He glanced at her, then back at the dishes. “I’m tired.”

Ours To Keep

“That too. But it’s more than that.”

Draco exhaled slowly. The mug in his hands clinked too hard against the sink. “I’ve had time to think.”

Ginny studied him in the silence that followed. Her eyes, so much sharper than people gave her credit for, softened.

“I’m sorry,” he said abruptly. “For everything my family did. To yours. To your friends. For what I did at school. The names. The cruelty. All of it.”

She blinked. Her mouth twitched. “You already apologised to Neville and Luna, didn’t you?”

He nodded. “Ages ago. I’ve been making my way through the list.”

“And Hermione?”

Draco’s hands stilled in the sink, soap suds clinging to his fingers. He didn’t look at Ginny, but his voice was honest—small in a way she wasn’t used to from him.

“Not yet.”

Ginny followed the shift of his eyes, drawn instinctively by something in his silence. Across the room, in the soft glow of lamplight, Hermione stood just outside the kitchen entrance, partially hidden behind the threshold. She wasn’t moving. Her eyes were locked on Draco—not in anger, but with something that twisted Ginny’s gut.

Salvies. Lunging. A disappointment so old and deep it had settled into her bones.

And as Ginny opened her mouth to speak—to urge him gently, to make him see—Hermione turned.

No words. No glance.

She simply walked out the back door.

Draco’s eyes widened. “Granger—”

He dropped the towel, shaking water from his hands, and went after her without another word.

Ginny didn’t follow.

Neither did anyone else.

They all just watched, silent, the truth finally crashing into the space between them like a wave they’d all seen coming—just too afraid to name.



The air outside was cooler than expected, the breeze carrying the faint scent of eucalyptus and the sound of distant traffic. Draco stepped onto the back patio, heart thudding against his ribs like it knew something he didn’t.

He found her there—Hermione—curled on the wooden bench beneath the trellis, knees huddled to her chest, cardigan sleeves pulled over her hands. The porch light above cast soft golden shadows across her face, catching in her curls and illuminating the glint of unshed tears in her eyes.

She didn’t look up when he sat down beside her.

Head over heels016

of feminist theory.

Draco raised a brow. “The hell is that for?”

“Your bedside manner is shit,” she said, arms full. “You need to learn how to talk to people who didn’t grow up in palaces.”

“You mean, like you?”

She grinned. “Right. Exactly. And even worse off than me.”

As she walked to the front, Draco leaned against a shelf and let himself breathe. He lingered in the aisle a moment longer, fingers tracing the ridged spine of *Human Physiology and Systems*. The quiet hum of the shop was oddly comforting - pages turning, the soft thump of Pansy’s boots stomping indignantly toward the counter, and the tinny jazz playing from the ceiling speakers.

He wasn’t sure when exactly it had happened—the shift from wanting to disappear to wanting... more.

But maybe it had started the first time one of the nurses had asked him to help settle a crying patient. Or when the lead custodian, a rotund bloke named Gregor, had clapped him on the back and muttered, “You’re not bad, Mal. Bit posh, but not bad.”

Three months ago, he’d been convinced his life had ended. Now everything has changed. It wasn’t a perfect life. His flat was still the one Theo had paid for. His shifts were long and his wand itched from disuse. He missed his mother’s tea. Missed the way his father used to tilt his head when thinking, even if the man would never walk the halls the same way again.

But for the first time in years, he felt the burn of something unfamiliar warming in his chest.

Hope.

“Oi,” Pansy called from the counter. “Do you want this book on Muggle childbirth or shall we leave that until you actually have sex again?”

Draco groaned. “Leave it.”

She winked. “Just checking. You never know who might be in your future.”

And as he rolled his eyes and walked toward her, the golden glow of the autumn sun caught his profile in the window.

He almost looked like someone new.

“You’ve got the face for a doctor,” Pansy called back. “Terrifying. Slightly arrogant. The right amount of ‘I know more than you and I’m probably right.’”

“I suppose that makes you the patient with delusions of grandeur?”

She batted her lashes. “Naturally.”

He chuckled and took half the books from her arms. “You really don’t have to do this.”

“I do,” she said, serious now. “Because for the first time in years, you want something. And I’m going to make bloody well sure you get it.”

He blinked. “You’re very sentimental for a sociopath.”

“And you’re very soft for someone who used to hex people for blinking too loud.”

They made their way to the till, the warm scent of paper and ink filling the air around them. As the cashier rang up the titles, Draco glanced at the pile—anatomy, psychology, nursing theory, and one suspiciously romantic medical memoir titled *Salpel and Surrender*.

Pansy winked. “That one’s for your ‘emotional development.’”

manipulative.”

“I asked if you’d bring me a potion for migraines.”

“Exactly. Manipulative. You know I can’t resist medical drama.” Her eyes flicked to the book in his hands. “And look at you! Studying. Merlin’s tits. Are you about to tell me you’ve gone vegan, too?”

Draco smirked. “Hardly. But I have been working in the hospital. Sanitation. It’s... humbling.”

Pansy blinked, taking in the shadows under his eyes, the smudge of ink on his fingers. “Is that a polite way of saying you clean blood and piss?”

“Mostly vomit, actually. But yes.”

She recoiled theatrically. “How the mighty have fallen.”

He shut the book gently and turned to her. “I like it.”

There was no defence in his tone. No sarcasm.

“They don’t know who I am. They don’t care. To them, I’m Mal—the bloke who carries the mop and asks intelligent questions during shift meetings.”

Pansy tilted her head. “You’re not miserable.”

“I’m exhausted. But not miserable.”

She fell quiet for a beat, watching him.

“You’re really changing.”

He offered a faint shrug. “I didn’t come here to stay the same.”

It was then he pulled the folded letter from his back pocket, smoothing it out on the display shelf. McGonagall’s writing was still prim, but the bottom corner held Kingsley’s seal, pressed into the parchment like a whisper of absolution.

“They’ve granted my Muggle records. Charmed copies of my transcripts.”

He glanced sideways at her, then sighed and closed the book.

“I’m thinking about applying. For the programme. Study medicine. I’ve started shadowing a trauma doctor. Chen. Muggleborn, surprisingly. Knows what I am. Who I am. Doesn’t care.”

Pansy’s eyes widened. “And you... what, like it?”

“I like that it’s real,” Draco murmured. “People bleed. People cry. You help them, or you don’t. It’s not about bloodlines or politics. It’s about whether or not you do the work.”

Pansy was quiet for a moment, the levity slipping from her face.

“A Muggle doctor? What, are you going to cure wizarding prejudice with a stethoscope?”

He chuckled, dry and tired. “Maybe I just want to help people. Maybe I want to fix something.”

“You’ve changed.”

“Yeah. Well. War’ll do that.”

He set the book aside and turned to her.

“I don’t want to be him anymore, Pans. The boy who sneered and hexed and did what he was told because he thought that was strength.”

She looked at him for a long beat.

“Good,” she said softly. “Because I never liked him anyway.”

She stared at him for a long while. Then without another word, she turned and began pulling books off shelves. Medical terminology. Anatomy. First aid. A surprisingly hefty stack

For a moment, they said nothing.

Then, softly—too softly—she said, “You’ve never apologised to me. Not once.”

Draco stilled.

“I know.”

She turned, finally, to look at him, eyes shimmering but steady. “Why?”

His jaw worked, but no words came. He looked away, stared out into the darkness beyond the garden fence.

“Because I didn’t think I deserved to.”

Hermione didn’t speak. She just... waited.

And it gutted him.

He ran a hand over his face, the motion jagged with tension. “I was an arrogant little shit, Granger. We both know that. Cruel. Entitled. I said things—did things—that I thought made me powerful. Untouchable. But really, I was just a fucking coward. A scared, brainwashed boy who thought hate was safer than the truth.”

Hermione’s brow creased, but she stayed silent.

“I apologised to Luna,” Draco said, voice rough. “And to Neville. And Ginny, apparently. But not to you. Because you were the one person I hurt most, and I couldn’t face it. Couldn’t look you in the eye and acknowledge just how far I went.”

She looked down at her knees. Her silence hurt more than any hex.

“I see it now,” he said, quieter. “I see all of it. The names. The silence. The fear I put in your eyes. What my family did to you at the Manor—what I didn’t stop. I see it every day. And I hate it. I hate who I was. I hate that I let you suffer while I stood frozen.”

Hermione turned toward him then, her eyes darker now, unreadable.

“I needed to hear that,” she said, voice trembling. “I’ve forgiven so many people. Forgiven Harry and Ron for the ways they failed me. Forgiven strangers who said worse. But you? You’re different. Because we grew up in the same castle, Draco. And even though we were on opposite sides of a war...I always thought, somehow, that you saw me.”

“I did,” he whispered, throat tight. “And that’s what makes it worse.”

A silence stretched between them, fragile but not broken.

Then, softly—“You mean a lot to me,” he said. “More than I know what to do with. I don’t expect you to forgive me for everything. But I needed you to know. And if I’m being completely, devastatingly honest—I care about you. Deeply. And it’s not just about the past anymore. It’s about who you are now, who we are. And who I want to be. With you.”

Hermione blinked, and something in her chest cracked open.

She thought of the boy he’d been, all sneers and silence.

Then she thought of the man beside her now—tired and kind, careful and steady, who brought her soup and labelled her spice jars and walked her home every night.

“I forgive you,” she said at last.

Draco’s head snapped toward her, eyes wide.

“I forgive you, Draco.”

He stared at her, disbelief rippling through every inch of him—and then something softer.

Warmer.

Relief.

Ours To Keep

Hermione smiled, small and certain. “I want something different this time. No more pain disguised as love. No more forgiving people who never say sorry. I want...something real. Something that’s ours.”

Draco breathed out like he hadn’t taken in air for weeks.

And then—without thinking, without planning, without permission—he reached for her.

Hermione met him halfway.

Their lips brushed—once, twice—before the dam broke and their mouths collided in something soft and desperate and so utterly right it stole her breath.

It wasn’t a perfect kiss. It wasn’t polished or poetic. But it was honest. Raw. Healing.

When they pulled apart, she rested her forehead against his.

“Are we doing this?” she whispered, her breath still mingling with his.

Her fingers curled lightly into the fabric of his jumper, grounding herself in something that, for the first time in a long time, didn’t feel like chaos.

Draco searched her face—the uncertainty in her eyes, the bravery it took just to ask. It was the same look she gave every hard question in life. Like she already knew the answer but needed to hear it aloud anyway.

“I think,” he said softly, brushing his nose against hers, “we already are.”

Hermione let out a sound—something between a laugh and a sob—and it broke open in the space between them, soft and fragile and whole.

He kissed the corner of her mouth again, tender and reverent, like he was still half—afraid he wasn’t allowed.

“I’m still a mess,” he said. “A right bloody disaster, if we’re being honest.”

She shook her head gently, tears welling up again. “I know. But so am I.”

Her hand lifted to his face, thumb brushing over the faint scar near his jaw—the one that hadn’t been there at Hogwarts. The one earned in some Muggle accident he refused to speak about. The one that, to her, meant survival.

“I’m not asking you to be perfect, Draco,” she said, voice shaking with emotion. “I’m asking you to keep growing. And to let me grow, too.”

His lips parted like he wanted to say something—argue, maybe, or weep—but instead he closed his eyes and leaned into her touch.

“I don’t know how to be in love with someone like you,” he murmured, voice cracking.

“Someone good. Someone who stayed brave.”

“I’m not always brave,” she whispered back. “But I’m here. With you.”

They stayed like that—nose to nose, breath to breath—as if neither of them dared move too fast, lest the moment shatter.

But it didn’t.

It settled instead. Deep. Warm. Real.

And when she reached for his hand, twining their fingers together, it wasn’t hesitant.

It was certain.

No proclamations. No fireworks. Just the quiet, steady certainty of two people who had clawed their way back from the edge—separately—only to find each other waiting on the other side.

And for once, when they looked at the future, it didn’t feel like a gamble.



Chapter 9

Flashback

Tangled Pages

“The thing about starting over is, sometimes you crash into someone else trying to do the same.”

Draco Malfoy had never imagined himself finding peace in Muggle spaces.

But there he was—three months into exile—standing beneath the sterile lighting of an independent bookstore, who luckily also tailored to the magical, tucked between a curry house and a failing travel agency in Sydney’s Inner West. The hum of the air conditioning, the faint scent of old pages and printer ink, and the occasional clatter of someone dropping a stack of books—it all formed a cocoon of anonymity. No eyes followed him. No whispers trailed behind him. Just quiet. Blissful, human, mundane quiet.

He’d spent the last few weeks finding solace in the oddest places—public parks where no one recognised him, the ancient Egyptian exhibit at the museum where he could stare for hours at mummified bones and marvel at the absurdity of time, the corner booth of a greasy café where the barista had once called him “darlin’” without irony.

Life had been stripped to its bones. And oddly, that suited him.

He arrived early at the bookstore, same as he had the last three Sundays, wearing a battered hoodie Theo had magicked for him and a pair of trainers so worn the soles flapped when he walked too fast.

Today, he was looking for a specific title—*Advanced Principles of Emergency Medicine, Volume Two*. Not for any real reason. Just curiosity. Or maybe hope.

And then, as if conjured by chaos itself, Pansy Parkinson crashed into the front entrance like a hurricane in heels.

“Malfoy!”

He didn’t even turn.

“You’re late,” he said blandly, flipping open a copy of *Human Anatomy for Beginners*.

She tossed her sunglasses on a nearby shelf and sniffed. “Your letter was emotionally

fully risen over the skyline of Sydney.

Draco insisted on walking her to the Australian Ministry, fingers brushing hers as they waited in the corridor outside the Portkey chamber.

Ginny arrived before they were called, breezing in with a scarf around her neck and purpose in her step.

“Good, you’re still here,” she said, giving Draco a critical once-over. “You look like you haven’t had tea in a week.”

“I had tea this morning.”

“With what stress and despair?” she scoffed. “Right, well, Hermione, don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on your broody bastard.”

Draco rolled his eyes but the small smile on his face was hard to miss.

“Drakey,” she added sweetly, just loud enough to make Draco’s eye twitch.

“Do not call me that,” he muttered through gritted teeth, flushing red.

Hermione laughed, wrapping her arms around his neck. “Try not to murder each other.”

He kissed her softly, his forehead pressed to hers for a long, steady breath. “You come back to me, yeah?”

“I will.”

When the Portkey activated and she vanished in a flash of blue light, Draco’s world went just a little quieter.



Two Days Later - Ministry of Magic, London

Hermione stepped through Kingsley’s private Floo and into a softly lit, unfamiliar conference room deep within the lower levels of the Ministry. There were no nameplates, no crests—just polished walnut paneling, thick curtains, and the faint scent of sandalwood and ink.

Kingsley stood at the head of a long table, tall and still and steady, as he always was when the world felt like it might tip.

He smiled gently. “You’re here.”

“I said I would be,” Hermione replied, brushing soot from her sleeves. “I’m just glad it worked.”

But she faltered slightly when she saw who else was in the room.

Poppy Pomfrey, sitting to Kingsley’s left, glasses perched low on her nose, hands folded over parchment. Her expression was unreadable—professional, calm, but not cold.

And directly across from her sat Professor McGonagall, every bit the formidable force Hermione remembered, tartan shawl wrapped tightly around her shoulders, eyes sharp as ever.

Hermione’s breath caught. “Oh.”

Kingsley gestured to the seat beside him. “We thought it best to brief you together. You’ll be heading the policy design on a new trial programme for displaced Muggleborns. Education, housing, and healthcare.”

Hermione blinked. “That’s why I’m here?”

“And because we trust you,” McGonagall said, her voice cool but laced with warmth.

Hermione smoothed her robes and sat. “Before we begin... I need to tell you something.

All of you.”

She didn’t look at them at first. Just stared down at her folded hands.

“I’m seeing someone,” she said. “Have been. For some time.”

A pause.

“It’s Draco Malfoy.”

She looked up, her chin lifted in quiet defiance, ready for the disapproval, the questions, the doubt.

Pomfrey’s lips parted. McGonagall tilted her head. Kingsley... grinned.

“Took long enough,” he said mildly.

Hermione blinked. “You... what?”

McGonagall gave a sniff. “Miss Granger, I’ve taught you both since you were children. There’s always been something between you—tension, challenge, possibility. I once saw the two of you arguing over a cauldron in sixth year and thought, ‘That’s not hate. That’s potential.’”

Pomfrey chuckled softly. “You should have seen the way he paced around the Hospital Wing the day that potion blew up thanks to Mr. Finnegan during the fifth-year prank. I had to force a Calming Draught down his throat.”

Hermione stared.

Kingsley leaned back in his chair, eyes warm. “When Draco chose Australia for his exile, I knew. I saw how your paths were aligning. Fates have a funny way of nudging people into place.”

“I don’t believe in fate,” Hermione said automatically.

“And yet,” McGonagall said with a smile, “here you are.”

Hermione let out a stunned breath. “He’s changed. He works hard. He studies harder. He helps Muggles without blinking and brews Healing draughts for wizarding patients at the hospital when no one’s looking. He’s not perfect. But...he’s kind. And good. And becoming someone remarkable.”

“And are you happy?” McGonagall asked, her tone suddenly more serious.

Hermione met her gaze. “Yes.”

Poppy leaned forward, squeezing her hand. “Then that’s all that matters.”

There was a pause, heavy with unspoken emotion.

Kingsley folded his hands. “We know what you’ve endured, Hermione. And we know what he has, too. You’ve both walked through hell and come back with your hearts still intact. You deserve this. Both of you.”

Hermione swallowed the lump rising in her throat.

McGonagall’s voice softened. “He works on the Muggle side, doesn’t he?”

Hermione nodded. “Full-time. He’s studying at the magical wing too, but with limited magic. The restrictions are still in place. But he likes it since it allows him to do a bit more magic and brew potions.”

“Tell him,” Pomfrey said firmly, “that if he ever wants to apply for a dual-side Healer programme here, I’ll sponsor his candidacy myself.”

Hermione couldn’t stop the tears that gathered in her eyes—quick and hot and unexpected.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “Thank you all.”

That night, tucked into the crisp sheets of her guest quarters in the Ministry, Hermione

Ours To Keep

wept—not from grief or fear, but from something else entirely.
From relief.
From the sense that maybe, just maybe, she didn't have to fight the world alone anymore.
And that her happiness didn't need defending.
Because this time, the people who mattered were already on her side.



Three Days Later Malfoy Manor, Wiltshire

The manor hadn't changed.
Its spires still reached through the Wiltshire mist like skeletal fingers, and the tall iron gates groaned open with the weight of old magic and older memories.

Hermione adjusted her cloak and stepped through.
Narcissa Malfoy met her at the doors of Malfoy Manor with the kind of poised stillness that seemed carved from marble.

The late afternoon wind caught at the hem of her silver-grey robes, sending the embroidered fabric tripping like water across the grand stone entry. Her gloves were pristine. Her posture immaculate. Only the gauntness in her cheeks and the pale tightness around her eyes hinted at how time had worn at her.

"Miss Granger," she said, her voice smooth as silk yet edged with something quieter—wairiness, perhaps. "Thank you for honouring the invitation."

Hermione inclined her head politely. "Thank you for extending it, Lady Malfoy."

There was a brief pause as they assessed one another—no longer enemies, not yet allies. The echo of their shared history hung between them like a silk curtain, sheer and fragile.

"You are welcome here," Narcissa said finally, a little softer. "Though I imagine it must feel strange, crossing this threshold."

Hermione offered a faint smile. "Strange, yes. But not unwelcome."

Narcissa dipped her head gracefully. "Then let us make it less strange."

She turned with the elegance of someone raised in ballrooms and stately salons. Hermione followed her through the wide, echoing corridors of Malfoy Manor. The portraits watched her, silent and disapproving. The ancestral tapestries whispered their old, fraying spells.

"I wasn't sure you'd come," Narcissa admitted after a pause.

"I wasn't sure you'd want me to," Hermione said softly.

Narcissa's lips twitched. "You're braver than anyone I know, Miss Granger. Of course I wanted you to."

"Thank you Lady Malfoy."

"Please, call me Narcissa."

"Ok, but only if you call me Hermione."

"Very well," she answered with a small smile on her face so similar to Dracos it made Hermione's heart clench.

In the drawing room, Narcissa gestured toward an armchair upholstered in forest green

Head over heels016



Later that day, Hermione made her decision.

"I want to keep the trip quiet," she told Draco as they sat curled up together on the sofa. Her head rested against his chest, his fingers drawing slow circles on her back.

He tilted his head. "You don't trust them not to announce it?"

"I trust Kingsley. That's about it," she said. "I'm not ready to deal with the Prophet speculating why the war heroine has returned. Or to see my name next to Ron's in print ever again."

Draco tensed beneath her but said nothing. He didn't need to. She felt it in the way his hold on her tightened just slightly.

She wrote to Kingsley using a secure channel, and his response arrived within the hour:

Private floo only. No press. No leaks. I'll see you at my office, Hermione. You're family. - K S.

The words made her eyes sting. It was silly—she'd read and written thousands of letters in her life, but somehow those four short lines meant everything.

That evening, just before bed, Draco hesitated at the doorway to the bathroom, arms crossed, brows drawn together like he was debating something. He stared at her, silent.

She closed the file she'd been reading. "What is it?"

He shifted awkwardly. "I... was wondering if you could write to my mother."

Hermione straightened.

"She's still under surveillance," he added quickly. "I can't owl her without the letter being opened or delayed by six fucking weeks. And she—" He looked down, swallowing hard. "She hasn't replied to anything I sent before that restriction came in. I don't even know if she got them."

Hermione's heart broke at the quiet plea in his voice.

"Of course I will," she said without hesitation. "What should I say?"

"That I'm alive," he muttered. "That I'm not completely miserable. That...I miss her."

Hermione's letter was brief, respectful, and honest.

Narcissa's response arrived two hours later by private delivery. The parchment was thick, the ink rich and elegant.

Dearest Hermione,

You are most welcome for tea.

- N. M.

Hermione smiled and tucked the letter into her travel bag. "You'll have your visit," she whispered to Draco that night, tracing circles over his bare shoulder as they lay in bed.

He nodded into her neck, already half-asleep.

The morning Hermione left for England, the air was muggy and restless, the sun not yet

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asked what happened. Or if I was okay.”

She swallowed. “Ron broke my heart, but Harry shattered the rest of me. Because I thought he was the one who would always be there.”

Draco’s eyes darkened. “You deserved better than that. Better than all of them.”

She nodded slowly. “He wrote in that letter that if I just say sorry, everything will be okay again. As if me apologising will fix everything.”

Her voice cracked again. “Why do I always have to be the one who says sorry, Draco? Why is it always me who has to forgive and forget and pretend it didn’t hurt? And then when they do say it—when they finally apologise—it’s hollow. Like the words alone are enough.”

Draco shifted, cupping her face with both hands now.

“They’re wrong,” he said. “Words mean nothing without change. Sorry isn’t enough if it’s not followed by action. You taught me that.”

She closed her eyes, letting his words sink in.

“I will never break your heart,” he said, barely above a whisper. “I will never ask you to be the strong one just because you can be. You don’t need to lead anymore, or plan everything, or keep every little piece from falling apart. That’s not your burden to carry. We’re a team now. And I swear to you, Hermione, I will carry it with you. I will protect you. I will make sure you’re okay, even when you forget to do that for yourself.”

Hermione opened her eyes, raw with emotion. “That’s all I ever wanted,” she said. “Someone to see me. Not the war hero. Not the girl who always had the answers. Just me.”

“Well, I see you,” Draco whispered. “And I like her. All of her.”

She let out a soft, broken laugh and leaned into him, pressing her forehead against his.

“I’ll never go back to being that girl for them,” she said. “If they want me in their lives, they’ll have to come to me with the truth. And if they don’t, well...I’ve got enough here.”

“You’ve got me,” he said. “Forever. No conditions. No expectations. Just...me. So let’s write the next chapter of our lives...ourselves.”

She gave a small laugh, watery but real. “You and your dramatic metaphors.”

“Blame yourself Granger. You turned me into a bloody romantic.”

He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to her brow, then her cheeks, and finally—softly—her lips.

“You mean the world to me, you know,” he whispered against her mouth.

She didn’t reply. Just kissed him again, her fingers curling in his shirt like she couldn’t bear to let go.

Later, when the quiet had wrapped around them like a blanket and their breathing had evened out, she shifted slightly in his arms and whispered into the stillness, “I think I’ve been falling for you for a long time.”

Draco smiled against her hair. “Took you long enough. I’ve been falling for you since we spoke at the bar the day of the bookshop encounter.”

She closed her eyes again. Let herself breathe.

The letter still lay on the floor where they’d dropped it.

But now, she didn’t look at it.

Because Draco was here. With her. For her.

And that was something Harry Potter had never been willing to be.

Head over heels016

silk, then seated herself across from it with the slow, regal grace of a queen descending her throne.

“I imagine you’ve come on Draco’s behalf,” she said as a house elf wordlessly poured the tea. “Though I daresay you’ve always been far more than just his advocate.”

Hermione didn’t flinch. She met the older woman’s gaze directly. “I have a letter from him.”

At that, something flickered across Narcissa’s expression—brief, like a ripple beneath glass. She nodded once, and Hermione reached into her satchel, carefully drawing out the sealed parchment.

“Before you read it...” Hermione hesitated, her voice more tentative. “I want you to know he wrote this not just for obligation or formality. He wrote it because he...he needed you to hear his heart.”

That seemed to shake something loose in Narcissa’s carefully composed façade.

She accepted the letter with gloved fingers and did not open it right away.

Instead, she studied Hermione again, this time less like an old rival and more like a woman looking at someone who carried the most precious part of her soul across an ocean.

“I hope,” she said quietly, “he’s found peace.”

Hermione exhaled. “He has. And he misses you. Every single day.”

Narcissa held the letter delicately, her fingers brushing over the Malfoy crest as though it might vanish beneath her touch. She was silent, still poised on the edge of her chair, but her breath caught almost imperceptibly at the familiar handwriting.

Before she could open it, the door to the drawing room creaked open.

Hermione turned toward the sound and stiffened.

Lucius Malfoy stood in the doorway, his cane tapping once against the polished floor as he stepped inside. His blond hair was threaded with more grey than she remembered, but his bearing was still aristocratic, dignified, and impossibly controlled.

For a moment, none of them spoke.

Lucius’s gaze flicked from his wife to the letter in her hand, then settled on Hermione. His face betrayed nothing—and yet, there was no coldness in his eyes. No disdain. Only... weariness. A kind of heaviness Hermione had seen too often in those who had outlived their legacies.

“Narcissa,” he said quietly. “I wasn’t told we’d be receiving guests.”

“I didn’t want to overwhelm her,” Narcissa replied, her voice soft but sure. “She’s brought us a letter. From Draco.”

Lucius’s expression faltered just slightly, his jaw tightening. He stepped further into the room and gave Hermione a formal nod.

“Miss Granger,” he said, each syllable precise, as though practiced in a mirror. “It’s... been a long time.”

Hermione stood politely, dipping her head. “Mr Malfoy.”

He studied her for a beat longer, then glanced at the parchment in his wife’s hands. “May I?”

Wordlessly, Narcissa handed him the letter, her gloved fingers lingering a fraction of a second longer than necessary.

Lucius broke the seal. As he read, his brows furrowed, then rose. A deep breath slipped

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from his lips as he continued down the page, eyes scanning every line with growing stillness. Narcissa leaned in, reading over his shoulder.

Silence fell again—until Lucius spoke.

“He cares for you very much,” he said quietly, still staring at the final line of the letter. “He writes of dreams. Of purpose. Of redemption. And all of it—” he looked up at Hermione, his voice cracking, just barely “—is tethered to you.”

Hermione swallowed hard.

“He’s changed,” she said, her voice hoarse. “Not for me, not just for me. For himself. But I see it. Every day.”

Narcissa reached out then, gently retrieving the letter from Lucius’s hands and reading it again herself—slower this time. When she reached the end, she blinked fast, her throat working to form words.

Then, carefully, she folded the parchment and placed it in her lap. Her eyes lifted to Hermione’s, and for the first time since she arrived, the proud mask cracked.

“Thank you,” Narcissa whispered, rising to her feet. “For bringing this. For giving us this... reprieve. For not turning your back on him.”

Hermione stood as well, unsure of what to say, until Narcissa did the unthinkable.

She stepped forward and embraced her.

It wasn’t the cold, hesitant clasp of a pureblood heiress bound by obligation. It was full. Fierce. Grateful.

Hermione returned it, stunned and moved, her arms tightening around the woman who had once watched her bleed on a marble floor and now clung to her like a lifeline.

Lucius cleared his throat.

“I cannot undo the past,” he said, voice quiet but sincere. “But I would be a fool not to see what’s before me now. After the darkness we’ve endured... you are a golden light in our son’s life. And, if you’ll allow it... a light in ours as well.”

Hermione’s throat ached.

“There’s more,” she said softly. “I spoke with Kingsley before I left Australia. The restrictions on your communication with Draco... they’ve been lifted.”

Both Malfoys stared stunned to silence.

“You’ll be able to write to him freely now. No monitored channels. They may still be subject to Ministry Clearance but not as high. It’s official.”

Narcissa gripped the armrest of her chair. Lucius closed his eyes, shoulders slumping in something like exhausted gratitude.

“And once a year, if you wish...” Hermione hesitated. “You’ll be permitted to visit him. Provided you have a Ministry-approved sponsor with you at all times.”

For the first time in years, Narcissa Malfoy’s eyes filled with tears she did not blink away.

“When?” she asked, her voice trembling. “When can we write?”

“As soon as I return. I’ll hand-deliver the clearance to Draco.”

Lucius stepped forward then, slowly. When he reached Hermione, he extended a hand—no cane, no mask. Just a man, offering a gesture of respect. She took it.

And for the first time in a very long while, it didn’t feel like history pulling them apart. It felt like a future, unfolding quietly between them.

Head over heels

He looked up, just in time to see Hermione sink onto the edge of the bed, her breath catching in short, shallow gasps. Her hands clutched the comforter, knuckles white.

He moved immediately. “Hermione. Hey...hey, love. Look at me. You’re okay. Just breathe with me.”

Her chest was rising and falling too fast. Her vision swam. The letter slipped from her grip to the floor.

Draco knelt beside her and gently took her face in his hands.

“Breathe with me,” he said again, grounding her. “In. And out. Just like that. You’re safe. You’re here. I’ve got you.”

He kept whispering to her, letting his voice anchor her as the panic slowly began to fade.

Then her breaths finally began to steady. The trembling in her hands lessened, but her body still shook in the aftermath of panic. She curled into Draco on the floor of their bedroom, face buried in the crook of his neck. Her tears came silently now, soaking into his shirt.

“I can’t go back,” she whispered, voice fractured. “Not to that. Not to pretending everything’s fine. Not again.”

“You don’t have to,” Draco said fiercely, holding her tighter, as though he could anchor her through sheer will alone. “Not like that. Not ever again.”

Hermione pulled back slightly, just enough to look at him. Her face was blotchy, eyes rimmed red, hair a tangled halo around her flushed cheeks.

“I gave them everything,” she said, voice hoarse with grief. “Everything I had. I broke myself into pieces to make everyone else feel whole. And he still—he still won’t say what happened. Still wants me to come back and forgive Ron like nothing ever happened. Like I didn’t lose myself trying to keep us all together.”

Draco’s hand moved to her hair, fingers gentle as they combed through the mess there. “I know.”

“No, you don’t,” she snapped, sharper than she meant. But the pain was raw, festering. “Harry and I used to talk every day. I loved him like a brother. I trusted him. He saw what Ron did, what he said to me. And he still let me walk away like I meant nothing. Like my leaving was the problem, not what led to it.”

Her voice broke on the last word.

Draco said nothing for a moment, his throat too tight. Then, low and careful, he said, “I’m sorry. I’m so fucking sorry, Hermione. For what I did to you back then. For what they did. For what everyone let happen to you because they all expected you to keep carrying the world. For every time someone used your strength against you.”

His hand found her cheek, cupping it. His thumb brushed away the tears that kept falling, relentless.

“I know sorry doesn’t fix it. Merlin, I know that better than anyone. But I see it now. All of it. What I said to you, who I was. I see the cracks people left in you and then expected you to repair yourself from. And I’ll spend the rest of my life making sure I never add to them.”

Hermione stared at him, eyes shining. “You already don’t,” she whispered. “You’ve shown me every single day how different you are now. I’ve written to Harry, you know. After I first left. Not just once. I sent letters. Trying to make peace. Trying to find some... some version of the friend I loved. But he never said much. His replies were so cold. Empty. He never once

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The question hung in the air like fog.

Hermione's voice was barely above a whisper. "Always."

But Draco couldn't shake the feeling that the ghosts waiting in England might not be so willing to stay buried.

Hermione was tracing circles over the pale scar on his collarbone with the tip of her finger, and he was half-asleep again, his hand curved around her hip.

"I don't deserve mornings like this," he murmured against her hair.

Hermione shifted to look at him, her voice soft. "Why not?"

He shrugged. "Because I used to think softness made you weak."

She kissed his chest. "And now?"

"Now I know it makes you brave."

Before she could answer him, the tapping began.

An owl—sharp and relentless—pecking at the window with military precision.

Hermione groaned, burying her face against his neck. "Merlin, I'm not even dressed."

"You were barely dressed last night," he muttered, smirking. "Not that I'm complaining."

She pulled herself out of bed with a sigh, grabbed one of his worn jumpers from the chair, and padded barefoot across the floor. When she opened the window, a sleek Ministry owl showed a parchment into her hand before taking off again.

She hesitated before unrolling it.

Draco, now propped on one elbow, watched her expression shift the moment her eyes caught the signature at the bottom.

Her shoulders tensed. The colour drained from her face.

"Granger?" he asked, sitting up fully.

She didn't respond.

"Hey, Hermione," he repeated, more firmly now.

She blinked, then turned and handed him the letter. Her fingers shook.

He took it and read:

Draco's jaw tightened as he lowered the letter.

Hermione,

I don't know how else to say it anymore—I need you to come back.

Things here aren't right. The Prophet's tearing into me daily, spinning every silence into some kind of scandal. People keep asking questions I don't have the strength to answer. Ron's drinking again, and I can't—I don't know how to stop it. It's like everything's falling apart in slow motion.

I thought we'd be past this by now. Thought maybe... you'd forgive him. Forgive me. That you'd come home and things could finally settle. That we could be us again. Or something like it.

You don't have to see Ron if you don't want. Or even talk to him. I'll keep him out of it. But if you could just write. Or call. Something. Even if it's just to say you're sorry.

I know once you do... everything will start to feel normal again.

They blame me, Hermione. For you leaving. For everything. And I can't breathe under it.

You were always the one who knew what to do. The one who held it all together. I don't know

how to do this without you. I've tried.

I'm not asking for much. Just come back. Please.

—Harry

Head over heels

Later that evening..The Ministry guest quarters were quiet.

Hermione sat at the vanity, brushing out her curls in slow, meditative motions. Her day had been full—meetings, quiet tears, tea with Narcissa, Lucius's hesitant but heartfelt approval—and yet something hummed uneasily at the edges of her magic. An undercurrent she couldn't name.

She had just changed into pyjamas and was debating a last cup of chamomile when the Floo roared to life, green flames flaring unnaturally high.

"Theodore?" she blinked, startled.

Theo's face flickered into view in the emerald glow. He looked pale, his normally well-groomed hair in disarray. His brows were drawn together, his lips pressed into a grim line.

"Hermione," he said, voice tight. "Sorry to barge in this late."

Her stomach dropped.

"What's happened?"

"It's your parents." He inhaled sharply. "There's been a breakthrough. Something in the last spell structure reacted to the memory charm's underlayer—not the Obliviate itself, but the magical fragmentation it caused after repeated reversals"

Hermione blinked. "Theo...English, please."

He exhaled. "It's good. Potentially very good. But it's unstable. You need to be here. You're the constant they've been anchoring to. Without you, the whole thing might unravel."

Her throat closed.

"Fuck," she breathed. "I—yes. Yes, of course. Give me ten minutes."

"I've already spoken to Kingsley," Theo added quickly. "Explained everything. He approved an emergency Portkey without hesitation. It leaves in one hour from the International Floo Chamber."

Hermione's chest tightened with a mix of panic and resolve.

He gave her a short nod. "We'll be ready. And Hermione...bring hope with you. We need it."

The Floo snapped closed.

Hermione stood there for half a second—frozen.

And then she moved.

She packed with clinical precision, her wand drawing robes, documents, vials of calming draught, and copies of the treatment notes into her suitcase as she scribbled a rushed message to Kingsley and pinned it to her pillow. Her fingers shook as she sealed the note, heart pounding in her chest like a war drum.

By the time she reached the private Floo chamber, the Portkey was already glowing faintly with swirling magic, pulsing in rhythm with her racing thoughts.

She clutched her satchel to her chest, took one final breath—and vanished with a sharp twist of space.

The first breath she took was thick with dust and the sterile scent of enchanted marble. She staggered as the Portkey dropped her onto the designated rune circle, knees nearly buckling with the force of it.

Her heart was hammering, throat dry.

And then—

Ours To Keep

Arms. Strong, familiar, grounding.

Draco.

He caught her before she could fully collapse into herself. His coat was slightly askew, and there was ink on his hand like he'd run straight from work. His tie was crooked, shirt rumpled, and his eyes—fuck, his eyes—were wild with worry until they landed on her.

He didn't say anything at first.

Just held her.

Arms wrapping tight, chest solid against hers, chin tucking instinctively into her hair like it was the only place he could breathe properly.

"Hi love," he whispered into the crown of her head.

"Hi," she said, voice cracking.

She gripped the back of his coat like it might disappear if she let go.

They stood there for a long moment, pressed together in the middle of the quiet atrium, as the world reset around them.

He pulled back just enough to look at her, brushing her wind chilled cheek with his knuckles.

"Theo called me after you left. I've been pacing the atrium for an hour."

"I had to come back," she said, breathless. "They might. Theo thinks it could work."

His thumb swept just under her eye, grounding her. "Then we'll fight for it. Like always."

She gave a wet, broken laugh.

"I missed you," she said, voice trembling.

"I missed you more." His mouth twitched into something just shy of a smile. "Ginny tried to feed me a sandwich. It had beetroot on it. I nearly died."

Hermione laughed properly this time—a wild, hiccupping sound that melted into a soft sob.

"I'm home," she whispered, burying her face in his chest again.

Draco wrapped his arms around her tighter.

"You're home," he murmured. "And whatever happens next—we'll make sure you have your parents back."

And just like that, the fear didn't feel quite so crushing.

She wasn't bracing for the worst anymore.

Because this time... she didn't have to face it alone.

Head over heels

Hermione was tangled in Draco's arms, their legs draped over each other in the soft warmth of early light. The flat was still and quiet, the kind of silence that only came after everything had been said in the dark—with mouths, with hands, with breath.

Draco shifted slightly, brushing his fingers across the bare curve of her hip beneath the sheets. Her eyes were closed, lashes casting shadows across her cheeks, but he knew she wasn't asleep.

"You've been quiet all morning," he murmured.

Hermione didn't open her eyes, just exhaled through her nose. "Because if I speak, I might start overthinking. And if I overthink, I might cancel the whole damn thing."

Draco tensed beneath her. "So it's confirmed, then?"

She nodded. "Two weeks. London. The Council wants me to oversee a hearing involving magical displacement and post-war relocation policies. I'm the only one with direct field experience."

He didn't say anything for a moment.

"And the timing?" he asked gently.

She opened her eyes then, meeting his gaze. "Theo's running another memory diagnostic while I'm gone. It's... time. We need to know if it's safe to try again."

Draco's jaw clenched. "You're going to do all of that without me there?"

"I'll be fine," she said, though the tremble in her voice betrayed her. "Kingsley's arranging security. I'll be in and out of the Ministry. I've done this before."

He pulled her closer, resting his chin against her shoulder. "That's what worries me."

She went quiet again, letting herself be held, and for a long moment they simply breathed together.

Hermione's voice was soft, teasing. "Do you want me to write?"

Draco scoffed, lifting his head just enough to give her a flat look. "Granger, you gave me a bloody mobile. I'm still not over that."

She grinned against his shoulder. "You can text now. You're practically a Muggle."

"I'm offended," he muttered. "And also not entirely convinced the 'unlimited texting charm' you cast isn't some dark magic."

"It's not dark magic," she said, smug. "It's convenience. And now you can leave me voice mails complaining about your tragic meals and how the flat is falling apart without me."

He huffed. "I'm not texting you about food."

"Oh, so you'll only call me for emergencies, then?"

He leaned in, brushing his lips just beneath her ear. "I'll call you if I miss your face. I'll call you if I think you need someone to tell you to sleep. And I'll call if I think for one second you're not alright."

She stilled for a heartbeat, heart thudding softly against his chest.

"Alright then," she whispered, pressing a kiss to his collarbone. "Just don't forget how to use the damn thing."

He chuckled. Draco's hand slid into hers beneath the blanket. "Don't worry. I know you'll be fine. But just.. promise me something."

She turned her head slightly. "What?"

"Promise you'll come back to me."

Ouns To Keep

When Blaise and Ginny bought a flat two blocks over, it was as if the universe had decided their little found family needed a permanent headquarters. A new centre of gravity. Their building was taller, with bigger windows, and an actual roof garden where Ginny practised dives and Blaise tried—and failed—to avoid sun damage.

“Merlin’s tits, Gin,” Blaise had muttered the first time he caught her doing laps above the chimneys. “One of these days you’re going to crash into an air conditioning unit.”

“And one of these days,” Ginny had shouted back, “you’re going to stop moisturising your wine labels!”

“Those are imported labels! From the Veneto estate!”

Draco had just stood on the rooftop stairs and watched them with a look that could only be described as *affettuoso dimmy*. Somehow, that worked. Somehow, they all did.

Blaise had taken up part-time residence in Australia to be with Ginny, but his business still pulled him back to Italy every few weeks. His vineyards—three now, scattered across Tuscany and Piedmont—had become his pride and joy, along with a growing international wine export label that Hermione jokingly referred to as “the Zabini vintage of doom.”

“He’s going to get rich off pretension,” Draco once grumbled.

“He’s already rich off charm,” Ginny countered. “And arsehole luck.”

The real surprise, though, had come with Pansy and Neville.

They’d tied the knot in a quiet courtyard garden behind their shared flat, a month after Neville’s first herbology memoir had finally been published: “*Roar! Healing After War*.” Only their closest friends had been invited. No press. No Ministry presence. Just a string of fairy lights, good food, and a vow exchange that had made even Theo snifle.

Luna had worn a crown of eucalyptus leaves and feathers, and showed up with Padma Pail on her arm.

Hermione had blinked. “Padma?”

“Apparently,” Ginny whispered behind her wine glass, “Theo brought her here on a work trip. She bumped into Luna while birdwatching. They’ve been inseparable since.”

Luna had just beamed at all of them and said, “She likes puffskeins. I think it’s meant to be.”

Padma, for her part, had looked completely enamoured—and not the least bit confused.

“Luna found her star chart,” Hermione had whispered to Draco, watching the two girls laugh together under the strings of glowing lanterns.

He’d slipped his hand into hers without a word, just squeezed once.

It was strange. Surreal, even. After everything they’d endured, after the blood and fire and bone-deep grief of war, there was... peace. Not always. Not everywhere. But in pockets, in tiny, warm corners of the world, they had carved out something like happiness.

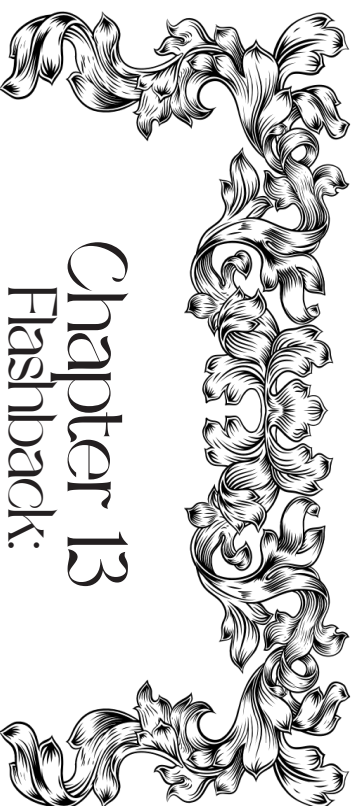
Draco had a flat that no longer felt borrowed. A woman who kissed him goodnight and teased him for snoring. Friends who didn’t flinch when he entered a room, and laughter that didn’t sound like it was trying too hard.

He was studying. Healing. Living.

And for once, when he looked ahead, he didn’t see a void.

He saw the next page.

Until that morning.



Chapter 13 Flashback:

Memory and Mercy

“Sometimes mercy is a choice. Sometimes, it’s a gift. And sometimes... it’s just love, showing up when you need it most.”

The world blurred as Hermione stepped through the Floo and into the flat.

It was mid-afternoon in Sydney, golden sunlight cutting across the wooden floors like slices of warmth, but Hermione barely registered it. Her robes were wrinkled from travel, her limbs heavy with fatigue, but her mind was sharper than ever—coiled, waiting.

Theo was pacing in the sitting room, a folder clutched in one hand, soot still smudging the collar of his shirt. He looked unsettled in a way that made her stomach bottom out—Theo never paced unless it was serious.

“Tell me,” she said before he could speak, voice low and urgent.

Draco appeared behind her like a breath of wind, quiet and solid. He said nothing—just reached for the strap of her bag, gently lifting it off her shoulder. His fingers lingered against her back for a second longer than necessary, a quiet tether, an anchor.

“Sit down,” Theo said.

She obeyed, hands clenched in her lap. Draco eased down beside her, his thigh brushing hers, warm and steady.

Theo opened the folder, his expression unreadable. “We’ve had a breakthrough.”

Hermione’s breath caught.

“You remember the last two potion cycles? The fragments we recovered were inconsistent. Some memories surfaced—flashes of home, bits of language—but the emotional tethering wasn’t strong enough. Nothing held. Nothing stuck.”

She nodded once. “Yes. They’d wake up and not know who I was again. Every time.”

Theo inhaled slowly. “We’ve rebuilt the structure. Refined the spell layering. And more importantly... there’s a new compound. A stabilising agent.”

He glanced at Draco, who immediately looked down, ears faintly pink.

Hermione blinked. “What...?”

Theo smirked faintly. “Your boyfriend is more clever than he looks.”

Draco cleared his throat. “Chen and I...well. He needed a mind for theoretical magic, and I...needed to feel useful. It started out as notes, then formulation. A mix of neuromagical stabilisers, grounded with dreamroot essence and blood-forged memory threads. All safe. All tested.”

“You never told me.”

“I wasn’t going to unless it worked,” Draco said, eyes meeting hers at last. “Didn’t want to give you false hope.”

Her chest ached.

Theo’s tone turned sober. “If administered properly, it could break through the final wall. Disperse the damage. And—maybe—restore them.”

Silence.

“But there’s a cost,” Theo added. “You know there always is.”

Hermione nodded.

“If it doesn’t work... there’s nothing else to try. This is the last viable option. And if it does work—they’ll need hospice—level care. Three months, minimum. Daily stabilisation charms. Magical therapy. They might not remember you at first. At least not consistently. It could come in flashes, until they finally remember. It could hurt if instead of flashes they regain those memories all at once.”

Hermione’s breath left her in a shudder. She stared at the floor like it held the answer.

“I don’t...” she whispered. “I don’t know if I can decide this.”

Draco’s head snapped toward her. “What?”

She turned to face him, fully now. Eyes wide. Fragile. “I’ve been making decisions since I was eleven. I made the call to wipe their memories. I chose the Horcrux hunt. I stayed behind at the Ministry. I left Ron. I left Harry. I’ve spent my whole fucking life choosing things for the sake of everyone else.”

Tears spilled over her cheeks.

Theo looked between them, gave Draco a solemn look and then nodded. “I’ll give you both a moment.”

He left quietly, the door shutting with a gentle *click* behind him, leaving silence in his wake. Hermione didn’t move. She sat rigid on the edge of the sofa, her hands clenched in her lap, breathing like each inhale might crack her ribs.

Draco sat beside her, but not too close. He knew better. He could feel her magic twitching beneath her skin, brittle and buzzing.

His fingers closed around hers, trembling.

“I didn’t mean to spring that on you,” he said quietly.

Hermione didn’t answer.

“I wasn’t hiding the potion research to be secretive. I just—I wanted to give you something that might actually help. That might fix something.”

She turned her head then, her expression unreadable.

“You’re already doing so much, Draco. Your schooling, your work at the hospital—”

“Because of the family?”

“Because of who I am when I’m around them,” she admitted, voice barely above a whisper. “I love them. I always will. But... I forget how to breathe near them.”

Draco said nothing, just watched her with a kind of quiet understanding only someone who had also suffocated under the weight of family could manage.

“I still talk to George. Charlie, sometimes. And Dad writes, when he can sneak a letter past Mum. But the rest...” She exhaled shakily. “They’ve basically disinherited me. Figuratively, of course. You’d think I’d killed a Kneazle rather than fallen in love with someone they didn’t approve of.”

Draco frowned. “Because of Blaise?”

Ginny nodded. “They don’t understand him. Or they don’t want to. And I think... I think they wanted me to be the good daughter. The compliant one. The one who kept Harry safe and gave Mum a dozen ginger-haired grandchildren.”

Her laugh was bitter, tired. “But I couldn’t keep pretending. Not for them. Not for Harry. Not even for the ghost of what we thought we were.”

She looked over at Draco, her eyes shining but dry now.

“Blaise loves me. Actually loves me. Doesn’t try to edit who I am or what I want. And with him, I don’t feel like I’m betraying anyone just by breathing differently.”

There was a pause before she added, “I’m starting with the Australia team next month. Keeper. Can you believe that? Always thought I’d be a Chaser.”

Draco gave a small, lopsided smile. “I can. You’re bloody brilliant.”

Ginny grinned. “Yeah. I am.”

Then, quieter, almost to herself: “I don’t need to be a Weasley to be good. I don’t need their name to be whole.”

Draco glanced at her sideways, something sparking behind his eyes. “You thinking of changing it?”

Ginny’s expression softened. “Maybe. Haven’t decided yet. But I like the sound of Ginny Zabini more than I thought I would.”

Draco raised a brow. “You’d better let me hex your wedding dress if it’s ugly.”

“Only if you catch the bouquet.”

They laughed—sharp, bright, and honest—and for a moment, it didn’t matter how many people had turned their backs.

He grinned. “I can. And I will personally jinx your broom if you even think about quitting.”

She chuckled. “You’re a better brother than Ron ever was.”

He raised a brow. “High praise, Weasley.”

She nudged him. “Don’t make it weird.”

“I make everything weird.”

When Hermione got home, she found Ginny asleep on the sofa and Draco watching over her like a sentry.

“She okay?” Hermione asked, dropping her bag softly.

Draco looked at her—tired, but something warmer in his eyes. “Getting there.”

And somehow, so was he.

Ours To Keep

on the couch between them, and declare she was staying for the night because “Blaise is being a twat” or “the air at my place doesn’t feel as forgiving.”

And Draco didn’t mind.

He liked having her around. Ginny kept him honest in ways that didn’t sting—ways that made him better. She saw through his dramatics, called out his wallowing, and reminded him that redemption didn’t have to be joyless.

“Stop brooding like a tragic hero,” she once snapped. “You’ve got a second chance, decent hat, and Hermione Granger reads to you. Don’t waste either.”

He, in turn, pushed her right back.

“You don’t have to fix everyone’s expectations,” he said one evening, casually tossing an apple between his hands as she lamented the pressure from her brothers to come home and “settle down.”

“You should play Quidditch. For you,” he said. “Not to prove you’re still a Weasley. You’re a fucking legend on your own. You don’t need a last name to make something of yourself.”

That was when Ginny had really looked at him—like she was seeing him properly. Not the spoiled boy from the Hogwarts Express, but the man who now remembered to eat three meals a day and had half a drawer in Hermione Granger’s dresser.

One evening, Ginny came to the flat when Hermione was still at work. She hovered in the doorway awkwardly, red eyes and blotchy cheeks giving her away before she even spoke.

“She’s not home,” Draco said.

Ginny shook her head. “Doesn’t matter.”

He didn’t press. Just motioned to the kitchen table and poured her a cup of tea. She sat, quiet for a while, eyes fixed on a crooked photo Luna had charmed to hang above the sink.

“I lied for Harry,” she said finally, voice raw. “We had this understanding. Back at school. That we’d date—or look like it. And I’d keep his secret.”

Draco stilled.

She kept going.

“I didn’t mind. Not then. I knew what it was. We cared about each other. Just not like that.” Her eyes flicked up. “But after the war... when I wanted to be with Blaise, he didn’t want to end it. Not publicly.”

Draco said nothing. Just let her speak.

“I couldn’t do it anymore. Couldn’t be a cover. Couldn’t pretend that I hadn’t found someone who made me feel... seen. Even if it was Blaise bloody Zabini.” She laughed wetly. “So I left. And I still kept his secret. And I lost almost everything else for it.”

Draco set the mug down gently. “I get it.”

Ginny turned to him. “Do you?”

He nodded slowly. “I’ve spent most of my life pretending to be someone else. For my father. For the name. For the cause. And when I finally let it go... I didn’t even know who I was anymore. Still don’t, some days.”

Ginny smiled, watery and small. “Yeah.”

They sat like that for a moment—two survivors of very different wars, tethered by silence and understanding.

She reached for her tea. “I don’t think I’ll go back. Not to England. Not for a while.”

Head over heels

He cut her off gently. “This is more important.”

“But why?” she asked, voice cracking. “Why take this on too?”

He exhaled, leaning forward, elbows on his knees. “Because I had a hand in what broke you.”

Hermione stilled.

“I mean it,” he said, gaze pinned to the floor. “Maybe not directly. But I stood in the shadows of people who tried to erase your worth. My family profited off a world that told you that you didn’t belong. And then... I just let it happen. I sneered. I spat. And then I shut up when you fought back because I was too much of a coward to admit you were right.”

He looked at her then. And she saw it—the guilt. The years of it, settled like dust behind his eyes.

“So if I can give you something—anything—that eases even one moment of that pain, I’ll do it. A thousand times over.”

Hermione blinked hard. “You already have, you know. You didn’t have to move in with me. You didn’t have to stay.”

Draco looked at her, eyes dark and stormy. “I *wanted* to stay,” he said, almost fiercely. “I wanted to stay the second I realised you were more than just clever. That you were... everything. Brilliant. Kind. Maddening. Brave. So fucking brave.”

She opened her mouth, then closed it again, her breath catching. Her hands trembled in her lap, fingers curling against her knees.

“You didn’t need to do that,” she said quietly. “You don’t owe me anything.”

Draco moved closer, a muscle ticking in his jaw.

“I know,” he said, voice ragged. “Gods, Hermione, I *know*. I know what you’ve done for me. Even the things you’ve never said aloud.”

He paused, searching her eyes.

“I know you’re the reason the Australian Ministry let me work in both the Muggle and magical wings of the hospital. I know you used your connections—Kingsley, Chen, the bloody International Council—to get those exceptions pushed through. I know you were the one who filed the paperwork that made my transcripts look legitimate once McGonagall sent them over.”

Hermione’s breath stilled.

Draco gave a shaky smile. “You’re also the one who paid the tuition gaps my scholarship didn’t cover, aren’t you?”

Her eyes welled.

“I kept wondering how everything lined up so perfectly. Why it wasn’t harder. Why no one questioned my wand restrictions when I started research again. You did that. *You* made that happen.”

He leaned forward, hands braced on his knees, voice rough.

“You saved me, Granger. In every way a person can be saved.”

She was crying openly now, silent tears streaking down her cheeks.

“And that’s why I *can’t* decide this for you,” he said. “You’ve already sacrificed enough. You’ve carried so much. Hell, you’ve carried *me*.”

His voice dropped, soft as ash.

Ours To Keep

“I’m still not worthy of you.”

Hermione’s head snapped up. “Don’t you *dare*.”

Draco blinked.

“Don’t you dare say that again,” she hissed, voice shaking. “You take care of me. You cook for me. You put up with me rearranging your books and nagging you to sleep. You sit outside the bathroom door when I cry in the bath and pretend not to hear. You are the kindest, most patient man I’ve ever met, and *you are my best friend*.”

Her chest heaved. “You’re worthy, Draco. You’re more than worthy.”

He looked like he might break.

“I don’t feel like I’ve earned this,” he said. “Not after who I was.”

Hermione reached out and grabbed his hands.

“You don’t earn love,” she whispered. “You *build* it. And you’ve been building it every single day since you came here.”

Silence stretched between them, heavy and full.

Then she said softly, “I trust you. That’s why I’m asking you to decide. Not because I can’t. But because I’ve chosen so much for others...and this time, I want to choose *you*. I want to choose to let someone else take care of me.”

Draco stared at her, wide eyed.

“If it goes wrong—”

“It won’t be your fault,” she interrupted. “Don’t you see, Draco? I’ve spent my life making hard decisions and carrying them when they broke. I made the decision to Obliviate my parents. That was on me. And if I do this again, if I choose this again...I don’t know if I’ll survive it.”

He shook his head, jaw tight. “Hermione, I don’t want to be the reason—”

“You won’t be,” she whispered. “You never would be. I trust you. More than anyone. I need you to trust that.”

He closed his eyes. Exhaled.

Her voice dropped to a whisper. “You’re the only person who hasn’t taken anything from me without asking. Who’s never demanded I be something else. You’ve always...seen me. You’re it for me, Draco. You’re my person. My home. I trust you more than I’ve ever trusted anyone. So for once—just this once—I want someone else to tell me what to do.”

He opened his eye and there was no hesitation left. He just looked at her. This woman who had carried the weight of a war and a world. Who had been betrayed by the people she’d bled beside. Who still, somehow, stood with her head high.

And who now...was asking him to be her strength.

His voice, when it came, was rough around the edges.

“I’m going to get you through this.”

He reached out, took her hands in his, and kissed her knuckles softly. Reverently.

“All right,” he whispered. “You don’t have to hold the sky up, Granger. Not by yourself.”

He stood, walked to the door, and opened it. Theo looked up from where he’d been waiting just outside.

“Do it,” Draco said, jaw set. “Give them the potion.”

Theo’s shoulders eased as he nodded. “We’ll prep the room tonight. Start the compound

Head over heels016

you still keep me around.”

Hermione didn’t flinch. Her fingers brushed his cheek and she said softly, “Because I believe in you.”

And she meant it.

Neither of them said the big words—not yet. But the weight of it was there, threaded through every shared breath, every unconscious brush of fingers in passing. It lived in the space between her laugh and his answering smile. In the way he always made her tea before she could ask. In the way she folded his laundry without complaint.

Their friends knew. Of course they did.

Theo, who had taken to calling them ‘Gracey’ just to be annoying, regularly walked into the flat unannounced and made dramatic comments like, “If this turns into a romcom, I’m demanding a cut of the box office.”

Luna had gifted them a house plant named Jasper who only bloomed when they were both in the flat. Neville and Pansy had made a habit of inviting themselves over for dinners that always ended in board games and arguments about Wizarding Monopoly.

And Ginny, ever the sharpest of the lot, had pulled Hermione aside one evening and said, “You’ve never looked at anyone the way you look at him. Not even Harry. Not even Ron.”

Hermione didn’t deny it.

How could she?

Draco, for all his prickliness and pride, had become her person.

He hadn’t just walked into her life.

He’d built a place in it.

And day by day, moment by moment, they were building something together.

Something good.

Something new.

Something worth holding onto.

The biggest surprise in their new—found family dynamic was Ginny Weasley.

Somehow—between the post-war bitterness, the tangled history, and the general chaos of Hermione and Draco’s awkward romance—Ginny had slipped in like a whirlwind. And to everyone’s shock, she had become Draco’s biggest tormentor...and his fiercest defender.

Their relationship made no sense on parchment. And yet, it worked.

Ginny treated Draco like an irritating little sister, equal parts menace and protect. She threatened to hex his bollocks off if he ever made Hermione cry again, and he, in turn, called her “Weasley Matriarch Number Two” whenever she tried to meddle in anything resembling domestic affairs.

“You’re a bloody menace, Weasley,” he’d muttered one day, kneeling on the pitch sidelines to help her patch a blister on her ankle after training.

“You’re a snobby arse, Malfoy,” she grinned, sweat clinging to her brow. “But you’re growing on me. Like a wart.”

“You’re the wart,” he shot back.

“Touching.”

Their insults were practically love letters.

Some nights, she’d show up at their flat with half a bottle of wine and a bag of chips, flop

him on nights when nightmares clawed at his sleep—when he woke in a sweat, shaking, the screams of people he'd failed to save still echoing in his ears. On the worst nights, he couldn't speak at all. Just sat on the floor with his head in his hands while she ran her fingers through his hair and whispered that he was safe. That he was home.

He learned to let her in when he spiralled—when he found himself staring too long at old letters from his mother, hands trembling, or when he read one too many articles claiming he'd never truly change. Sometimes he broke down in the quiet, apologising not for one thing, but for everything. And she never once walked away.

And she...she forgot to eat. So he cooked for her.

There were days when her appetite vanished and she floated through the flat like a ghost. Draco had noticed it early on: the untouched plates, the trembling fingers, the way her eyes seemed hollow and too far away. It was hunger. The same hunger she'd endured while running for her life, starving in forests and tents while carrying the weight of the war on her back. She flinched at loud knocks. Her eyes darted every time an owl arrived. Some days she couldn't bear to be touched. Others, she curled into him like she'd disappear without him.

They navigated the minefield of shared trauma like dancers avoiding broken glass—awkward, careful, and always together.

When she had rough days working with Theo on her parents' memory recovery—days where her mother looked at her like a stranger, or her father forgot her birthday—he would run her a bath, leave her favourite jumper by the door, and sit outside with a book just so she wouldn't feel alone. He never pushed. Just waited.

When his coursework overwhelmed him and he feared he'd never measure up—when the pressure of being someone new, someone better, someone worthy—threatened to crush him, she dragged him outside into the sunlight. Forced him to breathe. Quoted obscure magical medical journals at him until he rolled his eyes and laughed, the weight lifting just enough.

When she stayed up too late reading through Council policy drafts with that same obsessive gleam in her eye that had always scared him back at Hogwarts, he stole the parchment, tucked her into bed, and left her tea on the nightstand with a note that always read: *"The world won't end if you sleep late. But I might break international law and hex someone if you don't."*

She called him Draco. He called her Granger. Neither explained why.

But somehow, the names felt like home.

The flat had changed.

His Slytherin jumper now lived on the sofa. Her enchanted quills were scattered across his notes. A framed photo of them (taken sneakily by Luna and charmed to wave) sat near the fireplace, their heads tilted toward one another in a quiet, private moment.

The spare room was still his—technically—but he hadn't slept there in weeks.

One Sunday morning, she found him in the kitchen, shirtless, making pancakes. The wireless hummed with a soft melody. She padded in, kissed his bare shoulder, and leaned her head against his back.

"This domesticity is disturbing," she muttered.

"Speak for yourself," he said, flipping a pancake. "I look excellent with flour in my hair."

She smiled against his skin. "You look like you were hexed by a baking spell."

He turned, smudged her nose with batter, and kissed the corner of her mouth. "And yet

tomorrow."

Hermione's hand flew to her mouth as the tears spilled freely. Not from fear but from relief that she didn't have to carry this alone.

Draco returned to her side, gathering her against him with both arms, her body curling into his chest like it had been waiting for that command.

And he held her there, his lips at her temple, whispering the same vow over and over.

"You don't have to choose alone anymore."

And for the first time in years—through pain and fear and all the fragile, tangled hopes stitched between their fingers—she didn't feel like she was choosing alone.

She had someone beside her.

And together, they would see this through.



The next day, time didn't move, it *dripped*.

Theo's memo had arrived just past nine in the morning, his usual neat script unusually slanted: *"We're starting. I'll know more in six hours. I'll send word as soon as I can. Hold tight."*

Six hours. That might as well have been six years.

The flat became something of a war camp—except instead of battle plans and strategy, it was tea, blankets, and the unspoken need to *breathe through the waiting*.

Pansy and Neville arrived first.

Pansy swept into the flat like a gale, her wand out and her expression fierce. She was already muttering about the emotional trauma this was causing her skin as she slapped a cooling charm under each eye.

"If I get a wrinkle over this, I'm holding you personally responsible, Granger," she announced as she pulled Hermione into a brisk, one-armed hug. "Stress is *terrible* for my complexion."

Neville followed her in with a fond sigh, clutching a small pouch of fresh cut herbs. "Ignore her. She's made six different face potions in the last two days and tried them all."

"I am *married* to you," she said without looking at him, "and this is how you support me?"

"You're glowing, love."

"Don't be charming, it's distracting."

They bickered their way to the kitchen, leaving Hermione with a shaky smile that Draco immediately wrapped an arm around her for.

Then came Ginny—her hair wild in the wind, arms full of takeaway containers and a determined scowl on her face.

"I brought enough food to feed an army," she declared, kicking the door closed behind her.

"Or at least you know, emotionally unstable war veterans and their partners."

Blaise strolled in behind her, completely unbothered. "Which we clearly are."

He kissed Hermione's cheek, then gave Draco a brief nod that said *you good?*—and when Draco nodded back, Blaise just said, "Good. Let's eat and pretend we're not all unravelling."

"You're *very* dramatic for a wine merchant," Luna said dreamily as she floated into the room

Ours To Keep

next, a battered picnic basket swinging at her side. “The aura in here is thick with tension. I brought calming bread.”

Draco blinked. “Calming... bread?”

“Lavender and nettle,” Padma answered, entering behind Luna and giving them all a firm, kind smile. She carried a flask of something that shimmered faintly. “And I’ve got calming draught, just in case.”

Luna wrapped her arms around Padma from behind and rested her chin on her shoulder. “She makes the best potions. And she lets me use her as a niffer pillow. It’s lovely.”

Ginny grinned. “Oh, I *like* this.”

Hermione let out a breathless laugh, clutching Draco’s arm as the absurdity and beauty of it all crashed over her. “Thank you,” she whispered, looking around the room. “All of you. For being here.”

“We wouldn’t be anywhere else,” Neville said seriously.

“Besides,” Pansy added, tossing her coat over a chair, “I already cancelled my hair appointment for this. Let’s not let it go to waste.”

Blaise raised his takeaway container. “To chaos, trauma, and the most overqualified support group in the Southern Hemisphere.”

Luna raised her calming bread in response.

As they spread out around the flat—Ginny setting food out with purpose, Pansy rearranging Hermione’s throw pillows with a scowl, Padma organizing potions on the counter, and Neville reinforcing wards at every corner—Hermione leaned into Draco’s side.

“Is it weird that I feel... safe right now?”

“Not weird,” he murmured into her hair. “It means you finally let them carry some of it too.”

And for the first time since Theo’s memo arrived, she believed she could.

The wait though was unbearable and Hermione... Hermione didn’t sit once.

She moved like a ghost between rooms, barely speaking, barely breathing as time went by. Her magic, normally tethered and calm, sparked at the edges of her skin—uncontrolled, raw, aching. Her hair more sentient than usual sparked and grew every time she grew too restless.

Draco never left her side.

When her hands trembled, he covered them with his. When she nearly broke down in hour two, he stood behind her and whispered every grounding spell he knew against the shell of her ear. At least those he could use with his limited magic. By hour four, when the silence became unbearable, she curled into the corner of the sofa, legs pulled to her chest, and let herself cry. Draco pressed a kiss to her temple and held her hand like it was the only thing tethering him to the world.

She had fought every war, survived every loss, stood tall when everyone else crumbled—and now, they were waiting to see if the thing that had defined her most painful wound... could finally be undone.

The moment Theo stepped into the flat, time stopped.

He looked like he’d been through hell. Pale, bloodshot eyes, medical robes askew, a sheen of sweat across his brow. Everyone stood up.



Chapter 12 Flashback

Letters and Promises

“Some wounds don’t close cleanly. But sometimes, the right hands find a way to hold them until they heal.”

Three months.

That’s how long it had been since Hermione Granger had crossed the line between friendship and something infinitely more terrifying with Draco Malfoy.

Three months of tentative touches, of late-night laughter echoing off their shared kitchen walls, of arguments over laundry and which tea blend was the superior one (he swore by Earl Grey; she maintained Chamomile had restorative properties).

Their relationship was far from perfect. But it was real. And, in its own clumsy way, it was healing them.

Hermione had always been steady. The planner. The fixer. The one who held the world up when it threatened to collapse. But with Draco, she let herself be soft. Vulnerable. She let herself cry without reason, nap in the middle of the day, or admit when she needed to be held. And he, in turn, held her. No questions asked.

Draco, who once would have rather swallowed glass than show weakness, now left notes on the bathroom mirror:

“You are not responsible for everyone. Just breathe today.”

“You saved the world. You can survive this Monday.”

“Reminder: You are brilliant even when you forget your tea on the counter.”

“Your kindness is not a weakness. It’s your strongest spell.”

“I’m proud of you. Even on the days you’re not proud of yourself.”

“We’re allowed to rest. You taught me that.”

“One day at a time, Granger. I’m right here.”

They held each other up in more ways than one. Hermione brewed calming draughts for

Head over heels016

“They’re in recovery,” he said quietly, voice cracking at the edges. “It worked. It worked, Hermione. They’re back.”

Silence.

Then Hermione made a sound—a soft, broken sob—and collapsed forward, her hands covering her face, her body wracked with trembling so fierce Draco thought she might fall apart right there on the rug.

He caught her.

He always would.

He didn’t speak. Just lifted her gently and carried her out of the flat, down the stairs, through the back gate of the building to the small garden where they had shared too many midnight silences and not enough sunlight.

They collapsed onto the bench—the same bench where he’d once cupped her face and promised to be her strength. Where she’d told him he was her person.

Hermione curled into his lap, burying her face in his shoulder, still crying.

“They remember me,” she whispered, voice thready and hoarse. “They remember me.”

Draco wrapped both arms around her, eyes burning. “I know. I know, love.”

“I thought I’d lost them forever.”

“You didn’t.”

She pulled back just enough to look up at him—flushed cheeks, red-rimmed eyes, a trembling smile.

“Do you have any idea what you’ve done for me?”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“You *did*,” she insisted, voice shaking. “You worked with Chen. You made the potion. You made this *possible*. You gave me *hope*, Draco.”

He didn’t answer.

So she kissed him.

It wasn’t soft.

It was the kind of kiss that felt like the breaking of storm clouds—fierce, desperate, overflowing. It was everything she hadn’t been able to say and everything he had never let himself hope.

When they finally pulled apart, their foreheads resting together, her hand on his chest and his arms locked tight around her waist, Hermione spoke again.

“I love you,” she said. “I love you so fucking much it’s stupid.”

Draco’s breath caught. His eyes closed for a moment as if to steady himself.

“I love you,” she repeated, quieter. “You bloody insufferable man. I love you more than I thought I could love anything again.”

Draco opened his eyes. “Granger—Hermione—I’ve loved you for longer than I’ve had the right to. I think... fuck, I think I’ve loved you since you punched me in third year and I pretended it didn’t hurt. I’ve loved you every time you told me off, every time you pulled away, every time you let me back in.”

She laughed through a sob. “Don’t make our love story about me breaking your nose.”

“I still think it’s crooked.”

They both laughed.

And then Draco cupped her face and said, voice trembling, “I love you. Every brilliant, maddening, resilient inch of you. You terrify me. You undo me. You saved me.”

Hermione pressed her forehead to his again, her hands shaking where they clutched his jumper.

“I used to think I’d never have this,” she said. “That I’d always be the girl who made the hard choices and got left behind. But you... you stayed.”

He kissed the tip of her nose.

“I’ll always stay.”

They sat there, wrapped in one another, the weight of years finally cracking open into something warm and whole.

The sun began to dip low on the horizon, streaking the sky with gold and lavender. Somewhere inside, their friends waited with champagne and probably far too much cake.

But here, in the garden, they were just two people who had survived the war, the silence, the heartbreak—and somehow found each other.

“I love you,” she said again, as if she needed him to hear it.

Draco leaned in and kissed her once more.

And this time, it felt like a beginning.

The sun had already dipped below the rooftops by the time they returned to the flat. The air inside felt warm—familiar—but laced with the kind of tired tension that clung to skin after too many hours of waiting.

Theo was still there, a mug of tea in hand and an exhaustion in his eyes that matched Hermione’s.

“They’re stable,” he said, voice low. “They’ve already been transferred to the hospice suite. Magical stabilisation every six hours. Daily potions, mental recalibration, memory anchoring charms. I’ll oversee the first week myself.”

Hermione nodded, rubbing her thumb over the back of Draco’s hand.

“They might have good days and bad ones. They might forget you tomorrow and remember everything next week. It’s going to be a process. But it’s real. They’re there.”

She swallowed. “Thank you Theo.”

Theo smiled faintly. “Get some rest, Granger. That’s your next job.”

And with that, their friends said their goodbyes, slipping into the cool night one by one with tired hugs, warm promises, and lingering glances that said *we’re here, always*.

By the time their friends left and the flat returned to stillness, a kind of sacred quiet settled over them, like the house itself knew what they had just been through.

Hermione didn’t speak at first. She stood in the middle of the living room, fingers curled around the back of a chair, staring out the window at the inky city sky. Her shoulders rose and fell in slow, deep breaths, like she was still reminding herself that it was real. That it had worked. That her parents—*her parents*—remembered her.

Draco stepped up behind her without a word, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind. She let herself fold into him, her hands resting on his forearms as he pressed a slow kiss to the crown of her head.

“You did it,” he murmured.

She turned in his arms, eyes wide and luminous. “We did.”

It felt like a promise.

It felt like *home*.

A beginning, the kind built not from fairy tales, but from truth. From shared scars and stubborn hope.

From *them*.

Ours To Keep

My dearest Vernon,

And of course, my darling Bruce,

Kindly has informed us of your parents' progress. Thomas and I most say, having of their recovery has pulled me home after something I scarcely dared hope for these last years, yet I know what it is to nearly lose someone irrevocably, and I know what it means to fight for them anyway.

That you succeeded. it speaks not only of your brilliancy, but of your heart. And it does not surprise me in the least

These notes if us often, as you know, the letters have grown longer, sturdier, warmer, the words of you with such quiet resonance that even without knowing the details, I could guess what you meant for me another long before he told us plainly.

Please know that both Louisa and I are weighed for you both. And though we have yet to say so in person, we are deeply, truly grateful for the light you've brought into our son's life.

Kindly has returned our final point as supposed. We are glad that it were not well under his great. It will be our first and final step ahead in our a decade, and though I am sure the day-to-day are well be ahead in my skin. I find I do not care in the slightest.

We are coming to see our sin that is reason enough to endure anything

that we have undoubtedly received the copy of the published paper by a certain "Dr. Drake." Lucas suggests a few of the names, but I, drawing on funds of little ingenuity and of Lucas's great richness of literary knowledge, was helping and misdirected. Nevertheless, on weeks few papers are like ours, both of us finally proud. Even if the copyright can't now trace the discovery to us, his paper must.

I feel proud to send you again, thimble-just as the young woman I once knew at the edge of Colfax; but as the war has grown not so much friendly, compassionate, and quite clearly helped by our son. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Wharfedale

Narcissa Thallay

Hermione didn't realise she was crying until a tear dropped onto the edge of the parchment. Draco gently brushed it away with the pad of his thumb.

“She called me beloved,” Hermione whispered, stunned.

"She means it," Draco said quietly, reverently. "She's not one for empty words."

Hermione looked down at the letter again, chest tight but full.

"Well," she murmured, "that's one parental reunion I might actually look forward to."

Draco smiled, soft and full of something almost like disbelief. "I think...I might be ready for it too."

The fourth letter was written on dragonhide stationery that smelled faintly of gunpowder and peppermints. The handwriting was unmistakably George's—large, uneven, and absolutely incapable of respecting the margins. Hermione opened it with a grin already tugging at the corner of her mouth.

DiChiaro,

Right, so Erin told me you've been playing Florence Nightingale across the world and mind-bogglingly fixed what *every* Haden said was impossible—typical you. Pretty brilliant.

I don't know exactly what it cost you. She didn't say much. Just that you'd done the impossible and that you were...different. More than different, actually. That you're *freer*.

Head_over_heels016

She hasn't told me who the mysterious man is—but I'm not stupid, you know. I've got two cars, a suspension bridge, and a working knowledge of school-run classes. And I'm starting to put a few things together.

Now, I know, like to you. I'm still not sure how I feel about it. But I trust Eric. And I trust you more than most people. You're always doing things for the right reason—even if they scared the absolute state out of the rest of us.

So if you've chosen him—wherever he is—and he's making you laugh again, then that's all I bloody care about.

Thanks for looking after Eric and the dogs. She's a bloody nuisance, but she's not malicious. She's brighter now. Forgive. She's always been fine—but whatever you lot are doing over there, it's helping her want the way she's meant to.

I've been this way of visiting. Not just to see Cyril but to see you. Properly, it's been years since we've met actually. But most of us observed your disappearance, and you always gave it a good go. I want to see what your looks like on you. However, I think it's long overdue.

If you ever need anything—and I mean anything—write me. Day or night. And, Father was, I don't care. You're family. Even if the rest of us have been a bit shy about showing it.

Tell Frank you, I know, I said hi. And that if he hurts you — well, let's just say, I've got enough products in the backroom to make sure he survives when he walks.

- George W.

Hermione let out a shaky breath and pressed the letter to her chest.

Draco, who had been reading over her shoulder, gave her a bemused look. "Did he just threaten to turn me into a squeaky toy?"

"Probably," she said, eyes misty. "And that was him being kind."

Draco huffed but smiled. “Well, I suppose if I’m earning reluctant approval from a Weasley, I must be doing something right.”

Hermione wiped at her eyes, grinning. "You've done a lot right."

She set George's letter gently on top of the others. "I'd like to see him again," she added softly. "It's been too long."

Draco nudged her shou

And then.. the fifth.

The parchment was thicker than the others—a familiar, floral-scented envelope, the corners crisply pressed and the script unmistakably Molly Wessley's. Her handwriting had always been a thing of beauty—neat and proper, like the warm, maternal woman who had once made Hermione feel like she was part of something steady and eternal.

Her hands trembled as she opened it.

Draco noticed. "Want me to read it first?"

She shook her head.

Thermione,

I suppose congratulations are in order for your parents' recovery. Though how much of that success you can claim yourself is debatable. It's easy to play the hero when the rest of us are too busy cleaning up the mess you left behind.

Ben is drinking again. He can hardly stand up most nights, and the reporters won't stop circling. It's broken, *Almanac*. He loved you. You humiliated him all for what? A life of selfish ambition and never playing house?

with just "how" who?

Should Ginny well. She's off shopping a Stationer, flouncing her daggers across continents. Did you put her up to it? Because if you think everything we did was it enough, now you've taken my daughter from me too. You walked away from this family. From the people who loved you. From the boy who fought beside you. From the girl who included you. You disavoured what we built after the war. You disavoured Fred's memory. Should you what?

Oh redemption, fantasy with some post-for-nothing man? Playing the part of exalted woman in a new land where we are remember what you did – or who you left behind?

When Ginny smiles, and she will, I hope you'll be ready to care for her. Because we are here with her. Don't write back.

– Molly Weasley

She wished she'd let him.

Silence.

The letter slipped from Hermione's hands, landing in her lap like it weighed a thousand bloody stones. Her face didn't move. Didn't crumple. Didn't betray even a flicker of the pain lodged beneath her sternum.

Draco didn't wait for permission this time. He reached over and snatched up the parchment, skimming it quickly.

Once.

Then again.

Then he stood, his breath shallow and hot.

"Fucking hell," he hissed, voice shaking with rage. "That bitter, self-righteous—"

He stopped himself, fists clenched so tight his knuckles whitened. He looked at Hermione—still frozen—and knelt down in front of her.

"Hey," He cupped her jaw gently. "Granger. Look at me."

She blinked, once.

And then again.

Her eyes brimmed, not with tears but with the hollow kind of heartbreak that didn't know how to weep anymore. Just...ache.

"I gave everything to them," she whispered. "To her. To all of them. For years."

"I know."

"I stayed in that house every summer. I set the table. She made me Christmas jumpers. I covered for Percy when he snuck off to court that Hufflepuff girl. I helped rebuild the fucking Ministry with her son, and still..."

Draco's voice was dark. "Still it's not enough. Because it never would be. Because they only ever loved you when you played their version of perfect."

"She called me a scarlet woman." Hermione let out a humourless laugh. "Me."

Draco surged forward and kissed her—not out of passion, but out of grounding. Fierce and soft all at once. Like he was reminding her: *You're here. You're safe. You're mine.*

When he pulled back, his voice was low and steady.

"We don't need them. Not a single one of them. You've got Ginny. Blaise. Pansy. Theo. Neville. Luna. Your parents. Me."

Ministry to sign off on final terms.

And I'll be bringing two special guests with me.

Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy have been granted their first formal travel permit. When I told them, Narcissa nearly cried. I don't think she truly believed she'd see her son outside of a Ministry liaison ever again. But she will. And she's elated.

They're coming to see Draco, of course. But also... to see you. She insisted. She said she wants to thank you in person. For everything.

No one else knows. Not even your colleagues back in London. And I'd like to keep it that way. Just my secretary, the Australian Ministry, and you.

I'll send word of the exact date once we finalise arrival times. Until then, take care of yourself, Hermione. You've already done the impossible. Let yourself feel it.

Always,

Kingsley

Hermione exhaled slowly, the breath shaking on its way out.

This—this was what acknowledgment was supposed to look like. Not transactional. Not forced. Just... genuine.

Draco watched her carefully. "What did he say?"

She passed him the letter with a small, weary smile. "He's coming. Next week. With your parents."

Draco blinked, then straightened. "Really?"

"Narcissa apparently nearly cried when she found out."

His eyes softened.

"And... he said they want to see me. That she does."

Draco reached out and took her hand. "Then she'll get to. And they'll see what I see every bloody day."

Hermione let her head rest against his shoulder, heart caught somewhere between grief and hope.

"Kingsley said I should let myself feel proud," she murmured.

"You should."

"I'm trying"

Draco leaned down and brushed his lips against her hair. "You've got a week."

Hermione closed her eyes.

Maybe, she thought, it was enough.

She slowly opened her eyes and reached for the next missive.

The third envelope was heavy, thick cream parchment sealed with wax embossed with the Malfoy crest. Hermione recognised the script instantly—all looping elegance and restraint.

She unfolded the letter slowly. The scent of Narcissa's stationery—something floral and faintly antique—wafted up as she and Draco leaned over the parchment together.

Owls To Keep

Hermione sat down at the kitchen table, hands shaking just enough for her to notice. “I don’t know what I expected.”

“Yes, you do.”

She looked up.

“I thought... maybe this time he’d ask something. Say something real. Tell me he misses me. That he—” Her throat closed. “That he’s sorry.”

She laughed, bitter. “But no, just ‘wishing you the best.’ Like I’m a former coworker who left for a better job.”

Draco reached for her hand and squeezed it.

“It’s worse than him yelling at me,” she whispered. “At least then I’d know he still gave a damn.”

“You invited him here,” Draco said gently. “You tried.”

“He didn’t even ask about my parents’ names. Just ‘the procedure.’ Like they’re a fucking project.”

He didn’t reply. He didn’t need to.

Because he knew what it was like to lose someone who had once known the worst parts of you and still stayed—only to let you down when it mattered most.

And that was the thing about Harry.

Hermione had loved him like family. Like blood. Like the boy she’d fought beside and bled for. But in the quiet aftermath of war—when apologies and understanding mattered more than loyalty and fire—he’d gone quiet.

And now...he was cold.

Just like the letter in her hands.

And that was somehow worse than all the shouting in the world.

She folded Harry’s letter with slow, deliberate care and set it aside - like handling glass that might still shatter. The silence in the flat stretched between them.

“I’ll write him back later,” Hermione said, voice clipped. “Maybe. I just...not now.”

Draco didn’t push. He only nodded, pressing a kiss to the top of her head as she reached for the next bit of parchment.

She unrolled the second letter and immediately recognised the bold, confident script. Kingsley.

Her shoulders relaxed before she’d even finished reading the salutation.

Hermione,

Your parents’ recovery is a triumph. Not just for them—though I know that’s what matters most to you—but for the rest of us, too. The world needed something like this.

Proof that healing is possible. That there’s still magic in waking things right, even if it takes years.

You should be proud. Not just for what you’ve done for them, but for the way you’ve carried so many people through darkness and still manage to remain whole yourself, even when no one would blame you for falling apart.

I’ll be in Australia next week on Ministry business. Only a small delegation—very discreet. No reporters. Just myself, my secretary, and one official from the Australian

Head over heels016

His thumb brushed her cheek. “You’ve built a new life. One that no one—no bloody Weasley—has any right to tear down.”

Hermione shook her head, almost dazed. “I loved them.”

“I know. But love doesn’t mean you owe them your peace. Or your forgiveness. Especially not when they don’t ask for it.”

She nodded slowly, eyes flicking back to the letter on her lap.

“We don’t tell Ginny,” Draco added, more firmly now. “She doesn’t need that kind of poison in her head.”

“No,” Hermione agreed, voice hollow. “We don’t.”

Draco stood and pulled her gently up with him, wrapping his arms around her as she finally sagged into him.

“She won’t crash,” he said. “Because she’s got us. She’s got this whole fucking unorthodox family who loves her. Who sees her. Who isn’t afraid of the truth.”

Hermione clutched the front of his shirt and buried her face in his chest.

“I’m tired of people thinking I owe them,” she mumbled. “That I have to keep fixing everything.”

“You don’t,” Draco murmured into her hair. “Not anymore.”

They stood like that for a long while. Until the birds stopped fluttering outside the window. Until the silence stopped stinging.

Until Hermione finally whispered, “Burn the letter.”

Draco didn’t hesitate. He grabbed her wand, a new development in their relationship they haven’t told anyone and with a flick the parchment ignited in blue fire, curling and crumbling until there was nothing left but ash.

“You,” he said, brushing her curls away from her face, “are not anyone’s scapegoat.”

And Hermione, for the first time since the owls arrived, felt like she could breathe again.



Later that night, after visiting her parents—after her father recited her favourite bedtime story from memory and her mother called her “darling girl” with the exact warmth she’d dreamt about for years—Hermione sat curled on the worn armchair near the fireplace, parchment spread over her lap, a quill resting lightly between her fingers.

She stared at the blank page for what felt like hours.

Five different drafts had already been tossed into the bin.

Draco sat nearby, nursing a cup of tea that had long gone cold, watching her quietly. He didn’t push. He never did. Not when it mattered.

Finally, she dipped her quill in ink and wrote.

nk as it dried, the words stark and final. Her hand trembled slightly as she folded the letter, sealed it with a flick of her wand, and set it aside.

Draco hadn’t moved. But his eyes were on her, steady and sure.

“I don’t know if we’ll ever fix things,” she said softly, her voice raw from everything that had been left unsaid.

Ours To Keep

Draco leaned back against the wall, arms folded, expression unreadable. “And if you could?” She looked away. “I don’t know. That’s the problem. I miss him. I miss the boy who held my hand in the tent, who watched the stars with me while we kept the world from falling apart. But the man he is now...” She swallowed hard. “I don’t think I need him anymore. Not like I used to.”

Draco’s gaze didn’t waver. “You just wanted him to fight for you.”

She nodded, eyes stinging. “Yeah. But, he didn’t.”

Draco set his tea down and crossed the room in two strides. He dropped to one knee in front of her, hands gently sliding over her thighs until they rested at her waist.

“I will,” he said, voice low and fierce. “Every day. For the rest of our lives, if you’ll let me.”

She smiled through the tears she didn’t even realise had started to fall. “You already do.” He kissed her knuckles, her jaw, the corner of her mouth. “Then we keep going. The rest doesn’t matter.”

They sat there in the quiet hum of their flat, the fire crackling low and the evening bleeding into early night.

Outside, the city stirred.

Inside, something in Hermione finally settled.

Draco leaned his forehead against hers. “Do you realise it’s been nearly a year?”

Hermione blinked. “Since what?”

“Since I landed in this sunburnt corner of the world.”

She let out a quiet laugh. “Feels like a lifetime ago.”

He nodded. “And yet somehow, I’m... happy. Genuinely. And I didn’t think I’d ever say that again.”

“You deserve it,” she whispered.

His fingers tightened slightly at her waist. “So do you.”

They didn’t speak for a long while. They didn’t need to.

Because in the tangle of recovery, lost friendships, family wounds, and quiet victories...they had each other.



A week later, the flat was full of nervous anticipation.

Draco wasn’t sure why he’d woken up with his heart rattling in his chest—only that something in the air had shifted. The flat was unusually quiet, the sort of silence that hummed with expectation.

Hermione was in the kitchen, making tea, wearing one of his old shirts and humming under her breath. She didn’t seem to notice his restlessness, or perhaps she was purposefully ignoring it.

The Floo flared to life just after noon, flames licking the hearth in a swirl of green.

“Expecting someone?” Draco asked, brow raised.

Hermione glanced up from pouring hot water. “Maybe.” Was it mean of her to not have told him he was seeing his parents today? Maybe. She smiled as he looked at her and before he

Head over heels016

by the window sill.

Draco glanced up from the counter, watching her shoulders tense.

“Who’s it from?” he asked, already guessing.

She didn’t answer right away. Just stared at her name written across the front, her stomach turning with something too old and familiar to be called nerves. No warmth clung to the paper, no silly doodle in the corner like he used to do. No extra flick of ink or smudge of excitement.

It was sterile. Controlled. Like everything between them had become.

She’d been writing to him on and off for the last few months. Nothing consistent. Nothing like before.

The letters had started polite. Cautious. Stiff. They’d spoken of weather and work, never the war or anything that mattered. Never about Ron. Never about her leaving. Never about why it still fucking hurt.

Once, she’d sent a note inviting him to visit Australia—just for a weekend, to meet her parents, see the world beyond England, maybe even... try. She’d spent days writing and rewriting it, carefully leaving out anything about Draco or the flat or the space she’d carved out for herself here.

He’d replied three lines. Thanked her. Said he was too busy with Ministry work. That maybe someday.

She knew it was a lie.

And now, now that the Daily Prophet had printed the article, she feared what this letter might say. Or worse, what it wouldn’t.

She unrolled it with careful fingers.

Hermione stared at it for a long time, lips pressed into a thin line. Her heart thudded in her

pleasures,

I heard about your parents. Congratulations on the success of the procedure. I hope they continue to recover well.

The Ministry have been busy, unsurprisingly things aren't the same without you. I imagine you're where you want to be.

Wishing you the best.

- Flawly

chest like it was trying to punch its way out.

“That’s it?” she murmured.

Draco set his mug down. “What’s it say?”

She held the letter out like it had burned her. “Congratulations. Wishing you the best.” Like I moved to bloody Australia to open a bed and breakfast and not to fix the fucking trauma I gave my own parents.”

Draco took it, skimmed the words, and exhaled sharply through his nose. “It’s clinical. Like you’re a public service announcement.”

Owls To Keep

parents' recovery from the beginning.

"Miss Granger's commitment to ethical healing and her bravery in undertaking this effort—at great emotional cost—speaks volumes," said Dr. Chen in a brief statement to the Prophet. "This wasn't simply about healing a memory. It was about repairing a family, and reasserting agency after war."

Implications for the Future

Experts across Europe are already referring to the case as a turning point in magical medicine. "We now know that Obliviate is not always permanent," said one Healer from St. Mungo's. "That alone reshapes how we view memory damage, trauma, and magical consent."

Granger herself declined to give a full interview, but confirmed in writing that her parents are currently undergoing ongoing recovery and are "safe, supported, and surrounded by love."

The Australian Ministry of Magic has not officially commented, but it is believed that the team involved may be nominated for international recognition later this year.

As for Dr. Drake, little is known—though rumours suggest he has a background in both Muggle and magical medicine and has published work on trauma repair theory. When pressed, Dr. Chen merely smiled and said, "Sometimes heroes wear anonymity like armour. Let them."

Hermione Granger's parents are expected to make a full recovery within the next three months.

And in a world still haunted by the scars of war, this story—of a daughter's sacrifice, a team's brilliance, and a family's second chance—offers something we desperately need: **Hope.**

And just like that, the letters started coming.

Five owls arrived that morning within the same sixty seconds, battering the windows and dropping parchment like omens.

"Fucking hell," Draco muttered, ducking as the largest owl circled his head twice before depositing its scroll directly into his half-empty mug of tea.

Hermione froze as she reached for the first scroll. Her breath caught before she even unrolled it.

Draco watched her carefully, reading every flicker in her eyes, every tremble in her fingers.

"Want me to read them?" he offered, gently.

"No," she said. "I have to."

And with that, she began to open the letters—

The first letter was from Harry.

Hermione recognised the handwriting before the owl had even landed. Neat. Precise. Devoid of flourish. She froze with the parchment in her hands, her tea forgotten and cooling

Head over heels016

could ask more, the figure of Kingsley Shacklebolt stepped through the Floo, his deep voice filling the space with warmth.

"Hope you don't mind the intrusion," Kingsley said, brushing ash off his robes. "I brought company."

Draco froze.

Because behind Kingsley stepped Narcissa Malfoy.

And behind her... Lucius.

The room stopped.

He hadn't seen them since the sentencing. Since the trial. Since everything.

His mother looked thinner, but elegant, always elegant, her hair pulled into a flawless twist, her eyes rimmed with emotion she didn't bother hiding.

His father looked older. The proud tilt of his chin had softened, his shoulders slightly stooped, but there was something in his gaze that held no judgement.

Just... quiet pride.

"Draco," Narcissa whispered, voice catching.

He didn't hesitate. Didn't care that he was still in his pyjama trousers or that he hadn't brushed his hair. He crossed the room in three strides and wrapped his arms around her, burying his face into her shoulder.

"I've missed you," she said, her fingers digging into his back.

"I missed you too," he replied hoarsely, closing his eyes.

They stood like that for a moment—mother and son, once fractured, now slowly piecing themselves back together.

When they pulled apart, Lucius stepped forward.

There was a beat of silence.

Then, "Son."

Draco's breath hitched.

And still, no hesitation.

He stepped into his father's arms and let himself be held.

It wasn't dramatic. It wasn't tearful. But it was real. A silent acknowledgment of growth. Of pain endured. Of forgiveness not asked for - but offered.

When Hermione approached a moment later, Narcissa pulled her into a warm embrace without a word.

"Thank you," Narcissa whispered into her curls. "For loving him. For seeing him and for letting us visit you."

Hermione blinked back tears and nodded. "He makes it easy."

Lucius offered a polite bow of his head. "Miss Granger. Pleasure to see you once more. It seems we owe you much."

"Please," Hermione said with a quiet smile. "It's just Hermione now."

That evening, they gathered in the back garden of the flat—a mismatched collection of people who had once been enemies, strangers, and now... something like family.

Pansy and Neville brought wine. Luna had charmed the garden lights to shimmer like stars. Theo showed up late, citing a "very rude experimental potion that nearly exploded." Blaise and Ginny arrived hand in hand, arguing about whether to bring tiramisu or fireworks. They

brought both.

The table was full of stories and laughter and music floating from a wireless in the corner. It felt like peace.

It felt like home.

Later, when the sun began to dip behind the rooftops and the laughter softened into content murmurs, Narcissa pulled Draco aside beneath the old fig tree.

"I brought something," she said, slipping a small velvet box into his palm.

Draco looked down, curious.

"This belonged to your grand mother," she said, her voice soft. "And to her mother before her. And to a long line of Malfoy brides. It's yours now. For when you're ready."

He opened it.

Inside was a ring—delicate and old, silver and emerald, with ancient runes etched around the band. Protective magic, he realised. Meant for legacy. For love.

His throat closed.

"I'm so proud of you," Narcissa whispered, brushing her thumb along his cheek. "You've become a man your father and I are proud to call our son."

He didn't speak. Just nodded, swallowing the weight of what those words meant.

When he turned, Lucius was watching from the edge of the garden, glass in hand. He lifted it slightly in silent approval.

Draco stood under the fading sky, ring box in hand, and felt something settle in his chest. For the first time in his life, the future didn't feel like a punishment or a question.

It felt like a promise.

He looked across the garden.

Hermione was seated on a bench, Ginny's head on her shoulder, laughing at something Theo had said. The glow of the lights bathed her in gold, her smile soft and unguarded.

And Draco knew.

He would spend the rest of his life making sure she never lost that light again.

And perhaps, just perhaps... it was time to find out how to ask her to be his forever.



The next morning dawned crisp and golden, sunlight stretching over Sydney like the city itself was exhaling.

Draco sat quietly on the second-floor balcony of the hospice wing, a steaming cup of tea between his palms. Across from him sat Richard Granger—Hermione's father—dressed in a cardigan someone (probably Padma) had knitted, and reading the latest copy of the *Sydney Herald*. He looked better. Brighter. More present. It was in the way he sat up straight, the way his eyes tracked the birds beyond the garden, the way he reached for his tea without hesitation.

And for the first time in Draco's life, he wasn't afraid to speak his truth.

"Mr Granger...Richard," he said carefully, setting down his cup. "There's something I want to ask you."

Richard folded the paper and turned, his brow raised, the barest hint of amusement in his eyes. "Go on then, son."

THE DAILY PROPHECY

Front Page - International Section

Wednesday Edition

REWRITING WHAT WAS LOST: A Landmark Breakthrough in Memory Restoration

By Euphemia Crowley, Senior Correspondent

In a development that could change the course of magical healing for generations, Healers and researchers working out of Australia have successfully reversed one of the most complex memory modifications in recent history—the voluntary Obliviation of two Muggles by their own daughter.

Hermione Granger, celebrated war heroine and current representative to the International Magical Reconciliation Council, confirmed that her parent Richard and Jean Granger, who were under the alias Wendell and Monica Wilkins have begun a full recovery process following a delicate and highly experimental restoration procedure.

The Grangers' memories had been altered in 1997 at the height of the Second Wizarding War by their daughter, then seventeen, in an effort to protect them from retaliation by You-Know-Who's followers. Granger, a Muggle-born witch and former close friend of Harry Potter (The Boy Who Lived), was wanted by the Regime at the time and used the highly illegal Obliviate charm to erase herself entirely from their minds—implanting new identities, careers, and even memories of emigration.

Though the war ended years ago, her attempts at reversal had repeatedly failed, until now.

The Breakthrough

The procedure was led by renowned magical physician Dr. Daniel M. Chen, in collaboration with a promising researcher operating under the pseudonym Dr. Drake, and spell-repair specialist Theodore Nott, a former Hogwarts classmate of Granger's.

The trio developed a multi-phase potion and magical therapy cycle designed to stabilise fragmented memory cores—long considered too unstable for reformation. Sources confirm that the process involved both magical and neurological frameworks, and required months of trial work, hospice care, and intensive emotional anchoring.

Granger, known for her advocacy on behalf of war orphans and displaced magical families, had quietly relocated to Australia over a year ago. While her reasons remained undisclosed until now, sources close to the programme confirm that she had been involved in her

"I know," she replied, brushing a curl behind her ear. "But I still worry."

"I love that about you," he murmured, stepping forward to press a kiss to her temple. "But they're in good hands. And today we get to see them. Come on, love. Let's go."

Their life had become a symphony of domesticity and healing. Shared coffees in the morning. Matching notes stuck to the fridge—reminders to rest, to breathe, to believe.

Hermione had taken to curling up beside him at night with legislation drafts and parchment strewn across the bed while he read medical journals aloud until they both fell asleep. She was making waves with the International Wizarding Council, pushing reforms that would protect magical children during conflict, redefine the rights of war orphans, and set precedent for post-war trauma care.

Her name had begun to circulate in high-level diplomatic circles as the *voice of post-war reform*. Even McGonagall had written her recently, saying the Wizengamot had quietly passed two of her proposed amendments under new classifications: *Hermione's Law* and *The Granger Protocol*.

Draco, meanwhile, was flourishing in his own right.

He'd passed the latest round of exams in the Muggle doctor's program and was now fully immersed in practical rotations. He split his time between hospital floors and assisting Dr. Chen on the warding side of their research—particularly in post-Cruciatius nerve therapy and memory magic detox protocols.

One of his academic essays, titled "*Bridging Biology and Spell Theory: A Case for Dual-Sector Medicine*," had recently been published in an international Muggle-Wizard cooperative medical journal. Theo had thrown a dinner party in celebration. Luna brought sparkling elderflower champagne and Ginny made Draco a sash that read "Hot Doc" in glittering green script.

He'd been mortified.

But he wore it all night.

Still, it hadn't all been easy. Just last week, Draco lost a patient—a Muggle teenager from the oncology ward—and spiraled into a familiar darkness.

He didn't sleep for two days.

Hermione didn't push him to talk. She brewed the potions. She brought the tea. She climbed into bed beside him and whispered that some things couldn't be fixed, only held.

"You're allowed to feel it," she'd said, pressing her lips to his brow. "But you don't have to drown in it alone."

He hadn't cried. But he'd held her hand like a lifeline for the rest of the night.

And then, just two days ago, the *Daily Prophet* finally caught wind of her parents' recovery. The article was a full-page feature, discreetly titled "*Reuniting What Was Lost: New Advances in Memory Retention*". It detailed the medical breakthrough, credited Dr. Chen and a mysterious Dr. Drake (Draco's alias), and included a full column on Theo Nott's immersive magical care techniques.

It mentioned Hermione by name of course.

But thankfully it did not allude to her relationship with Draco. They were not ashamed or hiding; they just enjoyed the privacy they had with their relationship. This meant everything.

Draco swallowed.

"I'd like to ask Hermione to marry me. But I won't do it without your blessing."

The silence that followed was heavy. Not cold, just thoughtful. Measured. Richard Granger was not a man who gave things lightly. He watched Draco like a father assessing the integrity of a foundation he might build his entire future on.

"I was raised in a world where bloodlines meant everything," Draco said quietly, his hands folded tightly in his lap. "Where tradition wasn't just something we followed—it was a measure of worth. Every choice, every word, every match... all judged by the weight of legacy. It was a cage disguised as honour. But Hermione—" His voice caught slightly before he steadied it again. "Hermione taught me the difference. Between legacy and purpose. Between duty and love."

Richard watched him, unreadable.

Draco took a slow breath. "And even though I've spent a very long time unlearning the very foundation I was built on, there are still things that matter to me. Not because of the Malfoy name—but because of the man I'm trying to become. Asking you for your blessing, Mr Granger... it's not about formality. It's not even about Hermione, not really. It's about standing in front of the person who raised the woman I love more than life itself, and telling him that I will never take that love for granted."

His eyes didn't waver.

"I love your daughter. Fiercely. Without condition or expectation. She is my beginning and my end. My anchor and my storm. She saved me from myself—from everything I thought I was destined to be—and gave me something I never believed I could have. A second chance. A life with meaning. A life with her."

He cleared his throat, voice lower now, but steady.

"So yes—I was raised pureblood. I was raised with traditions and protocols, and all the nonsense that came with it. But this isn't about those old rules. This is about honour. Real honour. And respect. And love. It's about standing here today and telling you, honestly and humbly, that I want to spend the rest of my life earning the right to be by her side. To build a life that matches the strength and brilliance of hers. And to deserve the fact that, somehow, she loves me back."

Richard didn't speak for a long time. His expression remained still, eyes sharp with something that hovered between memory and emotion.

Then, finally, he exhaled—a slow, weighty sound—and nodded once, firm and quiet.

"You know," he said slowly, "the day I realised I couldn't protect her from the world was the day she cast a spell in the kitchen and turned the toaster into something else. She was nine."

Draco blinked.

"I'm still not sure how she did it," Richard continued. "But what I do know is that she's never needed a man to fight for her."

"No," Draco agreed. "She's always been her own bloody army."

Richard gave a small smile. "But she *deserves* someone who stands beside her anyway. Even when she doesn't need it."

He extended his hand. "You have my blessings, Draco. And my trust."

Draco's breath caught as he shook it. "Thank you. Truly."



The proposal took two days to plan. Which, in Hermione Granger's world, would be considered criminally spontaneous—but for Draco, it was the most thought he'd ever put into anything.

He enlisted Theo to help charm the back garden of their flat, Ginny to keep Hermione distracted, and Luna to provide *exactly* the right arrangement of floating lights and softly blooming nightlilies.

Kingsley approved the gathering personally. No press. No leaks. Just family.

The evening was cool but not cold, the sky painted with dusky purples and streaks of gold. The fairy lights flickered gently overhead, enchanted to pulse like starlight.

Everyone was there—Pansy in emerald silk beside Neville in soft brown robes; Blaise with his arm wrapped around Ginny, whispering something smug that made her roll her eyes and kiss his cheek; Luna dancing with Padma barefoot in the grass. Theo, drink in hand, offered a casual two-finger salute every time Draco looked like he might vomit.

Narcissa and Lucius stood a little off to the side, watching with soft, quiet expressions. Richard and Jean sat at the table closest to the flowers, holding hands, enjoying this short window outside of their hospice care to witness this.

Hermione, ever Hermione, was suspicious.

"You're fidgeting," she murmured as they stood at the edge of the garden, watching everyone mingle.

Draco tugged on his cuffs. "I'm always fidgeting. I'm a naturally anxious, highly reformed Slytherin."

She arched an eyebrow. "You've worn that tie only twice before. Once for court. Once when you tried to impress the French medical board last month."

"Are you accusing me of being sentimental?"

"I'm accusing you of plotting."

"Then I might as well get to the point."

He turned her to face him—and then, to the surprise of everyone but Kingsley, Hermione's parents, and Narcissa (who had been conspiring with him for days), he cleared his throat until everyone quieted.

The murmurs stopped. The laughter faded. And in that one moment, time hung suspended.

Draco pulled the box from his coat.

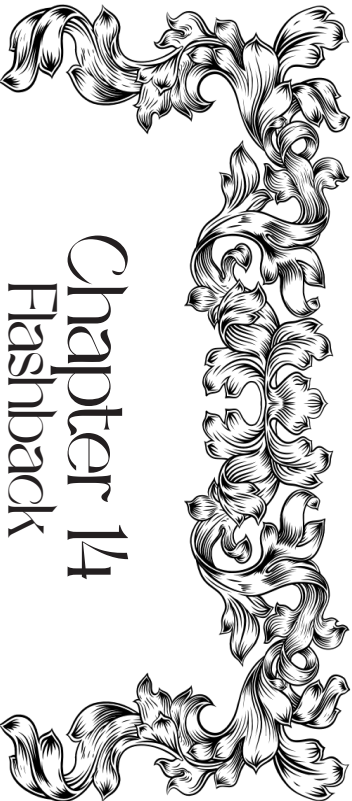
Draco dropped to one knee, the garden glowing under the soft shimmer of fairy lights. The gathered crowd fell completely silent, and time itself seemed to pause.

He looked up at Hermione, his voice steady—but thick with everything he had never said before.

"You once told me I didn't understand what love meant. And you were right."

A hush fell over the garden. Hermione's breath caught.

"I didn't. Not then. Not truly. But then you—*gods*, *you* walked into my life with your brilliant mind and your ridiculous compassion and your fucking terrifying stubbornness, and everything I thought I knew cracked apart."



Chapter 14

Flashback

Heirlooms and Homecomings

"Some wounds fade, some scars remain, but love, when it's real, finds a way to bloom through both."

It had been two months since Hermione's parents underwent the memory restoration procedure.

The days were quieter now. Steadier. The kind of soft, stable rhythm Hermione hadn't known she needed until she had it.

Her parents were doing better—her father more than her mother—but each week brought something new. A remembered birthday. A favourite lullaby. A comment about her career that wasn't steeped in confusion. Her mother still struggled with certain stretches of time, still needed grounding charms and memory anchoring. But she knew Hermione. Knew that she loved tea at night and that she used to read under the kitchen table when she thought no one was looking.

Her father had taken to calling her "Pumpkin" again—and though it nearly reduced her to tears the first time, she'd simply nodded and carried on.

There were still gaps. Still bad days. Still a long way to go.

But there was laughter again.

And that meant everything.

Draco leaned against the doorway of their shared bathroom, arms crossed loosely over his chest, toothbrush dangling from one hand as he watched her with the quiet reverence he rarely put into words.

Hermione was tying her hair back, frowning softly at her reflection. She'd finally allowed herself to sleep through the night. Her shoulders weren't as tight. Her eyes, while still lined with caution, had lost their constant ache.

"They're stronger every day," he said, voice soft.

Head over heels016

She let out a shaky laugh, already crying.

“You saved me,” he said, voice hoarse. “Not just from a name I despised, or a future I didn’t want, but from the person I used to be. The boy who sneered and pushed people away because he didn’t know how to be more than what the world told him to be.”

Draco swallowed, his eyes locked on hers.

“You saw through all of it. You challenged me. You called me out. You made me *better*. And you still chose to love me. Even when I didn’t know how to love myself.”

Hermione’s hands trembled at her sides.

“I wake up every morning wanting to be worthy of that love,” he said. “Not because I have to, but because it’s the greatest gift I’ve ever been given.”

He opened the box, the ring gleaming like it had waited its whole existence for this moment. The ring was beautiful. The Malfoy heirloom ring—the silver band carved with ancestral runes, the emerald polished smooth by generations of love and history.

“Hermione Jean Granger,” he whispered, “you rebuilt me. Brick by broken brick. And now all I want—all I’ve *ever* wanted—is to spend the rest of my life making sure you never have to carry the weight of the world alone again.”

He paused, just a breath.

“So... will you marry me?”

The entire garden seemed to hold its breath.

Hermione burst into tears, laughing through them as she dropped to her knees too and cupped his face.

“You absolute *arrog*,” she choked out, grinning through her tears. “Yes. YES. Of course I will.”

The cheers that followed were deafening.

Pansy burst into tears. Ginny screamed. Theo shouted “FINALLY!” so loud that the neighbours complained.

Blaise toasted “to the most powerful witch and the dumbest man alive.” Neville conjured flower petals midair. Luna sang something in Gaelic.

Hermione kissed Draco until her lungs burned and her magic hummed and everything in her life snapped into perfect alignment.

Later, after she caught her breath and her heart had stopped trying to jump out of her chest, she pulled Draco aside beneath the fig tree where, just days ago, his mother had once him the ring.

“I want to wait a year,” she said softly. “So your parents can come. So mine can be strong enough to walk me down the aisle.”

Draco brushed a curl behind her ear. “We could wait a decade if you wanted.”

“I want forever.”

“You already have it.”

And just like that—a girl who had saved the world and a boy who had once nearly destroyed it—sealed a promise neither of them had thought they’d ever be allowed to make.

But this time...

This time, they would get their happy ending.

Head over heels016

“They remember me.”

Draco kissed the top of her head, his voice low with wonder.

“They always would.”

And in that quiet, blessed moment—neither of them said anything else.

They didn’t need to.

They had all the time in the world now.

Together.

Ours To Keep

Harry—he stood by him. Even after everything. I felt like the war ended, and the world just kept asking me to smile through the wreckage. But I couldn't."

Jean's fingers tightened gently on hers.

"I came here to try to fix your memories," Hermione whispered, eyes stinging. "And instead... I found a kind of peace I didn't think I'd ever be allowed to have. He gave me that. Draco. He showed me what it means to be taken care of. To be listened to. To not have to be the strongest person in the room every second of every day."

She paused, eyes distant.

"I paid for his school here," she admitted. "I didn't tell him. I used the fund you and Dad had set aside for my postgrad studies. It felt right. Like maybe—maybe I could help someone who needed a second chance."

A breath. A smile, small and aching. "He found the research that helped you. He brewed it. With Dr. Chen. He's been working in a hospital—cleaning floors, shadowing doctors, studying poisons again on the wizarding side. And all this time, he never said anything. He just... wanted it to work. For me. For you."

Her mother was quiet for a long time.

Then she shifted slightly, raised Hermione's hand to her lips, and kissed her knuckles.

"You've always had a big heart, my darling girl. Too big for the way this world treats people like you." Her voice shook, just slightly. "We're still recovering. Still piecing the years back together. But I see it in your eyes. You found something here. Or someone. And I for one cannot wait to meet him properly in this new future."

Hermione nodded, brushing a tear from her cheek. "I missed you so much."

"I know," Jean said softly. "And I'm sorry we couldn't be here sooner."

"You're here now."

They sat together in the sun, arms intertwined, tears slipping quietly down Hermione's face as her mother held her—really held her—for the first time in years.

And in that moment, despite the war and the memories and the ache that still lingered beneath her skin, Hermione felt like a daughter again.

Not a soldier.

Not a saviour.

Just...a girl held in the arms of her mum.



When they returned to the flat later that afternoon, Theo gave them the full hospice schedule, three months of daily sessions, stabilisation potions, mental therapy, memory integration rituals.

It wouldn't be easy.

But it was possible.

That night, as Hermione curled up in bed beside Draco, her body finally still, she whispered against his chest:



Chapter 15 Flashback: One Year to Forever

"This wasn't just a wedding. It was a battle won. A declaration. A promise - carved into the fabric of a world that once told them they never could."

Australia's late spring sun warmed the coastal breeze, carrying the scent of salt and blooming eucalyptus across the sprawling garden estate overlooking the ocean. A white canopy, enchanted with floating candles and soft floral garlands, swayed gently in the wind. Beneath it, rows of ivory chairs curved around a delicate glass aisle, leading to an arch adorned with twining wisteria, fairy lights, and silver-blushed roses.

It was small by wizarding society standards—intimate even—but no one could say it wasn't *perfect*.

For every person in attendance had *fought* to be here.

They came from across the world—some in secret, others defying political risks and personal histories.

No press. No Ministry bureaucrats. No public declarations.

Just the people who *knew*.

The people who had watched Hermione *save* him—slowly, stubbornly, fully. The people who had watched Draco *choose* to become more than his blood, his past, his scars.

Theo had joked it was the most "scandalous, poetic, politically damning wedding of the century." But even he had spent the morning carefully straightening his robes and charming wildflowers into Hermione's bouquet with nervous reverence.

The ceremony was being held on a private estate called "Sanctum Veritas" that Draco and the gang had helped re-build during the past year—a safehouse funded by Hermione and protected by layers of international wards. The estate now served as a magical recovery centre, healing children and families displaced by war and blood prejudice. It was more than just beautiful.

It was *there*.

Draco stood beneath the altar, his emerald robes tailored within an inch of his life, silver thread catching sunlight like stardust. His hands were clenched behind his back, wand holstered discreetly, a white rose—one Hermione had insisted on picking herself that morning—tucked into his lapel.

Theo, beside him in dark navy and a cocky grin, leaned in and whispered, “You look like you’re about to faint.”

“I’m going to kill you,” Draco murmured.

“Touching,” Theo said, grinning wider. “Truly, the stuff of sonnets.”

Behind them, Kingsley adjusted the collar of his ceremonial robes, pretending not to be misty-eyed already. Narcissa dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief monogrammed in silver thread, her fingers trembling delicately. Lucius sat straight-backed beside her, his cane resting at his knee, pride etched into the soft lines that now cradled his age. His son had become a man—not through power, or wealth, or bloodlines—but through love.

Ginny, luminous in silver and green robes, adjusted her bouquet as she prepared to walk down the aisle. She was the Maid of Honour and she wore the title proudly, shoulders squared, her gaze flicking to Hermione with soft protectiveness.

Pansy, to no one’s surprise, was already dabbing her eyes with a monogrammed silk handkerchief. Neville had his arm around her, beaming, whispering calming nonsense while clearly holding back tears of his own.

Luna and Padma were nestled together under one of the flowering arches, fingers intertwined. Luna wore a crown of real starlight—“A wedding blessing from a Crumple-Horned Snorkack,” she explained, to which Padma only smiled and kissed her hand.

Doctor Chen and his wife were there too, hand in hand, the man who had given Draco purpose beaming like it was his son getting married.

Hermione’s parents were already waiting by the aisle, arms linked, her mother dabbing a tear with a lace-trimmed cloth, her father breathing deeply, whispering words only she could hear.

And then—

The music shifted. The wind slowed. Time stilled.

And Hermione stepped forward.

Draco forgot to breathe.

She wore soft ivory robes that shimmered with a hint of gold in the light, delicate embroidery of vines and runes curling over the bodice and sleeves. Her curls had been swept back with tiny pearl pins, her eyes glowing with unshed tears, her lips curved in the smallest of smiles—that private smile, the one only he ever got.

She was his miracle. His lighthouse. His salvation.

The woman who had chosen to *see* him—when everyone else had turned away.

And now, she was choosing to be his wife.

Her parents walked her down the aisle together, pride and awe written into every line of their faces.

When they reached the front, Richard took Draco’s hand—firmly, meaningfully—before placing Hermione’s in his.

Draco nodded. “Yes, sir. At Hogwarts.”

“You were one of the mean ones, weren’t you? Bullied her for her blood?”

Hermione’s eyes widened.

Draco didn’t flinch. “Yes. I was. Stupidly.”

There was a beat of silence. Then Mr. Granger nodded and extended a hand.

“I suppose I should thank you, then. For this. It’s nice to meet you Draco, you can call me Richard.”

Draco took it, surprised. “It’s not necessary to thank me, sir.”

“I think it is,” Mrs Granger said softly. “We don’t know everything. But we can see it in her. What she feels for you.”

“And what you feel for her,” Mr Granger added, eyes still studying him.

Draco opened his mouth, then closed it. For once, without a quip.

A little later, Mr Granger asked to speak with Draco alone. Hermione hesitated, but Draco touched her hand and gave a small nod.

She left with her mother to the small side garden, their arms looped together.

Inside, Draco took the seat beside Richard’s bed.

“She’s my only daughter,” he said simply. “And she’s gone through more than we’ll ever understand.”

“I know.”

“You hurt her once. More than once.”

“I did,” Draco admitted, voice low. “I’ve spent almost a year trying to make up for it and I don’t think I’ll ever stop.”

“You’ve done more than try. I’ve spoken to Theo. He’s told me about your work. The hospital. The research. What you did to help her—how you’ve changed.” Mr Granger leaned forward slightly. “You were a child. A product of terrible circumstances. But you’re not that boy anymore.”

Draco swallowed, throat tight. “I still don’t feel worthy of her.”

Richard smiled faintly. “Good. It means you’ll never take her for granted.”

In the garden, Hermione sat on a bench with her mother, Jean, the sun warming her face and the faint scent of eucalyptus drifting through the trees. The quiet hum of windchimes from a nearby veranda filled the silence, soft and almost sacred.

She hadn’t let go of her mother’s hand since they’d sat down.

“He’s not who he was,” she said quietly, watching the sunlight flicker through the leaves. “Draco. You probably remember him as the arrogant boy with the sneer who mocked me at school. And you’d be right. He was awful to me - once.”

Her mother said nothing, only watched her with those deep, perceptive eyes Hermione had missed every day for years.

“But he changed,” Hermione continued, voice soft and full of memory. “Not because I asked him to. Not because anyone demanded it. He changed because he wanted to. Because he looked at the world after the war and saw how broken it was—and how broken he was—and decided he wanted to be something different.”

She exhaled shakily. “When I left England... I was barely holding on. Ron had broken me down so slowly I didn’t even realise how much damage had been done until I left. And

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He kissed her hair and whispered back, “This isn’t the end of the storm, love. But whatever comes next, we’ll weather it together.”

They fell asleep like that. Together. And whole.



The next morning was soft with golden light and cautious hope.

Hermione didn’t speak during the walk to the hospice wing. Her fingers were laced with Draco’s, but she hadn’t said a word since breakfast. Not from fear—at least, not entirely. From awe, maybe. From the fragile disbelief that it had worked.

That the ghosts she had lived with for years might finally be real again.

Theo met them at the door, his features exhausted but triumphant. “They’re awake. Lucid. Still a bit foggy, they’re walking are able to go out to the gardens for a little bit accompanied, and...Hermione, they’re asking for you.”

She almost collapsed of happiness where she stood. Draco steadied her.

When they entered the room, the scent of lemon balm and antiseptic filled the air. Two beds sat beneath wide windows, sunshine pouring across knit blankets that Hermione instantly recognised—handwoven by Padma, undoubtably charmed for warmth and magical balance.

Her parents looked older than she remembered. Mr Granger’s hair was more grey than salt-and-pepper, his eyes tinged with worry lines. Her mother’s hands were thinner, her frame smaller. But they were upright. Coherent. Together.

And when their eyes landed on her—

“Hermione?”

Her mother’s voice cracked like a page being turned in a long-forgotten book.

Hermione surged forward, unable to breathe, let alone speak. Her father opened his arms, and she folded into him like a lost child finally finding her way home.

Her sobs weren’t sharp. They weren’t frantic. They were steady and low, like a wave coming back to shore.

“We remember,” her mother whispered, brushing Hermione’s curls back. “Not all at once. But it’s there. It’s coming back.”

Hermione laughed through her tears. “That’s enough. That’s everything.”

Behind them, Draco stayed near the door, hands clasped behind his back, posture almost too formal.

Mrs Granger noticed him first, tilting her head. Her eyes sharpened—intelligent and cautious, a mirror of Hermione’s.

Hermione turned, breathless. “Mum. Dad...This is Draco. Malfoy. Draco Malfoy. Um...he helped develop the potion. He’s been with me through everything. He—”

Draco gave a slight, respectful bow. “It’s an honour to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Granger.”

Mr. Granger looked him up and down. “I remember you, I think. From a long time ago. At that bookshop. Our girl mentioned you in some of her letters. You went to school with Hermione?”

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And then he stepped back.

It was only them.

Draco’s throat was tight as he looked at her, hands shaking as they held hers.

“You’re beautiful,” he whispered.

“You’re not too bad yourself,” she said, her voice shaky with joy.

The ceremony was short and heartfelt.

Kingsley officiated, his voice rich and reverent. “We are gathered here today,” he began, “not in defiance of what the world has said about love, loyalty, or legacy—but in celebration of what it can become. In the union of two people who have rewritten every story they were told to live.”

There was silence. A ripple of quiet emotion stirred through the guests. The kind that held weight. Magic. Meaning.

Kingsley turned to Draco.

“Draco and Hermione have chosen to write their own vows. In accordance with our customs, the wizard may speak his vows first.”

Draco’s throat bobbed. He reached for Hermione’s hands. His voice, though soft, rang with all the steel and ache and wonder in his heart.

I never imagined myself here.

Not just... not just in exile, or halfway across the world.

But here—

with you.

Choosing me, loving me, making me better than I ever thought I could be.

Hermione, I used to believe the world owed me something.

But you—you taught me that the world owes us nothing,

and that everything worth having, we must build.

Together.

You gave me your light in my darkest hour.

When I had nothing—not my name, not my wand, not my future—

you gave me hope.

You gave me your stubborn, brilliant, maddening heart,

and I will spend every breath left in me protecting it.

There were days I wanted to fall apart—

days when I hated the boy I used to be.

But you looked at me,

and you saw not who I was,

but who I could be.

And you never stopped believing in him...

even when I couldn’t.

You taught me that healing is not weakness,

that softness is strength,

and that redemption is not something granted—

but earned.

over and over, every day.

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You are the reason I smile without guilt.

You are the reason my hands beat, not harm.

You are the reason I get to dream again.

And love—

you are the reason I believe in love.

I vow to make a life worthy of your courage.

I vow to listen, even when I want to run.

I vow to never let a single sunrise pass without thanking the stars for you.

I vow to hold you when the world is unkind,

to stand behind you when you charge forward,

and beside you when you're tired and need a soft place to fall.

When the world turned its back on me, you stayed.

When my name became a stain, you dared to wear it.

You saw every broken piece of me—

and you didn't turn away.

You loved me into becoming something more.

You are my only home now.

Not Wiltshire. Not a manor. Not a legacy written in someone else's ink.

You.

And our story.

The one we rewrote with fire and grace and a little bit of bloody-minded stubbornness.

I was once told I would be nothing more than my name.

But I stand here today, your husband,

because you loved me louder than that lie.

You didn't just save me, Hermione.

You chose me.

And for the rest of my life, I will spend every moment choosing you right back.

So I give you everything I have—my heart, my name, my eternity—

because you are the reason I found my way home.

And I will never stop choosing you.

Not in this life.

Not in the next.

Not even when the stars burn out.

Always.

Even when it hurts.

Even when it's hard.

Even if we are oceans apart or under starlit skies.

You are the reason, Hermione.

And you always will be.

By the time he finished, Narcissa was quietly dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, and Kingsley gave a small nod. "Hermione."

The moment she stepped closer, her thumb brushing along Draco's knuckles, he felt his

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His hands cupped her face. Her fingers reached to tangle in the hem of his shirt.

And then, slowly, she rose onto her toes and kissed him.

It was soft at first. A whisper of a kiss. But it deepened—breath to breath, heartbeat to heartbeat—until it became something more.

Something like promise.

Something like need.

Without a word, she took his hand and led him to the bedroom.

The door shut behind them with a quiet click, muffling the rest of the world. In here, it was only them.

Hermione stood before him in the dim candlelight, letting him look at her. Really look. She was still in her worn jumper and leggings, hair half-up, eyes red from crying—and yet, to him, she had never looked more beautiful.

He stepped toward her, touching the edge of her jumper with reverence.

"Are you sure? It's been a long day," he whispered.

She nodded. "I want to feel something good. Something true."

He undressed her slowly—not like he was undressing her body, but like he was peeling away layers of fear and grief and pressure that she had worn like armour for far too long.

When she stood before him bare, he reached out and traced the scar at her collarbone with the back of his fingers. She shivered.

"You're breathtaking," he said hoarsely. "Do you have any idea how much I—"

She stopped him with a kiss, her hands fumbling with the buttons of his shirt, her breath shaky.

"I want all of you, Draco. Now."

Their clothes were shed in quiet movements. No rush. No urgency, just the slow, deliberate unravelling of years of longing and restraint.

When they finally sank into the bed, skin to skin, it wasn't frantic. It was worship.

He moved over her like she was something to be cherished. His mouth traced the line of her jaw, her throat, the curve of her shoulder. Her fingers splayed across his back, pulling him closer.

"I've never—" she began, voice breathless, "—never felt this safe."

His forehead rested against hers. "Then I'm doing something right."

They found a rhythm that spoke more than words could - a give and take, a surrender and a claiming. He kissed her like she was his anchor. She touched him like he was hers.

It wasn't just sex.

It was every unsent letter. Every sleepless night. Every time she had held the sky alone—and now, didn't have to.

When they both finally broke apart with a shared gasp, hearts pounding and breaths tangled, Hermione reached for him again.

Not out of need.

But out of love.

They lay tangled in the sheets, her head on his chest, his arm wrapped securely around her. And in the soft hush of post-storm silence, she whispered into the dark:

"I didn't know love could feel like this."

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wounded him.

Hermione nodded. “Yes. A brilliant, tender, fiercely devoted father. And the man Theo Nott and Neville Longbottom referenced when they spoke of the children you were too blind to see or hear about standing at the heart of this story.”

Her gaze drifted locked on Draco across the courtroom. A thread of steel between them.

“And let me be perfectly clear: I am not here because Draco begged me to come. He didn’t. I’m here because if this court is so determined to punish a man who has *redeemed himself beyond measure*, then I’ll walk out those doors with him. If the Wizengamot denies him the right to stay—I’m leaving with him.”

Her voice lowered, but every syllable was carved in stone.

“I will take my research. My department. The whole Council. My global network of magical and non-magical allies. And I will go to France—or back to Australia. Both have extended offers, especially Australia who does not want me to leave. I have a multitude of countries who value not only my work. But also my husbands. And frankly, *both have more sense than this courtroom does right now.*”

“You would abandon England?” Percy began, eyes wide.

Hermione cut him off with a precision that sliced the air.

“I didn’t *abandon* England,” she snapped. “*England abandoned me.* And I’m not in the habit of grovelling for the right to remain in a country that treats me like a traitor for loving someone who changed.”

Even Percy faltered then, stumbling back a half-step behind his podium.

And in that breathless pause—in the weight of her truth ringing like a spell through the chamber, not a single soul dared to interrupt.

Percy swallowed, clearly flustered, but pressed on—as if grasping for something that would regain control.

“But surely,” he said, voice tight and too loud, “there is something to be said—something *unnatural*—about a Muggle-born witch marrying into a pureblood family such as the Malfoys. It’s rather...unprecedented.”

Gasps echoed. A few older Wizengamot members nodded—subtly, but visibly.

Hermione didn’t blink. Didn’t flinch.

“Ah,” she murmured, voice silk and steel, “*where* it is.”

She moved forward, just slightly, like a queen descending a single step from her throne.

“The rot beneath the varnish. The question you’ve been dying to ask. Not about justice. Not about the law. But about blood.”

Percy opened his mouth, but Hermione raised a hand—delicate, precise—and the silence held.

“If the wizarding world in *England* is still so out of date that a witch’s worth is measured by the blood in her veins rather than the life she’s built, then perhaps you’ve just helped me make up my mind.”

Her eyes glittered dangerously.

“I *am* married to a pureblood. One who has done more to unlearn his prejudice than half this courtroom ever will. And let me tell you, *Mr Weasley*—”

She spat the title like a curse.

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“—my so-called in-laws, the *Malfoys*, have shown me more grace, more accountability, and more *genuine respect* than some of the so-called *allies* I fought beside during the war.”

Percy coloured. Deeply. His lips parted, but nothing came out.

“I suppose,” Hermione added coolly, “you’re just *shocked* a Muggle-born didn’t stay in her place.”

The gallery rippled. Gasps. Some shocked laughter. A shifting tide.

That’s when Kingsley stood.

Tall. Imposing. The room immediately quieted.

“Mr Weasley,” Kingsley said, his voice calm, deep, and resounding, “I suggest you choose your next words *very carefully*. The woman you’re speaking to is not only a decorated war hero, but the acting Director of Magical Security for the International Confederation of Wizards. She is responsible for critical diplomatic relationships with magical governments across five continents. She has earned more honours than you’ve read about. *And* she’s a mother.”

Kingsley turned to Hermione, offering a slight, respectful nod.

“Your presence here is a gift to this courtroom, not an obligation. If you chose to take your work—and your family—back to France or Australia, both would be the poorer for it, but *we* would be the greatest fools of all.”

Hermione inclined her head in return. Her smile was thin. Controlled. Deadly.

“Thank you, Minister. Your clarity is refreshing.”

Percy, thoroughly chastened, looked down at his parchment, his ears flaming.

Hermione turned back toward the Wizengamot.

“Now, if we are *quite* finished with this attempt to put me on trial for the crime of loving someone outside what is deemed correct,” she said, voice cool and dignified, “perhaps we can return to the matter at hand—whether this country is willing to allow a man to continue doing good, or if it prefers to bury him beneath the sins of a crime he no longer carries.”

And with that, she moved back—spine straight, chin high, her very presence radiating power.

Across the room, Draco’s hand clenched briefly over his heart.

And every person in that chamber—friend or foe—knew the tide had turned.

Percy fumbled for his parchment, voice pinched. “I have no further questions.”

Judge Thorne nodded slowly, clearly fighting a smirk. “Does the defendant’s solicitor have any questions for the witness?”

“Yes, Your Honour. Just one.”

She turned, gaze calm, sharp, and focused. “Mrs Malfoy,” she said with quiet gravity, “can you tell us—in your own words—why you believe your husband deserves to have his exile revoked?”

Hermione took a breath.

The room fell still again, as if the air itself were holding its breath.

She stood—not because she had to, but because she needed to. Her voice, when it came, was clear and unwavering.

“Because people forget,” she said, slowly, deliberately, “that he was *a child*.”

She looked around the room—first at the judge, then the assembled members of the Wizengamot, and finally, the packed gallery.

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"He was sixteen when they marked him. A boy who had already been taught to revere a cause he didn't understand, pressured by threats of death and a world that demanded obedience."

Her eyes swept across the rows of faces. Some turned away. Others stared back, unblinking. "He was sixteen," she repeated. "Forced to make choices no child should ever have to make. Forced to carry out tasks that still wake him screaming in the night."

Her voice broke—not from weakness, but from the weight of the truth she refused to let go unspoken.

"But here's the thing—" she continued, stronger now. "*We all were children*. We were seventeen. Eighteen. We fought a war built on the bones of the generations before us. We made choices. *Terrible* ones. We did things none of us should have had to do. And some of us came out lauded as heroes... while others were left behind to burn."

She turned—slowly—to face the gallery.

"To this day, members of this very court—and of our citizenry—who wore the Mark proudly, who *led* raids, who *commanded* tortures, now sit in positions of power. Some even walk free with full access to magic and privilege."

Her eyes found one elder wizard in the front row—a former high-ranking official known for his "war-time neutrality," who went pale under her gaze.

"And yet *he*"—she pointed subtly, without naming—"walks free."

Another to her left—a woman who once publicly endorsed 'heritage purity' laws during the early Voldemort resurgence—shifted in her seat, her cheeks flushed.

"But *Diana Malfoy*? He became the *symbol* of our collective guilt. A scapegoat. A convenient reminder that the face of evil could be young, wealthy, and despised. That punishing *him* would let the rest of us sleep easier."

Her voice dropped low, fierce.

"*He* didn't run. *He* didn't hide behind old money or false oaths. He accepted his sentence. He left behind everything, family, fortune, magic v and rebuilt his life from ash."

Hermione paused, then looked to Draco. His eyes shimmered, glassy, jaw clenched, but his spine was straight.

She faced the court once more.

"I am not here asking for forgiveness. *He* is not asking for sympathy. What we are asking for is *justice*. And if this court still believes it is just to exile a man who was a child when he was marked—when men who murdered in cold blood sit on public councils—then perhaps this country's sickness runs deeper than we thought."

A beat of silence. Heavy. Unmoving.

And then, Hermione spoke one final time, quieter, but more potent than anything she had said before.

"If you truly wish to heal the wounds of this nation, then you cannot keep punishing those who bled the most for your sins."

She sat.

And this time, no one dared breathe.

Judge Thorne adjusted her spectacles and lifted her wand slightly, letting the court fall into silence once more.

Her voice, crisp and calm, carried with it a finally honed from decades in the Wizengamot.

"Well," she said mildly, "then it's quite a shame you didn't apply the same principle when Harry Potter testified in favour of Professor Dumbledore's posthumous honour reinstatement. That was certainly personal."

A ripple of murmurs swept through the gallery like a breeze through parchment. Even Kingsley, seated off to the side, coughed into his hand—his eyes glinting with amusement.

Percy's voice tightened, sharp with self-righteousness. "What of your friendship with Mr. Potter and Mr. Ronald Weasley? Surely, they had some... insight."

Hermione didn't flinch. Her reply was flat, cold, and without hesitation.

"I haven't seen or spoken to *Ronald Weasley* in over a decade," she said, her tone like glass. "And as *his brother*, I'd have assumed you'd know that. Then again, selective memory seems to be a family trait."

The air snapped with tension.

"As for Harry," she continued, unblinking, "we exchange the occasional letter—formal, polite, impersonal. He's missed every invitation I've extended over the last ten years: my wedding, the birth of my children, my appointment as Director, and every international recognition I've received since. All of them. Each silence noted."

A hush rippled across the courtroom—heavy, uneasy.

She let it linger. Harry looked ashamed and if she noticed she gave no insight. A couple of those in the audience looked at him with surprise.

"I have had a relationship with Draco Malfoy longer, deeper, and more meaningful than anything I ever shared with the other two-thirds of the so-called *Golden Trio*." The disdain in her voice wrapped around the words like velvet-wrapped steel. "So again, I'll ask—what exactly does any of *that* have to do with the matter at hand?"

Percy's mouth opened, then shut. His composure cracked for just a moment before he grasped for something—anything—to regain control.

"So you married a *Death Eater*," he spat. "That was your answer? You abandoned your friends, your country, and the people who fought beside you, for *him*? The son of a war criminal? A marked criminal himself?"

Draco's jaw clenched, but he didn't move. Didn't look away.

Hermione smiled.

Slow. Controlled. *Dangerous*.

"I married a man who lost everything," she said, voice soft and serrated, "and rebuilt it with integrity and purpose. A man who turned his back on power and legacy, not because he was forced to, but because he *chose* to. He walked away from his family's wealth, their ideology, even his *magic*, just for the *chance* to live a life he could be proud of."

The chamber was silent. Watching. Listening.

"I married a healer. A teacher. A man who spends his Sundays treating Muggles in underfunded Sydney clinics because it's *right*, not because it's convenient."

She paused, then delivered the final blow.

"I married a *father*."

The silence cracked. Audible gasps. Whispers. One wizard dropped his monocle. Another scribbled furiously in a notepad at all these revelations.

"*Father, please...*" Percy echoed with disdain, incredulous, as though the word had physically

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“Mrs Malfoy,” she intoned, “please take your seat for questioning.”

The title hung there, undeniable.

Hermione nodded once and moved to the witness stand, robes trailing behind her like shadow and silk. She sat with the composure of someone who had walked through fire and built a kingdom from ash. Her spine was straight, her hands folded neatly. Her gaze was unflinching.

Not a witness.

A reckoning.

Then Percy Weasley stood, the embodiment of bureaucratic smugness in Ministry green. His posture reeked of procedure. His voice, of quiet condescension.

“*Miss Granger—*”

Hermione’s eyes snapped to him like a whip, her expression carved from ice.

“—I must say, this is quite the... revelation. *You*, of all people, defending Draco Malfoy. Would you care to enlighten the Wizengamot as to what precisely led you back to England, and how long you’ve been... involved?”

A hush swept through the chamber, thick with anticipation.

Hermione’s lips curved, not in amusement, but in something far colder. Sharper.

“First,” she said smoothly, her voice calm and crisp as winter glass, “I will remind you that my name is *Malfoy*. *Hermione Malfoy*.”

She let the words hang, deliberate and unyielding.

“If you find yourself unable to offer me the basic courtesy of my married name, then you may choose from my other formal titles. *Lady Malfoy* will suffice. Or, should you prefer something more professional, *Director Granger-Malfoy*—as appointed by the International Confederation of Wizards Magical Security Council. Or perhaps,” she added, tilting her head with mock-consideration, “you’d rather refer to me as *The Golden Girl*. That is still what the Prophet calls me, is it not?”

Her eyes glittered dangerously as she folded her hands in front of her.

“But I must ask, *Percy*,” she said, the name falling from her lips like a polished dagger, “if you cannot be bothered to address me with respect, why should I be expected to extend you the same courtesy?”

The silence that followed wasn’t just stunned—it was *electric*. A sharp inhale hissed through the courtroom like steam from a kettle.

Even the judge’s quill paused mid-scratch.

Theo burst out laughing in the back row, ignoring the dark stares thrown his way. “Ten points to Gryffindor! Give them the House cup!”

The judge, ignoring Theo as one must whenever he speaks, cleared her throat loudly. “Mr Weasley, the witness will be addressed with respect. Continue.”

Percy’s face turned a dangerous shade of red—like someone had mixed rage with indigestion.

“Fine,” he snapped. “Mrs Malfoy, then. When did this relationship begin, and does your presence here not suggest a conflict of interest?”

Hermione lifted an eyebrow. “Are you suggesting I should not testify because I have personal knowledge of the accused?”

“That is exactly what I’m suggesting.”

Head over heels16

“Mrs Malfoy, your statement has been recorded. You may step down.”

Hermione inclined her head, back straight, eyes steady. She descended the few stone steps from the witness dais like she was descending from a throne, not a courtroom. The hush that had settled was fragile, tight, as though even the walls held their breath.

Draco’s heart thudded in his chest, each beat loud and aching. She was nearly back to him.

One more step and—

Then it happened. From the gallery, a sudden shift. A screech of wood against stone. A scuffle. A howl.

“You lying whore!”

It was Ron.

Ron, who had been silenced not once, not twice, but *three bloody times* already during the hearing.

Ron, whose wand had been *confiscated*—or *should* have been.

Ron, whose face now twisted with something darker than grief, something *rotted* and *feral*.

“HOW COULD YOU, ‘MEONE?” he bellowed, showing through two startled Aurors.

“You’re *worrying another span* from this *filthy Death Eater* as if the other two brats weren’t already too much of a fucking disgrace! You are a disgrace to everything we fought for! If they won’t let justice prevail then I will!”

Hermione froze mid-step.

Gasps erupted.

“Ron, don’t—” Harry barked but it was too late.

Ron’s wand was raised.

A sickly yellow spark ignited at the tip—something meant to wound. Not kill, but maim. To hurt. It was flying—aimed squarely at Hermione’s *stomach*.

And Draco—*unlucky, helpless*—surged forward, but two Aurors caught him by the arms and yanked him back.

“LET ME GO!”

“RON, NO!” came Molly’s voice—too late, too shrill, her face ashen.

But it wasn’t Ron’s curse that landed.

“Protego Maxima!” Harry’s voice cut like a sword, clear and deadly.

A massive shield burst forth—not the soft shimmer of a casual defence charm, but a solid wall of gold and silver magic that cracked the air.

Ron’s curse hit the shield and ricocheted, shattering against the far wall with a bang.

And Harry—Harry Potter, eyes dark, jaw clenched—*grabbed* Ron’s arm, twisted it back, and *diarmed* him with a violent yank that made the gallery flinch.

Ron howled in outrage, struggling like a madman.

Theo had already sprinted to Hermione’s side, catching her as her knees buckled. “I’ve got you, Mf,” he murmured, arms locking around her waist. “You’re alright.”

“Get her out of here, through my chambers!” Kingsley shouted over the rising chaos, drawing his own wand and standing like a wall before the gallery.

The judge’s face had turned to stone. “Aurors! Restrain Auror Weasley. I want him removed from this court and *formally charged*. Attempted assault. Use of unauthorised wand in court. Obstruction of justice. Every bloody line you can find.”

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Aurors tackled Ron to the floor.

He kept screaming.

“HE’S PLAYING YOU, HERMIONE! YOU’LL SEE! HE’S USING YOU!”

Molly Weasley lunged from the gallery rail, shrieking obscenities about blood traitors and seduced daughters. Her howls were drowned by the sound of *flash-camera* and the crowd erupting in noise—half of them journalists, the rest opportunistic vultures.

And in the centre of it all—Harry, breathing heavily, shoulders tense, wand still raised.

He turned and walked towards Hermione. His face was unreadable.

Theo looked between them once. “Come on,” he whispered, helping Hermione to her feet. They didn’t speak as they left the room. The doors slammed shut behind them, muffling the storm.

Outside the courtroom, the air felt colder. The tension clung to Hermione’s skin like wet cloth.

Harry stood a pace away. His gaze flicked to her—and for a flicker, *just a flicker*—she saw the boy he used to be. Her best friend. Her comrade. Her brother in everything but name.

“Thank you,” she said quietly, voice hoarse. “For that.”

He didn’t answer.

Just gave her a curt nod, eyes dropping to the floor, before walking alongside them. An escort.

Theo exhaled a breath that sounded like ten years of anger, then turned to Hermione. “Let’s get you out of this fucking tomb.”

He held onto her as they made their way to the holding antechamber. Behind them, court security began placing fresh silencing wards on the main doors.

She did not see Draco and that worried her more than anything.



Outside the courtroom, the corridors buzzed like a beehive of whispers and warded doors.

Hermione sat on the edge of a velvet-cushioned bench just inside Kingsley’s private chamber, hands loosely folded in her lap but stiff, white-knuckled. Her face was composed, elegant even, but the edges of her calm were fraying. Only someone who knew her—*really* knew her—could see it.

Theo sat beside her, draping his arm across the back of the bench like he had no idea the world was on fire.

Harry stood near the entrance, arms crossed, looking like he wanted to say something. But he didn’t.

And that, more than anything, stung.

The silence between them was louder than Ron’s screaming had been. Hermione didn’t look at him. Didn’t speak to him outside of her “thank you”. She kept her focus on the door, waiting for Draco.

Theo noticed, of course.

He turned casually to Harry and leaned in, voice just loud enough for the others to hear.

“You ever considered dating someone who isn’t a walking arsonhole?”

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laughter and disbelief bubbling out of her. How he fell to his knees and pressed his lips to her belly before he could even think.

He saw Scorpius’s first breath. Cassiopeia’s first laugh. The nights they didn’t sleep, the lullabies sung off-key, the way Hermione would pace with a baby on her hip and whisper stories into the dark.

He saw every scar, every kiss, every fight that ended in forgiveness. Every promise they’d kept, and every fear they’d faced...together.

And now...*like*. This cruel theatre of politics and prejudice. This courtroom that sought to unravel everything they had built.

But she stood tall—proud, unflinching, radiant—her voice ringing with truth, not shame. Hermione Granger Malfoy. His wife. His fiercest defender. His peace in a world still at war.

Ten years of exile, redemption, and undiluted love had led them to this moment.

Draco’s throat tightened, thick with emotion that threatened to drown him. He forced the words through anyway—silent, but alive with everything he felt.

“I see you,” he mouthed to her.

Hermione’s eyes shimmered, softening—not with tears, but with recognition. With the fierce, unshakable love only they could share.

“And I love you,” she mouthed in return.

And despite the storm, despite the eyes on them, despite everything still to come—he smiled.

Because no matter what happened next, they had already won. She blinked, barely, but he saw it. Felt it. The bond between them tightened like a tether reforged in fire. The world could keep howling. They were unshakable now.

She turned back to the bench, voice clear, cutting through the noise like a blade.

“I have testimony to offer on behalf of my husband,” she said, unwavering. “And I suggest we all remember the value of truth before judging what we do not understand.”

More murmurs. An outright *howl* of protest from the back. But the judge raised her wand again, this time sending out a silencing charm that settled over the courtroom like a cold mist. Silence fell.

All eyes were on her. Some wide with disbelief. Others sharp with curiosity. A few, very few, softened.

And behind her, in the dock, *Draco Malfoy* sat taller.

Because for the first time in a very long time, he wasn’t just the son of Lucius. The branded boy who failed a Dark Lord. The exile with a blood-stained name.

He was *here*.

And that, in this moment, made him the strongest man in the room.

Eventually, after nearly seven minutes of deafening noise and frenzied whispers, the judge managed to regain control. She didn’t raise her voice.

Instead, she stood, lifted her wand, and cast a **Sonorus Tempore**—the air rippled. Quills slowed mid-scratch. Mouths still moved, but no sound emerged. Magic pressed down like a weight.

“Enough,” said the judge, voice soft, and all the more terrifying for it.

She released the charm. Time resumed, slower now. Quieter.

Ours To Keep

Draco Malfoy watched the world split open around him - and didn't care.

Because she'd said his name.

Not once in almost eight years of marriage had they spoken it aloud beyond the safety of foreign cities, their friend group, and shared beds, far from the eyes that condemned and the mouths that speculated. But now, here, in the centre of the courtroom that held his fate—she had *claimed him*.

His wife.

His Hermione.

Not hidden. Not glamourous. Not afraid.

His heart kicked against his ribs like a caged thing. She was everything—fierce, brilliant, terrifying—and she had just taken on the world for him.

He didn't move.

Couldn't.

Because in that single moment, through the rising tide of voices, through the crackling tension that clung to the courtroom air like electricity before a storm, their eyes met.

And everything else fell away.

There, in the stillness carved between heartbeats, was the truth of ten years.

Draco saw it all, as if time had folded in on itself. In the slight lift of her mouth—not quite a smile, not quite a tremble—and in the quiet, unshakable blaze of her gaze.

He saw the first time she had looked at him without hatred—that fragile, tentative truce in a cramped bookshop in Sydney, sunlight painting gold across her curls as she stood frozen, a paperback clutched in her hand and disbelief in her eyes.

He saw the night he made her laugh—really laugh—for the first time. Curled on a threadbare sofa, her book falling forgotten to the floor as she gasped for breath, her laughter echoing like music in the tiny flat they hadn't yet dared to call home.

He saw the fierce argument over tea that ended in silence—and then an understanding far louder. The quiet evolution of a relationship in coded notes, gentle meals left on the stove, the first time she reached for his hand without thinking, without flinching.

He remembered the ring. His trembling fingers. Her screamed “yes.” The trembling way she whispered, “I do,” as if it were a vow spun from magic older than language itself—unbreakable, infinite.

He remembered her walking down the aisle in a dress kissed with starlight, eyes shining with hope and courage and a thousand unspoken promises. His knees nearly buckled.

He saw their first home, barely more than four walls and a window, but filled with warmth and mismatched furniture and books stacked in every corner—a sanctuary they'd built with love and stubborn hope.

Her sobs the day her parents remembered her. How she collapsed in his arms, unable to speak, shaking with grief and something too sacred for words.

His own tears—the ones he hid from everyone but her—the night he confessed he still wasn't sure he deserved any of it. That he feared he was too stained by the past to be remembered kindly. She had cupped his face, kissed his forehead, and told him he had rewritten his legacy with every selfless choice since.

He saw the moment she told him she was pregnant—the way her whole face glowed,

Head over heels016

Harry blinked. “I-what?”

Theo smirked. “You heard me. You’ve got good bone structure, Potter. It’s going to waste on all that brooding.”

Hermione arched a brow but didn't turn. “Theo...”

“What? I’m providing comic relief. Everyone looks like they’re about to collectively shit themselves.”

Harry flushed. “I’m not—I mean, I’m not even—”

Theo tilted his head. “Not even what, sweetheart? You can’t hide what’s there. No matter how hard you try.”

Harry blinked, unsure whether he was being flirted with or threatened. Possibly both. “Are you serious right now?”

“I’m always serious when I’m emotionally terrorising emotionally repressed men,” Theo replied, entirely too pleased with himself.

Hermione finally cracked a small smile.

George appeared with a chocolate frog. Nodded to Harry and smiled at Theo. He looked at Hermione and his face said it all. “You alright, Mrs Malfoy?”

Hermione accepted it with a grateful nod. “Getting there.”

“I’m really sorry Hermione.”

The air shifted before he could respond. The gang arrived and quickly came right to Hermione bypassing Harry who thought better than try to stop them.

Neville had stationed himself like a quiet sentry by the door. Blaise handed Hermione a water bottle without a word. Pansy stood near Ginny in the lobby, arms folded and gaze razor-sharp, watching every passerby as if daring someone to speak Draco’s name wrong.

Harry watched it all from his spot. This... odd little makeshift family that had grown around Hermione. Around Draco.

He was on the outside looking in.

And it gutted him.

Not because she had moved on. But because she had *thrived*. Because every inch of Hermione’s world now was full of people who *saw her*. Who protected her. Who didn’t question her strength or manipulate her loyalty.

She had changed.

She had *healed*.

And he had no part in it. *He’d been such a fool.*

Finally, the door opened with a soft click.

Draco stepped inside—pale but upright, his shoulders tight beneath his robes. He clapped Neville on the shoulder, nodded to Harry in thanks and gave a slight smirk to Theo, but the moment he saw her, something in him *unlocked*.

Hermione was on her feet in an instant.

She crossed the room in a blur, all grace and adrenaline finally giving way, and threw herself into his arms.

Draco caught her with a soft, broken sound—something between a gasp and a prayer—and clung to her like he’d been holding his breath since she’d spoken his name in the courtroom.

His hands shook as they wrapped around her. She was warm. Whole. Still his.

Ours To Keep

"I couldn't move," he whispered against her hair, voice cracking. "I couldn't fucking move." Hermione pulled back just enough to cup his face, her own tears slipping free now, silent and shivering. "You weren't supposed to. You can't—You can't lose your temper, Draco."

His jaw clenched. "He raised his wand at you."

"I know," she choked out. "But I'd survive it. I couldn't survive losing you."

Draco dropped to his knees like gravity had tripped through him.

His hands slid gently, reverently, to her stomach—and stayed there, his forehead pressing just beneath her ribs.

"Are you alright, love? Are you—"

"We're fine," she said softly, fingers threading through his hair. "Shaken. But fine."

His breath hitched.

"I thought—fuck, I thought I was going to watch you die. Or get tortured. Again. And I couldn't... I couldn't do anything."

"You did everything," she whispered, kneeling to meet him, holding his face between her palms. "You stayed. You let Harry act. You stayed for me. For us. That's everything."

He let out a long, shuddering breath and wrapped his arms around her waist again, burying his face in her shoulder.

"I would burn the world if anything happened to you," he murmured. "But I'll be better. I have to be. For you. For them."

"I know," she whispered. "That's why I love you."

Draco held her tighter, as if he could wrap her in every promise he'd ever made.

Hermione kissed the top of his head, her voice breaking. "We're here. We're together. And I'm not going anywhere."

He nodded once, trembling against her.

Then, with a strangled laugh, he added quietly, "Still... if that ginger fuck tries that again, I *will* murder him. Probably with a clipboard. Or a rogue bedpan. I haven't decided."

She laughed through her tears, clutching him closer.

"Please let me help," Pansy said sweetly as she entered the room.

"I have a list of spells I've been meaning to try," added Luna.

Theo leaned his head against Pansy's shoulder, murmuring something under his breath that even she couldn't joke about. Blaise had gone still, arms folded tight as he blinked hard. Luna wiped her cheeks with her sleeve while Padma gripped her hand. Neville and George stood shoulder to shoulder, both unblinking. Ginny, who knew this version of them best, smiled through quiet, furious tears.

And Harry...

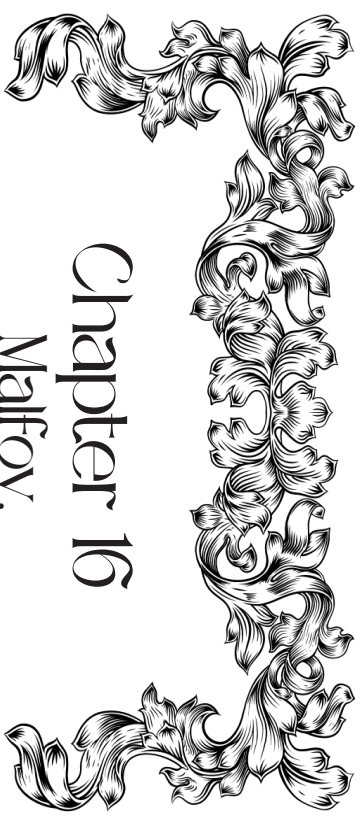
Harry watched them.

He watched as Draco Malfoy—the boy he'd once despised, the man he'd never understood—knelt before Hermione Granger like she was the centre of his entire fucking universe.

Watched him tremble. Watched him break. Watched him rebuild himself just to hold her. Watched her kiss his forehead like she'd found her way home.

And Harry realized, in that moment, what devotion really looked like.

Not in speeches. Not in titles. But in the way she cradled Draco's face with her palms. In the way his hands never left her.



Chapter 16

Malfoy.

Not Granger. Or Lady Malfoy if you prefer.

"It wasn't just a name. It was a choice. A declaration. A promise carved in fire."

The moment the words left her lips, the courtroom erupted.

"Hermione Jean Malfoy, née Granger."

The sound cracked across the chamber like a lightning strike through stained glass. For half a breath, time held still—and then all hell broke loose.

Gasps shot up like hexes. Quills snapped. Enchanted scrolls unrolled themselves mid-air, frantic hands trying to keep up. Magical flashbulbs burst into white blooms. A Ministry clerk shrieked and dropped her wand. Another outright fainted.

"Did she say Malfoy?"

"That can't be real—"

"She married a Death Eater?"

"Bloody hell—"

The Chief Warlock—judge Calliope Thorne—known for once hexing a senior diplomat into next week during a bribe attempt slammed her wand against the dais, purple sparks ricocheting through the room like fireworks gone wrong. "ORDER. Order in the court!"

No one listened. It was chaos—the kind that came not from surprise, but from fear, from scandal, from the visceral collapse of a narrative people had clung to for a decade.

But Hermione stood still.

Chin lifted, shoulders squared. *She* was the statement. She always had been. She was the quiet fury of someone who had been underestimated too many times and had no more fucks left to give.

And across the room, shackled to the Ministry's expectations and a history he hadn't written,

Head over heels016

In the way the world fell away around them—and they didn't even notice. He had never seen her loved like that.

Not by Ron.

Not even by him.

And for the first time in years, Harry understood that he wasn't the one who'd lost Hermione. She had found herself.

And Draco Malfoy—of all people—had given her the space to do it.

Across the room, Kingsley re-entered, papers in hand. "Court will reconvene tomorrow morning," he said, his voice low. "They want to hear directly from Draco."

Draco exhaled through his nose. "Of course they do."

Hermione tightened her grip on his hand.

"They can question him all they want. It won't change what's real," she whispered.

Back in the courtroom, the final decree echoed through the gallery:

"Given the witness testimony and unexpected developments, the Wizengamot will reconvene tomorrow at 9 a.m. sharp to hear the formal testimony of Mr. Draco Lucius Malfoy. This hearing is hereby adjourned."

The gavel fell.

But it didn't matter.

Because in the chambers outside that courtroom, the truth had already been laid bare:

The world had changed.

And Hermione Malfoy would burn it down before she let it take her family again.

Head over heels016

And he was hers,
And finally—for the first time since the war—they both believed in forever.

Ours To Keep

Theo blinked. “Right. Right that I just... I feel like we’d share a very powerful astral bond in another timeline.”

Padma just smirked and said, “This timeline has spoons.”

Luna kissed Theo’s forehead and handed him a butterbeer. “You’re terribly shiny tonight Theo.”

Padma rolled her eyes and dragged Luna into a slow dance.

Everyone was drunk by midnight—except Hermione, who paced her drinks, and Draco, who stuck to one firewhisky then sobered up entirely once Hermione started getting sleepy.

They snuck away just before the fireworks.

Up the garden path, beyond the trees, to the edge of the cliff where the sea shimmered in moonlight.

Hermione slipped off her heels and dropped her veil in the grass. Her hands found Draco’s collar, her lips brushing his.

“I can’t believe they all came,” she whispered.

“They’d have burned down England if we asked.”

She laughed.

A pause.

“How long do you reckon until they start placing bets on our first kid?” he muttered.

She laughed. “They already have. I heard Theo trying to charm Pansy’s necklace to reveal

if I was ovulating.”

“Fucking hell.”

“I told him if he tried it again, I’d hex his bollocks off.”

“That’s my wife,” Draco said, voice low and reverent.

Hermione looked up at him.

W//h.

The word settled around them like a spell, binding and infinite.

“I love you,” she said, voice steady, certain.

Draco’s fingers tightened around hers.

“I love you more than magic,” he replied. “More than redemption. More than all the chances

I thought I’d never get.”

Her voice was soft, almost shy. “You’re really my husband.”

Draco brushed a thumb over her cheek. “Forever, Granger.”

She turned. “Malfoy.”

He grinned. “I still can’t believe you didn’t go with Granger-Malfoy.”

“No, just Malfoy,” she said, wrapping her arms around his waist. “You are mine. And I am yours. And we are Malfoy.”

He laughed, pulling her closer. “You’ll always be Granger to me.”

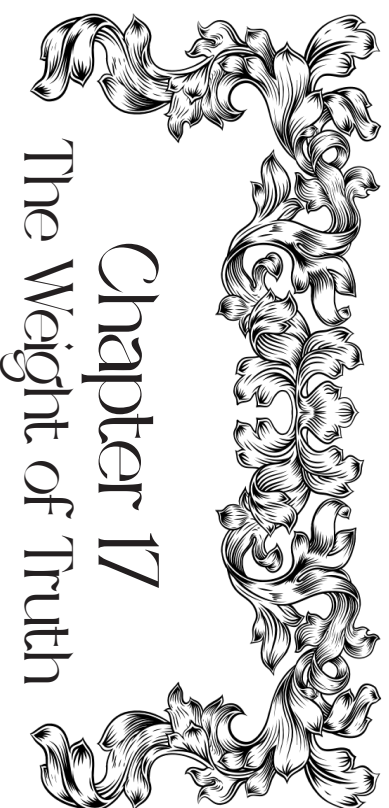
The stars spun overhead, and they stood there in the dark—married, surrounded by the people who loved them, carried by every choice they had made and remade.

From war to exile to memory to home.

They’d found their way.

And they weren’t going anywhere.

Because she was his.



Chapter 17

The Weight of Truth

“He had lived a life of silence. But today, he would be heard.”

The chamber was quieter than usual. Still brimming with people. Still choked with press. Still buzzing with the unsettled magic of a world holding its breath. But somehow—quieter.

The kind of quiet that clings just before a storm breaks. That hush of the air before thunder, before lightning splits the sky. Before truth demands to be spoken.

Hermione sat near the centre of it all. Her hands folded gently over the curve of her belly, calm in appearance, but not in truth. Her thumb traced slow circles just beneath her ribs—grounding herself. Or perhaps the life inside her. Or both.

Theo Nott sat to her left, uncharacteristically still, his usual wit silenced by the weight of the moment. Pansy was next, sharp as ever, her jaw tight and eyes narrowed on anyone who dared glance too long. Blaise lounged beside her with deceptive ease, his wand resting openly in his lap, as if daring someone to test the length of his fuse.

And Ginny—fiery, loyal Ginny—had taken the empty seat just behind them, her presence a silent declaration. She wasn’t only there for Hermione, though she had stood by her like a sister through every whispered doubt and veiled threat. She was there for Draco too—for her found brother, her Drakey—and that was the kind of allegiance no one in that courtroom could comprehend, let alone break.

Beside Ginny was George Weasley who had moved seats that morning.

No announcements. No fanfare. No dramatic declarations. Just a silent shift—sitting beside his sister, past the politically neutral seats and into the heart of the Malfoy camp. Where he belonged. He hadn’t looked back when he did it. And no one asked him to explain. Because they knew.

George had watched his brother burn down every bridge. Had watched Hermione carry that pain for years. And he’d seen Draco—the boy they’d once mocked, the name they’d once reviled—rebuild those bridges, brick by bloody brick.

He saw what the world didn’t. And he chose a side. He chose Hermione. He chose truth.

This was Hermione's side now. Her family. Her fortress.

And at the heart of it stood Draco Malfoy. Her Draco. No glamour. No preening robes or enchanted tailoring to make him something he wasn't.

Just black. Crisp. Stark against his pale skin and storm-grey eyes. His hair, longer than usual and without the sleek black look he usually wore, and every inch of him radiated the same quiet resolve that hands carried him through war, exile, and love.

He stood tall, hands clasped behind his back, shoulders squared beneath the weight of a thousand expectations.

But he did not bow. He would not bow. Not today. Not when everything they'd built now hung in the balance.

Across the room, Harry Potter sat alone. Not beside the press. Not amongst the brass of the Ministry, though he'd worn the Auror's badge on his chest for years. Not with the Weasleys—well what was left of them at least. Just... alone. Surrounded by wizards and witches unknown to him, even if he wasn't unknown to them.

His eyes hadn't left Draco since the hearing began. There was no hatred in his gaze. Not now. Just something heavier. Sadder. A hollow sort of remorse that had taken root too late and grown into a quiet, gnawing thing over the last weeks.

He hadn't come for Ron. Not after what happened yesterday. Not after seeing, knowing, understanding, what Ron had become.

He had come for Hermione, yesterday and today. To protect her—not out of duty. Not obligation. He hadn't been on assignment. He hadn't even been invited. He had already testified. But somehow he'd known she would need protecting. Not from Draco. From the world. From the shadows that never seemed to release her, even now. And from the ghosts Harry had helped unleash and never stayed behind to clean up.

He had let Ron sink into bitterness, and worse—he'd let Hermione take the brunt of it. Always had. It had taken years. Years of silence. Years of bitterness and convalescence. Of letters barely responded to. Of milestones missed. Of friendships faded and left to rot.

But now... now he saw it.

He saw how much damage he'd caused by doing nothing at all.

And it hurt. Gods, it fucking hurt. But it was the truth.

So he sat. Still. Quiet. Watching the woman he'd once sworn to protect—who had grown stronger in his absence—and the man she'd built a life with.

The judge's chair creaked above them, echoing through the marble chamber like a warning shot.

The Wizengamot robes rustled. Quills readied. Public eyes sharpened, eager and bloodthirsty. And still Draco stood, hands steady, spine straight, gaze fixed ahead.

He didn't look at the judge. He didn't look at the audience, or the reporters, or even Harry. He looked at her. At Hermione. Their eyes met, and the world softened.

Draco inhaled slowly, let it settle into his chest, and nodded once to the court.

"I'm ready."

Hermione's hand gripped the edge of her seat.

And across the room, Harry blinked back understanding something sharp in his throat, realising what so few ever had: Draco Malfoy wasn't running from his legacy. He was facing it.

Ginny continued, voice growing stronger.

"You protected me when I didn't even know I needed protecting. You stood up for me when my own family forgot how. You and Hermione—you gave me a new home. A safe one. One I chose. And for that... I will always love you both."

She lifted her glass high.

"To Hermione—my sister, my lighthouse, my fiercest advocate. And to Draco—the shock of the century and the heart of a man who chose redemption every single day."

She grinned.

"If you ever make her cry for the wrong reasons, I will hex your bollocks into the next dimension."

"Duly noted," Draco said, smirking.

She leaned in with a saccharine smile. "And I mean it."

Laughter burst around the table again, the kind that lit everything warm.

Ginny raised her glass once more, this time with a tremble of real emotion.

"To their love—the kind that rewrites everything"

The applause was thunderous. And as Ginny returned to her seat beside Blaise—who immediately handed her another glass of wine and kissed her cheek—Hermione leaned into Draco and whispered:

"She's right, you know"

Draco looked at her, eyes full.

"I know," he said. "So are you."

And together, they watched their chosen family dance like stars in the garden they'd built from ash and hope.

George stood and to everyone's surprise toasted Hermione—"To the girl who broke the rules, flipped the board, and built her own bloody kingdom." He looked at Draco. "And to the poor bastard who dared to love her through it." He was still a little wary of Draco but he loved Hermione and would stand by her always. He will do his best to accept Draco.

McGonagall and Poppy also had their moment. No one knew who started it—some whispered it was Neville, others swore it was Luna—but by ten o'clock, both women were halfway drunk and belting out "*A Cauldron Full of Hot, Strong Love*" like they were back at Hogwarts on a dare.

Minerva conjured mini fireworks with each high note.

Poppy harmonised.

Kingsley filmed the whole thing with a magical recording orb and vowed to blackmail them with it for years.

In the chaos, Theo—ever the showman and drunk as can be—dropped to one knee before Luna, wine glass in hand.

"Luna Lovegood," he slurred, "love of my chaotic, enchanted heart. Will you marry me?"

Luna blinked at him, unbothered. "Theo, darling, I have a girlfriend. And you're gay."

Theo waved her off. "Labels are restrictive. And I love your soul."

"You *can't* propose to her when she already has a girlfriend," Pansy drawled, flipping her hair. "Padma will murder you, and frankly I think I'd help."

Padma, behind them, sipped her wine slowly. "Thank you."

Ours To Keep

don't learn at Hogwarts. The kind forged in grief and rebuilt with gentleness. You've made a life that defies every prediction, every expectation, every label."

He raised his glass, hand trembling ever so slightly.

"To Draco and Hermione. For proving that light can be found even in exile. That softness is not weakness. And that love—real, maddening, honest love—is worth surviving for."

A beat.

"And for making sure I never have to share a flat with Draco again."

Everyone cheered.

Theo grinned, a little breathless. "I love you both. Don't forget it."

He downed the rest of his drink like a shot, stepped off the chair, and promptly walked into the cake table.

Padma groaned. Ginny whooped. Hermione sobbed into her veil.

Draco? He just smiled. Eyes glassy. Shoulders lighter.

Ginny stepped forward, the garden lights casting a warm glow across her copper braids woven with delicate gold threads. Her gown shimmered as she raised her glass, pausing with a practiced breath—not from nerves, but to hold the moment in her hands like something sacred.

She smiled. "Right. So, I'm Ginny Weasley—though most of you know me as the one who made Luna dye her eyebrows blue that one summer."

Laughter.

"But tonight, I'm here as Hermione's maid of honour. And that... that is something I still haven't quite wrapped my head around."

She turned, gaze softening as she looked at the couple seated before her.

"I've known Hermione since I was eleven. I've seen her in all her forms—the overachiever, the righteous fury, the sleepless researcher, the one who gave too much and never let anyone see when she was falling apart. I've seen her carry grief like a second skin. I've seen her heal others when she hadn't even begun to heal herself."

Ginny's voice grew quieter, more reverent.

"She's the kind of woman who rewrites the world simply by refusing to let it stay broken. And she's done it again and again—for Harry, for Ron, for Hogwarts, for her parents, for me."

She smiled fondly. "And then came Draco Malfoy."

The crowd chuckled, and Draco shifted, raising a brow as if bracing himself.

Ginny's eyes didn't leave the couple. "Now, I know what some of you might have thought—*Draco Malfoy? Really?* But I saw them. Not the headlines. Not the past. I *saw them*."

She turned to Draco now, eyes glinting with something fierce and fond.

"I saw a man who looked at her like she was the whole bloody sky. Who made her laugh again—really laugh. Who stood beside her when it was hard and never once tried to dull her shine."

A pause.

"And to everyone's surprise—especially mine—Draco Malfoy became one of my favourite people in the world. A brother. The annoying kind, with excellent hair and a deeply concerning skincare routine, but a brother all the same."

The guests laughed. Hermione wiped a tear from her cheek.

Head over heels016

Head-on. And rewriting every goddamned line.

The courtroom buzzed with a low, expectant hum, as if magic itself held its breath. The press had sharpened their quills, quick-charms already humming above floating parchment. Dozens of enchanted Quick-Quotes Quills hovered in silence, poised to twist whatever truth dared escape the chamber.

And then, with a crack that echoed like a lightning strike, the Chief Warwiche's wand slammed into the dais.

The silence was immediate.

Chief Warwiche Calloope Thorne—no-nonsense, rarely moved, and feared by half the continent—sat high above the court, robes immaculate, greying braids pinned with runes of law and order. Her eyes, sharp as obsidian, swept over the room like a hawk circling prey.

"This Wizengamot session is now in order," she said, voice laced with raw power. "Before we proceed to Mr Malfoy's testimony, I will address the events of yesterday's disgraceful interruption."

A beat of heavy silence.

"Following careful deliberation with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and the International Council of Magical Judiciary, the following charges have been filed."

The courtroom braced—journalists leaning forward, whispers stilled mid-breath.

"Ronald Bilius Weasley," she said slowly, as if weighing each syllable, "will stand trial in two weeks time for the following offences: attempted harm of an unborn magical child, magical assault of a representative of the International Confederation of Wizards, unauthorised use of a wand during an active Wizengamot trial, violation of courtroom security, obstruction of judicial proceedings, and incitement of public violence within a Ministry-sanctioned space. Until such time he will remain in a detained room in the Wizengamot prisons. Any further disruptions or rule breaking will have him sent to Azkaban to await trial."

Gasps rang out. Someone in the press gallery dropped their quill.

Hermione sat very still, jaw locked, fingers curled protectively over her bump. Draco's eyes didn't leave her.

Calloope didn't so much as blink.

"In addition, Molly Prewett Weasley is hereby banned from all Ministry judicial premises, including courtrooms, waiting areas, and public inquiry halls for the next ten years. Her behaviour yesterday—verbal assault of court officials, use of unauthorised spells within Ministry property, and attempts to interfere with Auror detainment—is beneath the dignity of this institution."

George whistled lowly under his breath. Theo muttered, "About bloody time."

The Warwiche continued, "The Aurors in charge of courtroom security have been removed from duty. Effective immediately, their posts are filled by a contingent of internationally certified officers from the Department of Magical Security—branches Paris, Tokyo, and Cape Town. This court will not tolerate incompetence, nor will we gamble with the safety of its witnesses."

At once, a visible ripple moved through the security perimeter. The new guards stood taller, their uniforms marked by foreign insignia and enchanted shoulder plates. They radiated the kind of magical precision that said, *Try something...just once*.

Ours To Keep

The Chief Warwich shifted slightly—not a movement of weariness, but readiness.

“And finally,” she added, turning toward the prosecution bench, “Mr Percival Weasley.”

Percy, who had been writing furiously with his left hand and clutching his wand like a scepter with his right, froze mid-scribble.

“I will speak plainly,” Callope said. “You are on a short leash.”

A few coughs of stifled laughter erupted behind the press gallery. Percy turned a mottled shade of Ministry-embarrassed crimson.

“I will not tolerate any more posturing. If I hear a single condescending remark, a whiff of political theatre, or an attempt to badger the witness out of personal spite—I *will* silence you and proceed with the questioning myself. And I promise you, Mr Weasley, I am far less forgiving than your ego might prefer.”

Percy swallowed and adjusted his glasses. “Understood, Chief Warwich.”

“Good.” Her tone sliced cleanly through the room. “Now—Doctor Draco Lucius Malfoy. Step forward.”

Draco stood.

Hermione exhaled shakily, Theo reaching to grip her hand under the bench. George gave a solemn nod. Harry, from his solitary seat near the side gallery, watched like a man waiting for the tide to pull him under.

Draco walked slowly to the witness stand. He didn’t stumble. Didn’t rush. Every step was measured—not just in pace, but in intention. He wasn’t walking to his trial. He was walking to reclaim his name.

Once in place, he clasped his hands behind his back, shoulders relaxed but firm, spine straight as a soldier, eyes locked not on Percy, not even on the Wizengamot—but on Hermione. She smiled at him, slow and sure. A silent promise in her gaze.

Draco exhaled. The nerves didn’t disappear, but they steadied.

Callope Thorne leaned forward.

“You may begin your testimony, Mr Malfoy,” she said, her voice softer now. “The floor is yours.”

And in that moment, before a world that once damned him, Draco Malfoy prepared to speak his truth.

Not just for justice. But for love. For legacy. And for the life waiting just beyond the storm. Draco’s voice rang out, low but sure. It didn’t shake, though his hands were clenched behind his back, fingertips white against his dark robes.

“I was born into legacy,” he began. “Into history. Into bloodlines that decided who I was before I even had a name.”

His words carried—not through volume, but gravity.

“And like most children raised by expectation, I followed orders I never understood. I played the role I was handed, not the one I would’ve chosen.”

A hush swept over the courtroom, rippling through robes and silence like a wave breaking against centuries of prejudice.

“At sixteen, I was Marked by a man who promised power and handed me a death sentence. I was forced to choose between my family’s safety and my soul. And I made choices—awful, cowardly ones. I was weak. I was afraid. And I have paid for those choices every single day of

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Theo stood.

Four drinks deep. Possibly five. His tie had been transfigured into a glowing flower crown, his robes askew, and he clutched a glass of rosé like it was a goddamn sword.

“I would,” he announced loudly, “like to say something emotionally devastating.”

“Please don’t,” Draco muttered from the head table.

Theo ignored him. He climbed onto a chair, clinked his glass and stumbled slightly as he rose—not from drink (well, maybe a little from drink), but more from the weight of what he was about to say.

“I have been—**unreasonably**—given the honour of being Draco Malfoy’s best man,” he announced, voice ringing out beneath the lantern lit canopy. “Which, for those unfamiliar, is a bit like giving a niffer a vault key and asking it not to fuck off with the silver. But alas—here we are.”

Laughter rippled through the guests. Draco groaned into his hand. Luna clapped.

Theo straightened the glowing flower crown someone (probably Padma) had magicked onto his head earlier and turned to the couple, eyes shimmering—not just with Firewhisky, but something far rarer in Theo Nott: sincerity.

“Hermione Granger is the reason we are all here tonight. And I don’t just mean at this wedding. I mean *here*. Alive. Healing. Fucking *bravely*.”

He glanced around the garden—at the handful of survivors, healers, rebels, and misfits who had once shouldered the end of the world and still showed up for love.

“She has carried people through war, through loss, through grief, and bloody bureaucracy. She survived the kind of battles most of us couldn’t even name. And she did it without ever asking for applause. She is a lionheart. A storm. A *miracle*.”

Hermione’s eyes brimmed. She looked away, overwhelmed, blinking fast.

Theo turned to Draco.

“And you. Ferret.”

The crowd chuckled.

Theo’s voice dropped, softened with emotion. “I watched you crawl out of hell. I watched you claw through guilt and shame and all the bullshit the world tried to bury you in. You dug your own grave with pride, then climbed out of it with something even stronger—*humility*. Grace. That absurd, infuriating wit you wield like a wand.”

Draco’s jaw worked slightly. He didn’t trust himself to speak.

“You’ve become a man I’m proud to call my best friend. My *brother*. And now, somehow, you’ve convinced this absolute goddess to marry you.”

He raised a finger with theatrical menace.

“If you *fuck* this up,” he said, “I will personally transfigure your dick into a flobberworm. And I won’t do it cleanly.”

Draco choked.

Hermione doubled over laughing, tears running freely down her cheeks.

“Padma’s already signed off on the spell,” Theo added with a wink.

More laughter.

Then, suddenly, Theo sobered.

“But truly, what you two have built... it’s not just love. It’s *healing*. It’s the kind of magic we

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*And I will wear that name like a banner and a vow,
because I believe in the man you are,
and the life we are building together.*

You are my once-in-a-lifetime.

And if the stars went out and the sky fell down,

I would still choose you.

Every single day. In every version of this life.

Over and over, without pause, without doubt, without end—

I choose you, Draco Malfoy.

Now and always.

When she finished, there was a silence that hummed with power. The kind of silence that meant *everything had changed*.

Kingsley raised his wand, weaving a silver ribbon of magic around their clasped hands.

“By bond and by name, by magic and by will—so it is done,” she said, voice trembling slightly. “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Hermione pulled Draco in before the kiss was even finished being announced. Their lips met, fierce and sure, sealing the moment with the kind of kiss that *promised*.

Promised to fight.

To forgive.

To choose.

Always.

Their friends erupted in cheers. Theo cried. Narcissa buried her face in Lucius’s shoulder, sobbing. Ginny caught the bouquet with one hand and punched Blaise with the other as he came to stand by her clapping loudly.



The reception was chaos in the best possible way.

They dined beneath floating lanterns and constellations charmed to reflect the actual sky above them. The tables were set with green and gold runners, silver cutlery, hand enchanted champagne flutes that never emptied, and tiny bouquets of starily blooms that changed colours based on the speaker’s mood—Theo’s had already turned an alarming shade of crimson.

The cake—five tiers of decadent almond and raspberry cream—was adorned with an enchanted sugar dragon climbing its sides, blowing glittery smoke and flicking its tail at any fingers that got too close.

“I insisted,” Luna had said dreamily. “Dragons symbolise transformation and karmic completion. Obviously.”

No one had the heart to argue with her.

Wine flowed like a river. Firewhisky was smuggled in via Blaise’s pocket flask (and eventually half of Padma’s clutch). Pansy had charmed a shoe into an ice bucket. McGonagall was already on her third champagne, Kingsley had loosened his robes, and even George was flushed from laughter and drink.

And then—

Head over heels016

my life since.”

Hermione’s breath caught, quiet and sharp. Her eyes shimmered. Theo reached for her hand again and gripped it tightly.

Draco didn’t look at her yet. He kept his gaze ahead—at the Wizengamot, at the shadows of portraits long dead, at the faces of those who believed they knew him.

“I was exiled to Australia. My wand restricted. My inheritance seized. My travel monitored. My magic bound by law. And I didn’t fight it. I didn’t contest it. I didn’t beg. I lived without magic—*me*, a Malfoy—in a world I’d been taught to despise.”

He let that hang for a moment.

“I scrubbed blood from hospital floors. I cleaned toilets. I learned what it meant to be invisible—to live without power, without recognition, without name. I studied. I healed. I earned everything I have now with my own hands. And for the first time in my life, I became someone I could respect.”

Percy stood sharply, the sound of his robes echoing like a blade unsheathed.

“And now you return,” he sneered, voice sharp as shattered glass. “Why? Seeking absolution? Gold? Power? Your name back?”

Draco turned to face him fully. Not rattled. Not enraged. Simply steady—as if the words rolled off armour built over a decade of loss and rebuilding.

“I’ve had ten years to learn the difference between wanting things and deserving them, Mr Weasley,” he said, voice even. “I didn’t come back for gold. Or absolution. I don’t need your approval. I came back for something far greater.”

His gaze shifted—cutting across the room like a spell cast without a wand—and landed on Hermione.

“I came back for my family.”

The courtroom was silent, breathless.

“My parents are here. My in-laws have recently moved back. My friends. The people who helped stitch my soul back together when I thought I’d lost every reason to keep breathing.” He glanced at George, then Ginny, then Theo—whose expression could only be described as fierce pride barely masked by a shit-eating smirk.

“I built a life in Sydney. A good one. With my wife. We’ve got a home, careers, children who’ve never once heard the word *murder* or *traitor*, only love. Only truth. Only books and magic and bedtime stories and laughter.”

He turned back to the bench, tone thickening with emotion.

“But England is her home. This—” he gestured around the courtroom, the Ministry, the stone walls of history and politics “—is the country she fought for. The country she buried friends for. The country she’s tried, again and again, to believe in. She deserves the freedom to grow. To lead. To thrive.”

He swallowed.

“To walk down Diagon Alley without whispers. To give lectures without her surname causing a bloody scandal. To raise our children in a place that remembers what she gave—and sees her as more than just the Golden Girl who survived.”

His voice cracked, barely. But he pushed on.

“She deserves to be more than a relic of the war. She deserves to be a woman. A mother.

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A wife. A leader.”

Hermione sat still, unmoving, but tears shimmered in her eyes. Theo shifted beside her and passed her a handkerchief without looking.

Draco exhaled, grounding himself.

“And I...I want my children to know their grandparents. I want my mother to spoil them with absurd Yule gifts. I want my father to tell them bedtime stories from the same spellbooks I once used as a child. I want my in-laws—Muggles, by the way, not that it matters—to continue being present. For birthdays. For first flights on broomsticks. For school letters. For scraped knees and spells gone wrong.”

He smiled, faint and achingly soft.

“I don’t want our children to only know their family through bloody Floo powder and enchanted mirrors, or limited one year visitations.”

Percy scoffed, too loud, too bitter. “So that’s it, then? A little sentiment, a few crocodile tears, and we’re meant to forget you spent your youth spewing hate and following a monster?” Draco tilted his head, cool and unbothered. “You seem very invested in who I was, Mr Weasley. I suggest you pay more attention to who I’ve become.”

“And we’re to believe that’s not an act?” Percy pressed, voice rising. “That you’re not manipulating this court through marriage? You married the most powerful war heroine in a century—the one symbol this country clung to like a talisman—and now you’re here, parading her like proof of your own redemption?”

For the first time, Draco’s jaw tensed. But still, he didn’t shout. He didn’t sneer. He simply let the silence press back.

“I didn’t marry Hermione to fix my image,” he said softly. “I married her because she sees every broken part of me—and loves me anyway. I married her because we built a life out of nothing but ruin and hope. Because she makes me better.”

He turned again to the bench, voice growing firmer with each word.

“You want reports? You’ve already talk to Doctor Chen and a multitude of other witnesses. Add on to that and talk to Kingsley Shacklebolt. Ask the patients I’ve treated, the children I’ve healed, the families I’ve stayed up with in the middle of the night to save someone they loved.”

He stood up and took one step forward.

“Look at the testimony of the woman you all used to place on pedestals, still do as a matter of fact—the one you praised until she stopped fitting your narrative but is now renowned and acclaimed internationally. The one who’s spent her life fighting for truth and equity and peace, until she married me, and now suddenly became the problem.”

He looked straight at Percy, voice like iron.

Percy’s ears went scarlet. “You’re deflecting—”

“No,” Draco cut in. “I’m defending the truth. And I’ll keep doing it. Because my wife deserves better. My children deserve better. And if you’re asking what I want the court to know?”

He turned to the entire chamber now, and his voice quieted—no less powerful for its calm. “I now tell the court that I love my wife. Fiercely. Desperately. Unequivocally. And if given the choice again—the choice of exile—I would choose it. Every time.”

He looked at Hermione, eyes full of history and promise.

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knees go weak.

There was no fear in her eyes. Just that unwavering, stubborn, terrifying love she always wore like armour.

When I was a girl, I thought love would be a reward—

a prize for being good, for doing everything right.

But then the war came, and goodness was no shield.

I gave everything I had to a world that broke me in return.

And when the smoke cleared... I was still standing—

but I was so very alone.

Then you appeared.

Not as a knight in shining armour.

But as a man scarred by darkness,

carrying guilt like armour and silence like a sword.

And Merlin, I was furious with myself for seeing you—
really seeing you—when I wasn’t supposed to.

But I did.

Because buried beneath the ashes of who we used to be
was this flicker—this hope.

That we could be more than the war had made us.

That we could be something new.

Draco, you were the most unexpected thing in my life.

And also, the most right.

You challenged me, softened me,

loved me in a way I didn’t think I deserved—

not after the world had asked so much of me and offered so little back.

You taught me that healing is not a straight line,

that love is not neat or easy—

but it is worth it.

You made room for me. All of me.

Not just the clever girl, not just the war hero, not just Granger.

You loved the parts of me that even I had forgotten how to hold.

So today, I vow this:

I vow to fight for you the way I’ve always fought for what matters.

I vow to carry you when you’re tired, and remind you that you are not alone.

I vow to be your mirror when you forget who you are—

not what the world says, not what the past whispers—

but the man I see: good, kind, stubborn, and full of light.

I vow to protect your name by choosing it.

Not because I have to—

but because I want to.

To most, I’ll always be Hermione Granger.

But to show you that your name can mean safety and strength and love—

I choose to be Hermione Malfoy.

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forgive me if I let you fall. No matter how much she doesn't care about you, I know she does."

Harry's lips twitched. "And because you don't actually hate me."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Don't push it, Potter."

A beat of silence.

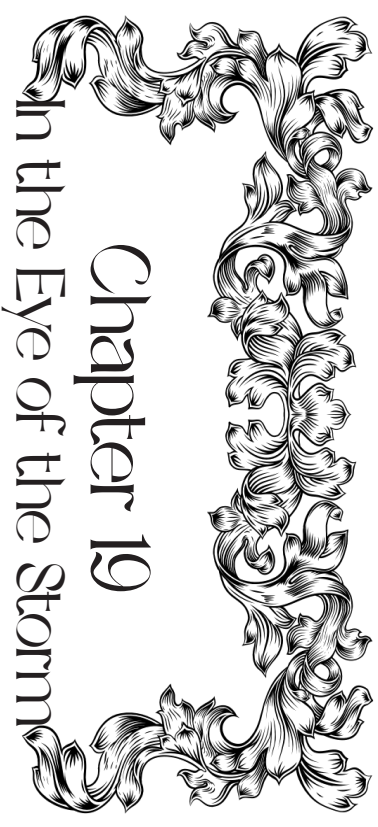
Then Draco extended a hand. "Come on. There's cake. Chaos. And probably glitter explosions courtesy of Cassiopeia."

Harry took it.

"Draco, I would appreciate it if—"

"Don't worry, healer's oath and whatnot."

And for the first time in a very long time, he felt something shift inside him. Something begin to settle.



Chapter 19

In the Eye of the Storm

"Let the world scream. I will still build walls around you that only love can pass."

It had been one week since the Wizengamot verdict.

One week since the exile was lifted, since Draco's magic was restored, since the tight knot around their lives had finally loosened—at least, in theory.

In private? They had simply exchanged one storm for another.

Because the British press hadn't wasted a fucking second. The Daily Prophet splashed bold headlines across their front pages every morning like clockwork:

"Golden Girl Turned Mafloy Matriarch: A Love Story or Political Scandal?"

"From War Hero to Wife of the Exiled—Has Hermione Granger Lost Herself?"

"Mafloy Redemption: A True Reformation or Carefully Calculated Propaganda?"

And of course, there were the vultures:

"Did Granger Sacrifice Her Reputation for Love? Exclusive Quotes from the Weasley Matriarch."

"Mafloy's Redemption Arc—Calculated or Coincidence?"

But—not everything had been venom.

To their surprise, a few articles had taken a more cautious—even supportive—tone. *The Wixing Times* had published a thoughtful editorial praising the work Hermione had accomplished abroad, commending her leadership in rebuilding international protections for magical orphans, war victims, and survivors of conflict.

Even *Witch Weekly*, once infamous for their ridiculous speculations about Hermione's love life, ran a cover story titled:

"Second Chances: The Mafloys, The Grangers, and the Power of Rebuilding."

It included a surprisingly flattering profile on Draco's medical work under Dr Chen, and even featured photos of Hermione and Draco at charity events in Sydney, their children

grinning mischievously in matching little formal robes.

The more progressive outlets ran headlines like:

“Healing After War: Can Love Bridge the Past?”

“The Golden Girl’s New Chapter: How Hermione Granger-Malfoy is Changing International Law.”

“Australia’s Healing Family—The Malfoys Today.”

It helped. A little. Enough to counterbalance the poison.

But no amount of flattering headlines could erase the steady undercurrent of old bigotries that still thrived in Wizarding Britain. The tabloids that usually copied *Witch Weekly* were worse and completely different. Vile, dripping with speculation and venom. Some whispered that Draco had bewitched her. Others suggested Hermione was addicted to the thrill of danger—as though their relationship was nothing more than some masochistic rebellion. And of course, there were the disgusting articles counting down to her due date, using her pregnancy like a tool to sell more papers.

They called the children *spann*, *husband heirs*, *future dark lords in training*.

Hermione had stopped reading after the first two days. Draco hadn’t even bothered. The stack of unread newspapers piled in the corner of their townhouse kitchen remained untouched, a monument to the public’s insatiable appetite for their pain.

Their home, tucked safely into a muggle suburb in Kensington, was lovely—charming, warm, and protected by more enchantments than Gringotts itself. The townhouse Harry had once inspected for safety was now a sanctuary. Teddy’s drawings covered the fridge. Scorpius’s toy broom leaned against the entryway. Cassiopeia’s enchanted stuffed unicorn occasionally wandered off into the sitting room.

But peace? Peace was still out of reach.

Draco stood by the kitchen window, a mug of black coffee, brewed in his newly acquired espresso machine after Potter murdered his last one, cooling in his hand as he stared outside at nothing in particular. His left hand absently rubbed his thumb across his wand—his fully magical wand, finally returned—like a talisman grounding him to the present.

Behind him, Hermione moved softly, making tea at the stove, one hand instinctively resting on the slight curve of her stomach. At 27 weeks, the pregnancy was ending its second trimester—a bit farther along than most realized, which only gave the media more fuel to feed their bullshit theories.

She caught his silence and spoke first.

“Don’t read it, love.”

Draco huffed a tired breath through his nose. “Didn’t plan to.”

He finally turned, watching her with that familiar, quiet gaze. The one that still carried a trace of disbelief that she was his. That they had survived everything to get here.

“They’ll get bored eventually,” she said, voice light but laced with weariness. “Something new will catch their attention.”

“They never get bored, Granger,” he said softly. “They just reload.”

Hermione set the kettle down and crossed to him, slipping her hand beneath his chin, gently coaxing him to meet her eyes.

“We knew this would happen,” she said. “We always knew England would be... complicated.”

watched her walk away and told myself it was better that way. Because I thought Ron was better for me because he cuddled and worshipped me. But I knew. I knew Ron treated her like an obligation, like she was supposed to fit a role and not be herself. I let him.”

He paused, tears burning behind his lashes. “I thought I owed him. For the war. For staying. For making me a part of his family. For not leaving when things got really hard afterwards. But all I did was let him isolate me. From her. From Ginny. From everyone. But that’s not the truth is it. It was always Hermione who protected me. It was Hermione who stayed during the war when things got hard. The one who starved, gave me her wand, was tortured, almost died. It was her who brewed polyjuice, used the time turner to protect Sirius, helped me with the Triwizard Tournament, threatened Rita Skeeter, created the DA, got rid of Umbridge, helped me with the horcruxes. It was always her.”

Draco didn’t speak, didn’t move.

“I tried to atone. I’ve done rehab more times than I can count. Therapy. Calming Draughts. Sobriety charms. I got clean and then relapsed. Over and over. I’ve spent years trying to find something worth waking up for.”

He looked up, eyes hollowed out. “You asked me why I came today. Why I sat through that trial. It wasn’t because I thought I could fix anything.”

His voice cracked.

“It’s because I needed to see it. I needed to know that someone like me could still choose something better. That it wasn’t too late for people like us.”

Draco let out a slow breath, his face unreadable.

“I’m going to ask you once,” he said. “What are you doing here? Really?”

Harry blinked at him. “I didn’t know what you’d built. What she’d built. I didn’t realise how far gone I was until I saw what you two had. It’s real. And it’s good. And it’s everything we all fought for. I just... I didn’t expect it to feel like this.”

Draco nodded once. Slowly.

“I won’t lie to you. You hurt her. Deeply. Your silence, your absence—it nearly broke her. So many times. And I won’t let that happen again. My wife is not some pawn in your redemption story. If you want any place in her life, you earn it. Every day.”

Harry nodded, tears slipping quietly down his cheeks.

“I don’t deserve that chance.”

“Probably not. But she’s better than us. She forgives like it’s a bloody sacrament.”

Harry gave a broken laugh. “I’m tired, Malfoy. I’m so fucking tired. And I don’t know if I can keep doing this.”

Draco stepped forward.

“You sound like me. Back when I was first exiled. Before Australia. Before Hermione. Before I figured out how to breathe again.”

Harry looked at him.

“I won’t let you hurt her again. But if you’re serious—if you want to claw your way out of that hole—then I’ll help you. I’ll bloody well drag you out myself.”

“Why?” Harry rasped.

“I’m a healer. It’s an instinct. But also someone once did it for me. Because I know what it’s like to be at the edge. And because my wife, as terrifyingly brilliant as she is, would never

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there.”
They sat in silence for a moment—just Harry, Andromeda, the breeze, and the sound of children laughing in the garden.



They rejoined the celebration nearly twenty minutes later.

Harry's face was pale but composed, as though Andromeda had stitched him together with magic too ancient for words. His steps were slower, measured, but he gave Teddy a crooked smile and nodded politely when Jean Granger offered him a slice of treacle tart.

Andromeda met Draco's eyes across the garden and gave the smallest of nods. She slipped back to sit beside Narcissa, who had a Cassi sprawled across her knee.

Draco stepped away from the crowd.

“Walk with me, Potter.”

Harry followed without a word. They slipped through the hedge-lined path leading to a quiet side garden, the kind meant for tea and secrets. Moonlight filtered through the enchantments overhead, casting shadows that danced like memories.

Draco didn't stop until they were out of earshot. He turned to Harry, arms crossed.

“You're not going to hex me, are you?”

Draco huffed. “Tempting. Believe me. But no. I did just get full use of my magic back. Just... talk to me. Why are you here? Why stay? Why go to the trial every day even when you had already testified?”

Harry leaned against the stone wall, rubbing the back of his neck. “You want the truth?”

Draco's gaze didn't flinch. “It's the only thing that matters to me now.”

And just like that—Harry broke. Not because he liked Draco but because holding all this in was too much. Andromeda would hear him and try to help but if anyone could understand him it would be this man who had suffered more, if not, the same as he has in this life.

He spoke, and once he started, he couldn't stop. The words came hoarse, unfiltered, jagged and raw.

“I've been drowning for years,” he whispered. “And I didn't even know it. I told myself I was fine, that I was doing my duty, that I was keeping people safe. But I wasn't. I was hiding.”

He looked down at his hands. “Ron—he twisted things. Said he was protecting me. That the world didn't need to know everything. That it was easier if I kept quiet, about who I was, what I wanted. I was so isolated, barely did anything by myself. Didn't even read my mail, cook my food, it's like I lived on a plane and Ron was the pilot. And I let him. Because I didn't want to lose what little I had left.”

Draco's jaw tightened.

“I'm gay.” The words still tasted foreign, as if they didn't quite belong to him yet. “And I hated myself for it. I still do sometimes. I thought if I said it aloud, everything would collapse. Ron made me feel like I was broken. Like it was my fault things didn't feel right.”

His voice wavered. “And Hermione... I didn't stop her when she left. I should have. I

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Draco exhaled heavily and leaned into her touch.

“I can handle them,” he said. “It's you I worry about.”

Hermione smiled faintly. “I've faced worse than quills and gossip.”

He let out a soft laugh, bitter around the edges. “That you have.”

She kissed the corner of his mouth. “We have each other. And we have them.”

Her gaze flickered briefly toward the staircase, where they could hear the quiet hum of children playing upstairs. It steadied them both like an anchor.

Just then, a tapping came at the window. An owl, *another bloody owl*.

Hermione sighed. “That'll be today's dose of public opinion, I imagine.”

But it wasn't the Prophet this time. She recognised the seal immediately.

Her face paled.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “What is it?”

Hermione opened the letter slowly, the parchment stiff and crisp beneath her fingertips. Her eyes scanned the first few lines and her stomach turned.

“It's from *Rita Skeeter*.”

Draco's jaw clenched. “Of course it fucking is.”

Hermione handed him the article enclosed, and together, they read the headline.

“SCANDAL AT THE CORE: Hermione Malfoy's Children—Innocents or Symbols of Betrayal?”

Her hands trembled as she unfolded it. Her stomach tightened as she read:

“Sources close to the Weasley family—specifically Molly Weasley, matriarch of the betrayed clan—expressed grave concern over the well-being of Hermione Granger's unborn child and her existing children, questioning the safety of raising innocent young minds under the guidance of a former Death Eater. ‘I fear for those poor children,’ Molly stated. ‘Blood may be diluted, but the darkness lingers.’”

Hermione's breath hitched.

More voices followed.

It wasn't just Molly. Other acquaintances—old classmates, distant relatives, former Ministry officials—were quoted, offering their shallow, cutting opinions. They condemned her marriage. They pitied her parents. They speculated on how long it would be before Draco Malfoy's ‘true colours’ would reemerge.

A particularly nasty line burned:

“The sins of the father do not always fade with time, and even the brightest witch of her age may find herself blinded by arrogance.”

The bile-filled words were painfully familiar: the betrayal of family, the dishonour to Fred's memory, the accusation that Hermione had abandoned the people who once loved her.

The final lines quoted Molly directly:

“She turned her back on the family that stood beside her. Now she raises Death Eater children and calls it love. When it all falls apart, I hope she remembers who she left behind, as though Fred didn't die for a better world.”

Hermione's breathing grew uneven as she read the full article again.

SCANDAL AT THE CORE

Hermione Malfoy's Children – Innocents or Symbols of Betrayal?

By Rita Skeeter, Special Correspondent for The Daily Prophet

In a shocking turn of events that continues to divide Wizarding Britain, the recent revelations surrounding former war heroine Hermione Granger—now styling herself Hermione Malfoy—have sparked renewed debate over love, legacy, and the dangerous rewriting of our post-war history.

Once hailed as the brightest witch of her age, Granger now finds herself at the centre of a growing storm after testifying at the recent Wizengamot hearings that saw the exile of convicted Death Eater Draco Malfoy officially lifted. The pair, married in secret for nearly a decade, are raising two children with a third, or maybe twins, on the way—children whose very existence has become the latest battleground for public opinion.

“I fear for those poor children,” stated Molly Weasley, matriarch of the renowned Weasley family and one-time close friend and confidant to Miss Granger. **“Blood may be diluted, but the darkness lingers. No child should be raised in the shadow of such a past. She was family. She abandoned all of us.”**

Mrs Weasley was not alone in voicing concern. Anonymous sources within the Ministry have reportedly expressed similar discomfort with the growing public platform afforded to the Malfoys, citing concerns over their potential influence on the next generation of Wizarding leadership.

“What message does this send to the families who lost everything in the war?” questioned one retired Auror. **“That a name can be washed clean with enough money, influence, and headlines?”**

Former Hogwarts classmates have also come forward anonymously, offering their own biting commentary. One unnamed Ministry official, who attended school alongside both Malfoy and Granger, remarked:

“It was only a matter of time. The sins of the father do not always fade with time, and even the brightest witch of her age may find herself blinded by arrogance.”

Skeptics argue that Granger's rise to international prominence in the Magical Security Council—combined with Malfoy's controversial re-entry into Wizarding society—reflects a dangerous blurring of lines between justice and ambition.

Magical family friends of the Grangers here in England, speaking under strict confidentiality, expressed sorrow for Mrs Malfoy's parents, muggles who were restored to health after years of obliviation—a trauma many speculate was worsened by the secrecy and stress of their daughter's

Draco was across the garden in seconds. He crouched smoothly next to his son, placing a hand on his back.

“Scorp,” Draco said, his voice easy but urgent, “go find your godfather. Ask him about the dragon in the wine cellar.”

Scorpius's face lit up. “There's a dragon?”

“Maybe. But only if you get there before your sister.”

Scorpius shrieked and tore off across the grass, shouting, “UNCLE THEO, THERE'S A DRAGON?”

Draco turned back to Harry—whose hands were now trembling, his breath shallow and fast, eyes unfocused.

“Shine,” Draco murmured. He didn't touch him, not yet. Just looked at him the way people do when they recognise drowning.

He caught Andromeda's eye across the garden. A silent signal passed between them. She was already moving.

She approached quietly and laid a hand on Harry's elbow, voice soft. “Walk with me, darling.”

Harry let her guide him without a word, allowing her to pull him gently behind a thick flowering hedge and into a shaded nook with a small fountain and a bench.

Hermione, from across the table, noticed. Her eyes narrowed slightly as she caught sight of Harry, pale and glassy-eyed, disappearing into the hedgerow with Andromeda.

“What happened?” she asked, rising to her feet.

Draco pressed a soft kiss to her temple and took her hand. “Ghosts, love.”

Hermione stared at the hedge again, worry swimming in her gaze, but nodded. Her fingers curled protectively over her belly.



Behind the hedge, Andromeda sat Harry down, rubbing his back slowly in wide circles like she used to when he was younger, when grief still howled through him every night.

“You're alright,” she murmured, calm and steady. “You're here. You're safe.”

Harry buried his face in his hands. “He just... he asked me if I protected her. I didn't know what to say.”

“You said the truth,” she said. “That you weren't very good at being her friend.”

“I wasn't,” Harry whispered. “I was angry and selfish and blind. I let Ron ruin things. I *have* not to see. She needed me and I walked away.”

“You survived,” Andromeda said softly. “You were young. Broken. And trying to hold too much. You made mistakes, Harry. But you were never cruel like him.”

“I let her down. I let *Teddy* down.”

“No. Don't do that,” she said, firm now.

Harry let out a shaky breath. “I don't know how to face her. I don't know how to speak to her anymore.”

“You already are,” she said gently. “And maybe now... it's time to start fixing what's still

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shoulders.

"You alright?"

Harry looked around, visibly overwhelmed. "I... this is not what I expected."

"You expected pitchforks?"

"I expected distance. Anger. Maybe polite indifference."

"Yeah, well, we're mental," Theo said cheerfully. "We adopted a Malfoy, for fuck's sake. But don't worry, love. If they hurt you, I'll shield your pretty face."

Harry gave him a withering look. "Don't you ever stop?"

Theo winked. "Not when I've found a new hobby."

Just then, Scorpius—five-going-on-thirty and full of mischief in miniature dragon slippers—bounced up to Harry, his curls sticking up in all directions and his face smudged with chocolate icing from a treacle tart.

He stopped in front of Harry with the dramatic flair only a Malfoy-Granger child could manage and peered up at him, his green eyes wide with curiosity.

"Hello, Harry Potter," he said very seriously. "We met at the Ministry when I went with my dad. Do you remember?"

Harry blinked, startled by the boy's formal tone. "That's right. I do."

Scorpius nodded solemnly, as if confirming the facts. Theo, watching from nearby with a drink in hand, chuckled and muttered something about "the tiny chaos diplomat," before turning toward the drinks table again.

"You were in my bedtime stories sometimes," Scorpius went on, swaying slightly on his feet. "Godmother Ginny used to tell me you were brave and clever. That you and my mum and your other friend saved the world. She said you saved my dad."

Harry felt heat creep up his neck. "She... exaggerates a bit."

Scorpius looked thoughtful, cocking his head with Hermione's trademark frown—that deeply analytical squint that seemed far too grown for such a small face.

"Then I don't understand," Scorpius said after a moment. "If you were so brave and had all those fun adventures, why does Mummy get sad when people say your name?"

Harry's mouth opened. Closed. His lungs stalled like they'd forgotten how to breathe. The boy had said it so innocently, so *honestly*, like it was the most obvious question in the world.

"I think," Harry began slowly, cautiously, "it's because... I wasn't very good at being her friend."

The words fell into the space between them like broken glass.

Silence followed. Not the calm sort but the kind that prickled under your skin. That reminded you of mistakes and could-be's and too-lates.

Scorpius frowned deeper. "That's dumb," he declared. "Mummy says friends don't make you feel bad. They make you happy. Your chosen family protects you and you protect them. Did you not protect my mum?"

And that—that tiny, brutal question—was the one that shattered whatever Harry had left holding him together.

His throat tightened. His vision narrowed. He couldn't think past the pulsing ache in his chest.

He had failed her. In ways the world didn't see. In ways a child could still somehow feel.

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secret marriage to a known Death Eater.

"They are respectable people," one source stated. "But how much heartbreak can one family endure?"

While supporters of the Malfoys point to Draco Malfoy's career as a healer, his years of exile, and their charitable work abroad, others—like Mrs Weasley—remain unconvinced.

"She turned her back on the family that stood beside her," Mrs Weasley declared in one of her most cutting remarks. "Now she raises Death Eater children and calls it love. When it all falls apart, I hope she remembers who she left behind—as though Fred didn't die for a better world."

The Prophet reached out to the Malfoy family for comment. No response was received at time of publication.

As the public watches this unprecedented reintegration unfold, one question remains at the heart of the matter:

Is love enough to outrun legacy? Or has Wizarding Britain simply forgotten the lessons it once swore never to repeat?

More on page 4: "Malfoy Manor Reopened: A Second Chance or Dangerous Symbol?"

Draco watched her shoulders tense, watched her knuckles whiten as she clutched the parchment.

"Love," he said carefully, stepping closer, voice low but vibrating with barely contained rage. "Don't let them in. They don't get to live in your head."

Her voice was tight. "She used Fred's name."

"She used everything she could," Draco growled, his teeth clenched. "Because that's all she has left. Because she knows nothing about us but bitterness."

He slid his arms around her from behind, pressing his hand gently over hers, grounding her. "You are not theirs to ruin."

"It's not even about me anymore." Her voice broke, her eyes shimmering. "It's about our children now. Our family."

His hand instinctively moved from hers to rest on the gentle curve of her stomach, protective, fierce. "They can say what they like about me. About the war. About my past. But the children, our children, are fucking off limits."

The words trembled with the force of his fury, like a vow being carved into stone.

She swallowed hard, leaning back into his chest. "I knew it wouldn't be easy when we came back. I was ready for some of it. But this? Using Fred's name, questioning my parents, attacking Scorpius and Cassy before they've even started school—"

Draco's jaw tightened, his hands shaking now as he carefully pried the article from her fingers. He scanned it again, and again, each line fueling his rage. The sharp crack of him gripping the parchment echoed through the kitchen as the paper threatened to tear beneath

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his grip.

"She's attacking our children now," he muttered, his voice rough and dangerous. "Those fucking parasites—"

"Draco—"

"No." His voice cracked slightly as his eyes darted again to her stomach. His hand pressed firmer over her bump, like he could shield her from the world itself. "I let them say what they wanted about me. I could handle it. I've handled it for ten years. But this? This? They're not touching you or the kids. Not again. Never again."

He was shaking now, his breathing uneven, fighting the urge to rip through the room and hex Skeeter and anyone who dared feed her narrative.

Hermione turned in his arms, cupping his face, her own calm fraying at the edges. "You don't think this isn't breaking me too? You don't think I want to burn it all down?" Her voice dropped, shaking. "But if we let them drive us to rage, they win."

Draco closed his eyes at her words, pressing his forehead to hers.

"We came back because this is our home," she whispered, voice trembling. "Because we wanted to raise our children near family. Because we wanted to help this country heal after everything it destroyed. We knew there would be ghosts. But not like this."

He swallowed hard, pulling her even closer. "I brought you back here, Hermione. I promised you we could do this. That it was safe. And now they're using Fred's name and our children to punish you for loving me."

"We knew Skeeter would come," she whispered. "We knew parts of this world wouldn't accept us."

"Not like this," he repeated, voice strangled. "They've gone too far."

Her eyes glistened, but her voice was steady now, stronger. "We didn't come back for them, Draco. We came back for us. For Scorpius, for Cassy, for this little one." She placed her hand over his where it covered her stomach. "For my work. For the people who stood by us. This country may still be broken, but we are not."

His breath hitched as he whispered, "I can't lose you. Any of you."

"You won't," she promised. "Not to them. Not to anyone."

Draco finally opened his eyes, his rage still simmering beneath his skin, but her steadiness pulled him back from the edge.

"I swear to Merlin, love..." His voice was hoarse, but resolute. "They will not break us. They can try. But they'll never touch what we've built."

Hermione smiled softly then, even through her own tears. "You just got your exiled overturned, and you're far too pretty to go to Azkaban for something as stupid as murdering Rita Skeeter."

That earned a choked laugh from him, his chest shaking as some of the tension bled from his shoulders.

"Fucking right I am. We could just use one of those fancy Mason jars you like for your jams. You are an expert at that."

She laughed heartedly and kissed him then—ferce, grounding—and for a moment, it was just them again. Solid. Whole. Untouchable.

But even as they stood locked together, Draco's protective instincts burned hotter than

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anything at first. For privacy. For safety. You were still healing. And truthfully, they weren't sure if the world was ready to know they were together, much less that they'd made a family out of what was left."

He clenched his jaw. "You didn't trust me."

Andromeda's voice didn't rise. "I didn't want to burden you. Not after Ron."

"I've *always* been there for you. For Teddy."

"I know," she said immediately. "And you always will be. And that's exactly why I didn't want to give you one more thing to carry. You were barely holding yourself together some days, Harry. And you loved Teddy so fiercely that I thought... adding more weight to that love might break something in you."

Harry blinked hard. "So instead, you let me go on thinking they were strangers?"

"No," she said quietly. "I let you go on loving Teddy, freely, without expectation. Without comparison. Because he needed you. Still does, just like he needs them. But in different ways."

He turned away for a moment, shoulders tense. "And what about you? You just made peace with Narcissa and decided—what—this was your new family?"

Andromeda's mouth twitched. "You know better than most how complicated family can be. Narcissa and I lost everything, Harry. We lost our sisters, our children, our peace. Rebuilding from that... it takes forgiveness. And time. And sometimes, yes, secrets."

He looked over to where Teddy stood between Draco and Hermione, beaming as Scorpius showed him a new enchanted top that whistled and spun sparks. He looked happy. Safe. Loved.

"They mean the world to him, don't they?" Harry asked.

"They do," Andromeda replied. "But so do you."

"I don't want him thinking I've been... replaced."

Andromeda placed a hand on his arm. "He never has. And you never were."

Harry's throat tightened.

"He calls Hermione *Amor Mi* because she reads him ancient spell theories and never treats him like a child. He calls Draco *Unle D* because Draco taught him how to box and always takes his side during game night."

She smiled, sad and proud all at once. "But you... you're the one he calls when he's sad. When he's scared. When he doesn't know who he wants to be. You're his anchor, Harry. You're his *Harry*. That's a title no one else could ever claim."

He looked back at her, pain still raw in his gaze. "You could've just told me that."

She nodded. "I know. And maybe I should have. But you're here now. And they're here. And it's time, isn't it?"

Harry's eyes drifted back to the gathering, where Hermione was chasing Cassy around a fairy-lit tree while Draco animated a napkin into a flapping bird for Scorpius. The past didn't vanish. But maybe, just maybe, it could live beside the present without consuming it.

"Yeah," Harry said at last. "It's time."

Hermione watched the exchange closely, a strange tightness curling in her chest.

"What's that about?" she asked Draco.

He glanced over. "No idea yet. But I don't think it's bad. Besides 'Chaos' is placing his mark." Hermione laughed at this as Theo sauntered over and slung an arm around Harry's

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“Daddy! You did it!” Scorpius yelled, finally understanding why his parents were here and still not at court.

“Course I did, champ,” Draco said, scooping him up. “Did you ever doubt me?” Cassiopeia clung to Hermione’s leg. “We beated court mummy?”

Hermione knelt, wrapping her in an embrace. “We did, darling. Daddy’s home. Properly home.”

Behind them, Theo conjured champagne and popped it with a flourish that sent gold mist into the air and startled a flock of enchanted garden finches into a chaotic waltz. Pansy rolled her eyes. Blaise caught Ginny around the waist and twirled her toward the drinks table.

Andromeda appeared beside a tall, lean young boy with scruffy hair that shifted between ash brown and sea blue. Teddy Lupin, 11 years old, looked like Tonks in the eyes and Remus in the jaw—and had none of the awkwardness Harry always remembered from baby photos. “Aunt Mi! Uncle D!” Teddy shouted, racing forward.

Draco grinned. “Oi, trouble!”

Hermione pulled him into a hug. “You got tall!”

“You got loud in court,” Teddy replied, grinning. “I bloody loved it. The papers are having a field day. I can’t imagine what they’ll write tomorrow.”

“Let’s not dwell on that now,” said Hermione with a grimace. Draco’s face darkened momentarily before he smiled brightly at Teddy and led him towards Theo.

Harry hovered near the edge of the gathering, hands shoved in his pockets, eyes fixed on Teddy as the boy threw his arms around Hermione and Draco. It was like watching two worlds collide—one he thought he understood and another he’d never even glimpsed.

He blinked, shook his head slightly. “Wait, what?” he muttered to himself.

Andromeda Tonks turned, her eyes already on him. There was something unreadable there—not shame, not guilt exactly—but a kind of quiet knowing. The kind only people who had lived through too much carried in their bones.

“You never asked, Harry,” she said softly, stepping closer.

“And you never told me,” he replied, his voice low, tight with something between disbelief and betrayal.

“I know.”

There was a beat of silence between them. A decade’s worth of unanswered questions pressing into the quiet.

“You’re angry,” she added.

Harry gave a single, humourless huff. “I don’t even know what I am.”

Andromeda nodded, not defensive, just honest. “You’re hurt. And confused. And maybe a little humiliated that you didn’t put the pieces together.”

“I’ve heard Teddy call them *Aunt Mi* and *Uncle D* for years,” he muttered, shaking his head. “I thought it was someone else. Friends of yours. Or Nymphadora’s. I never thought—bloody hell, Andromeda—all this time they’ve been the *Mallorys*!”

Her eyes sharpened for just a second at the name, but softened again just as quickly. “They’re also Hermione and Draco.”

Harry said nothing.

“You have to understand,” she said gently, taking a step closer, “they asked me not to say

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ever.

Because they had returned to rebuild.

But Brian was making it clear: some ghosts would not stay buried.

They had dinner and after settling Scorpius and Cassy into bed with their stories and charms, found themselves curled together on the sofa, the fairy lights flickering beyond the wide enchanted windows.

The townhouse was silent now, the hum of magic around them familiar, steady—their own little fortress against the storm outside.

Hermione lay stretched along his chest, one hand lazily tracing patterns across his shirt while his fingers moved in slow, soothing circles over the small of her back.

Draco breathed her in.

This. This was everything. This was why they fought, why they endured.

But tonight, the weight pressing on his chest wouldn’t ease.

“I worry about you going into the Ministry tomorrow,” Draco whispered, voice rough in the dim light.

“You always worry,” she said gently, her thumb brushing over his collarbone.

“Because I bloody well know how this world works, Hermione.” His jaw clenched. “You’ve been relocated directly into the lion’s den, and the lions aren’t even pretending to hide their teeth anymore.”

She tilted her head back to look at him, soft eyes shining with affection, but full of steel.

“Draco, I’ve faced worse.”

He exhaled sharply, the sound more frustration than relief. “You shouldn’t have to face any of it,” he rasped. “Not anymore. Not after everything you’ve given. You shouldn’t have to carry this weight while pregnant. While raising two children. While fixing everything everyone else keeps breaking.”

“I’m fine,” she tried, but her voice faltered at the end, betraying the fatigue behind her words.

Draco cupped her cheek, gently forcing her eyes back to his. “No, you’re not,” he whispered, voice breaking. “You smile for me. For the children. For your bloody Council meetings and your press conferences. But I see it, love. I see how it eats at you. And I can’t... I can’t protect you from it. I won’t, can’t, be there all the time.”

Her hand slid up to cover his, her eyes glistening. “You do protect me,” she whispered. “Every day. By being here. By loving me. By standing beside me when half the world wants to tear us apart.”

His throat bobbed, emotion tightening his voice. “I want to burn it all down for you.”

She smiled faintly, a sad, knowing thing. “But you won’t. Because we’ve built too much worth saving.”

Draco closed his eyes, his forehead pressing to hers. “Because you’re stronger than all of them.”

“So are you,” she whispered.

He breathed in deeply, the storm inside him quieting only slightly beneath the weight of her words. And then he kissed her—slowly at first, deliberately, reverently.

The kiss deepened as his hand slipped around her waist, fingers splaying across the curve

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of her growing bump. Her breath hitched at the touch, her body instinctively pressing into his. Draco's protective rage melted beneath the heat of her mouth, replaced by something softer, more desperate. Every touch, every caress spoke of the things words couldn't: his fear, his gratitude, his absolute devotion to her.

They shifted together, Hermione pulling him closer, needing him just as fiercely. His hands worshipped her, tracing every familiar inch of her—her neck, her waist, her hips. The swell of her stomach beneath his palm filled him with something fierce and unrelenting.

"I've got you," he murmured against her lips. "I'll always have you."

Her fingers tangled in his hair as she breathed his name, pulling him into her completely. The world outside their walls ceased to exist. There was no Skeeter, no Ministry, no court of public opinion. Only them...lovers, fighters, survivors.

When they finally collapsed into each other, spent and tangled beneath the enchanted ceiling that softly mimicked the glittering night sky, Draco held her tight against his chest, his heartbeat still racing beneath her ear.

The weight of the world still waited for them beyond tomorrow.

But tonight... tonight, they were whole.



The next morning, Draco slipped out early.

Hermione was already preparing for her day at the Ministry. She stood in front of the mirror, hair pinned back neatly, the swell of her pregnancy just barely hidden beneath her tailored robes. She was breathing—steadily, strong, brilliant—but Draco still couldn't breathe easy while she was out of his sight.

The world didn't deserve her.

So he found Potter. He knew Hermione would be pissed if she knew but he needed her protected so as the muggles say "better ask forgiveness than permission."

They met in the corner of the hospital's coffee room, quiet and tucked away behind two enchanted privacy screens Draco conjured. An unspoken truce existed between them now—thin, tentative, but real.

"I need a favour," Draco said without preamble, voice low.

Harry, who'd already sensed something brewing, straightened in his chair. "If it's about Mione—"

"It is."

Harry's jaw tensed immediately, but he nodded. "Of course."

Draco sighed, rubbing his temples. "I trust you've seen the Prophet."

Harry's eyes darkened. "Yeah. Absolute fucking filth."

The paper sat folded on the table between them. It made Draco's stomach twist.

"She's under enough stress as it is," Draco murmured, voice tight. "The pregnancy, the press, the office... and Skeeter's poison keeps pouring more fuel. She's fighting battles she shouldn't have to fight." His throat bobbed. "I need eyes on her when I can't be there. At the

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But then Hermione turned, her eyes meeting Harry's. No contempt. No wariness. Just a quiet nod. An offering.

Come in.

Be welcome.

Harry returned the nod. It was all he could manage.

Behind them, the Fluo roared once more, and George stepped through with a grin and a box of sweets in one hand and a charmed recorder in the other.

"Let's get pissed and tell the kids stories we'll deny tomorrow," he announced.

Draco raised a brow. "You realise my children already think you're a mythological creature?" "Excellent," George said brightly. "Long may it continue."

Hermione rolled her eyes and reached for Draco's hand. "Come on, love. Let's join the chaos before someone burns the garden gnomes again."

Draco looked down at her, expression soft. "Lead the way, Mrs Malfoy."

Harry followed behind them, quiet and watchful.

There were ghosts at this table.

But tonight, there was room for them all.

The back garden of Malfoy Manor—once whispered about in war meetings and listed in files as a place of torture and death—was now filled with bubbles, flower crowns, floating fairy lights, and the scent of roasted rosemary chicken and honeyed bread.

Lucius Malfoy stood barefoot.

Barefoot.

He wore slacks and a cream cardigan with the sleeves rolled up, his pale hair loose around his shoulders, and he was laughing—belly-laughing—at something Richard Granger was saying. The latter, in khaki shorts and a bright blue polo, had a muggle single golf club in hand, which he was using to point animatedly at a projected replay of a PGA tournament floating above the grass like a moving portrait.

"I still say McLroy's backspin was ridiculous," Richard said, nudging Lucius with his elbow. Lucius shook his head with a grin. "It was bloody brilliant. Come now, don't sulk just because your favourite was trounced."

Harry blinked. The urge to rub his eyes was strong.

Across the lawn, Narcissa Malfoy—elegant as ever but now wearing flowy linen trousers and a powder-blue top—knelt beside Jean Granger on a picnic blanket. They were helping Scorpius and Cassiopeia, who had left their parents as soon as they were outside again, enchant flower petals to float like butterflies. Cassy's giggles sounded like bells, and Scorpius's laughter cracked like summer lightning.

Harry opened his mouth and then closed it.

Draco raised his voice as he walked down the steps to the garden with Hermione at his side. "It's done!"

Everyone turned at once.

The moment Draco spoke, the garden seemed to inhale and erupt. Jean covered her mouth, already in tears. Lucius strode forward, his expression split between pride and disbelief. Narcissa dropped her wand, rushing to her son. The children squealed and ran—a tangle of limbs, wild curls, and tiny shrieks.

enchanted serpents curling across the bannister. The walls had been transfigured to a soft ivory with golden trim, charmed sconces blooming with seasonal flowers. The smell of dust and old magic had been replaced with something living. Something hopeful.

Gone were the massive tapestries depicting conquest and bloodlines. In their place hung magical photos—Hermione and Draco dancing at their wedding, Theo teaching Scorpius how to ride a child Muggle bicycle, Andromeda and Narcissa laughing at a bonfire on a beach, the children cuddled together beneath a charmed canopy of stars.

There was one of Lucius—*Lucius Malfoy*—in a knitted jumper with a sleeping Cassiopeia drooping on his shoulder. Narcissa sat beside him, smirking fondly, a Muggle romance novel open in her lap.

Harry didn't know what to do with that.

There were toys scattered by the foot of the stairs. Muggle crayon marks on the corner of a doorframe that no one had bothered to scrub off. A charmed nightlight shaped like a snitch floated lazily near the ceiling.

It felt like a home.

He barely registered Ginny stepping through behind him, her heels clicking softly against the floor. Blaise followed with a snort of amusement as he caught Harry's expression.

"You alright there, Potter?" Blaise drawled. "You look like you just walked into a particularly sentimental Pensieve."

"I—" Harry cleared his throat. "It's not what I expected."

"Good," Ginny said, passing him with a fond pat. "It bloody well shouldn't be."

Theo's voice rang out from the upstairs landing. "Someone tell Potter to stop brooding. There's mulled wine and enchanted charcuterie out here."

Malfoy's laughter, *laughter*, followed immediately after. "Give him a moment. He's still rebooting."

Harry turned to find him standing at the end of the hallway, Hermione already barefoot on polished wood, her hand resting on his chest. Malfoy held Scorpius on his hip, the boy mid-tumble about chocolate frogs and dragon dung, while Cassiopeia tugged on his sleeve, demanding her mother conjure sparkles for her hair.

Hermione looked radiant. Relaxed. And whole.

It hit Harry like a curse to the chest. He remembered the Hermione who didn't laugh. The one who came to every Order meeting like a ghost. The one who saved the world and still cried in bathroom stalls between missions. That woman was gone.

This one had found peace.

And Harry... he'd never even noticed she was still waiting for it.

Ginny looped her arm through Blaise's and followed Pansy and Neville down the corridor toward the gardens. Kingsley stepped out of the Floo last, clapping Harry on the shoulder and murmuring something about firewhisky and fairy lights.

Harry lingered.

He looked again at the walls—at the snapshots of joy and change, of lives rebuilt not on legacy, but on love. It felt intrusive somehow. Like witnessing something sacred.

He didn't belong here.

Not really.

Ministry."

Harry's face softened, the old loyalty flashing behind his green eyes. "You think she's in danger?"

Draco leaned in slightly, voice quieter. "I know how fast whippers turn into mobs, Potter. We both do."

Harry inhaled sharply.

"Just..." Draco's voice broke slightly. "Watch her back. Keep an ear out. And if any of your friends in security hear anything, I want to know. Immediately."

Harry studied him for a long moment. He saw it—the fear underneath Draco's composed exterior.

"You have my word," Harry said softly. "I'll make sure nothing happens to her."

Draco nodded once, though the weight in his chest didn't ease. Not entirely.

He watched Harry for a moment longer - noting how tired he still looked. But also how steady. How much progress he had made. Maybe Andromeda had been right to push him toward this second chance.

"Good," Draco said at last. His voice was calm, but his eyes were cold. "Because if anything happens to her, I will personally shove Rita Skeeter's quill so far up her arse, they'll be pulling headlines from her stomach lining for fucking years."

Harry snorted despite himself. "Didn't think I'd ever see you so feral, Malfoy."

"Family changes you," Draco replied darkly, his voice full of something rawer than threat. "And I won't lose her. Plus that beetle mentioned my children and that's a line you don't cross."

Harry nodded. "I know. I don't want to see her, then, hurt either."

For a moment, they sat in a strange, heavy silence—something that wasn't friendship, but wasn't quite hatred anymore either.

And then Harry left.



Later that evening, Draco returned home to the familiar sounds of chaos—the kind that made his chest loosen, the kind that reminded him why every battle he fought was worth it.

Laughter echoed from the kitchen.

"Mummy! I *spinned*!" Cassiopeia shouted gleefully as she twirled wildly in circles, her small hands stretched out like wings. She was dressed in one of her many princess gowns—this one a soft lavender with silver stars embroidered across the skirts. Her tiny glittering tiara sat crooked on top of her wild, bouncy curls, slipping further sideways with every turn.

"Cassi, my love, careful!" Hermione called from across the kitchen, her tone both amused and gently exasperated. "You're going to make yourself dizzy again."

"I *LIKE* dizzy!" Cassi giggled, staggering sideways and falling onto a pile of pillows with a squeal. "Boom!"

Draco's mouth twitched into a soft smile, his heart warm. Merlin, she looked so much like Hermione it physically hurt sometimes.

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Nearby, Scorpius sat cross-legged on the floor, holding one of his picture books with both hands, his little voice ringing out with all the drama and flair of a proper storyteller.

“—and THEN the big, scary dragon said, ‘You shall not PASS!’” he shouted, thrusting his arm out dramatically like he was casting a spell. “But the brave knight—*that’s me, Mummy!*—he stood tall and said, ‘I will save my mummy and sister!’”

“Oh, will you now?” Draco chuckled as he stepped further into the room.

Scorpius’ face lit up instantly. “Daddy!”

In an instant, Scorpius jumped up, book abandoned, and barreled into Draco’s legs, hugging them tight. Cassi scrambled up too, toddling over with her arms outstretched, tiara now completely falling over one ear.

“*Daddy home!*” Cassi sang, reaching up for him. He scooped both of them into his arms, holding them close, breathing them in—the scent of warm biscuits and lavender shampoo filling his senses. This was his home. This was everything.

“Rough day, Daddy?” Scorpius asked, tilting his head like a little old man.

Draco smiled, smoothing down his son’s hair. “Not anymore, mate.”

“Did you fight the bad people again?” Scorpius whispered, his voice suddenly serious, like he knew more than any five-year-old should.

“Something like that.”

“Don’t worry, Daddy. You have us.” Scorpius grinned proudly, puffing out his chest. “We’re your team.”

“That’s right. My very best team.”

Cassi patted his cheek clumsily with her small hand, whispering, “I lub you, Daddy.”

Draco pressed his forehead to hers. “And I love you, my star.”

As he finally lowered the kids back down, Scorpius tugged on his sleeve. “Daddy?”

“Yes, love?”

“Can we have a story after dinner? A *real* one. With dragons. And knights. And no bad reporters.” He wrinkled his nose at that last part, parroting words he’d probably heard from Theo or Pansy.

Draco chuckled, giving Hermione a knowing look. “You’ve got yourself a deal, little knight.

But only if you help me fix your sister’s tiara first.”

Cassi squealed with excitement as Draco gently adjusted the tiny crown on her head, his hands careful, reverent, like she was the most precious treasure in the world.

“Perfect,” he declared.

“*P/ai!*” Cassi echoed, beaming up at him.

And for the first time that day, Draco felt his lungs fully expand. The warm smells of dinner filled the air. Roasted vegetables. Herbed chicken. Soft bread rolls charmed to stay warm.

At the stove, Hermione stood with her back to him, stirring a pot with gentle precision.

He paused for a moment, letting the scene wrap around him like a blanket. His family. His life.

And yet... even before she turned, he could feel it—the tension radiating off her.

She was annoyed.

He barely had time to open his mouth before she spoke—low, deliberate, sharp.

“I am not stupid, Draco Malfoy,” she whispered, her back still to him. “Nor am I an idiot.



Chapter 18

Ghosts at the Table

“In the house we build with love, the past may knock—but it never decides who stays.”

The trial had ended.

Draco Malfoy’s exile was lifted.

His magic, fully restored.

His vaults, unsealed.

And more than anything—his family, unbroken.

It was over.

Or, at least, it was beginning again.

The floos in the Wizengamot’s exit gates flared emerald as they stepped off the lift. One by one, the tight-knit circle of survivors and supporters stepped through the Floo, robes dusted in ash and hearts heavy with the strange weight of justice finally delivered.

Harry stepped through last.

He stumbled slightly, catching himself as his boots hit the marble hearth of Malfoy Manor.

The landing, thankfully, no longer felt like entering a tomb.

Because this... this wasn’t the same place it had been during the war.

The first thing he noticed was warmth. Not from the hearth, but in the air. Gone was the cold draught and scent of damp stone. Instead, charmed breezes whispered through the corridors, carrying traces of roasted garlic, fresh thyme, and something sweet - apple tart, if his guess was right.

The second thing he noticed was sound.

Laughter—not the brittle, forced kind he remembered from the Hogwarts pure-blood elite, but loud and messy and entirely unfiltered. Somewhere above, a child shrieked with delight, and someone yelled, “No, Scorpius, we *do not* throw Pixie Pops in the pool!”

Harry blinked.

This was Malfoy Manor?

He stepped off the hearthstone into a foyer bathed in soft candlelight. No dark wood. No

Ours To Keep

talk with Potter privately, soon.

She sighed, brushing windblown curls from her face, looked at Harry with an unspeakable expression. “Fine. You can come. But if you say *one* thing out of line, you’re cleaning glitter out of Cassiopeia’s unicorn plush for the rest of your miserable life.”

Harry smiled—small and awkward, but sincere. “Understood. Thank you.”

Draco eyed him for a beat. “And bring the good biscuits. Scorpius has high standards.”

Harry laughed once, unsure. “Of course. Noted.”

And so they stepped into the lift—family, friends, misfits, warriors, lovers, and one very confused saviour of the wizarding world—heading not toward the end of something, but finally, finally, toward the beginning.

Toward home.

Head over heels016

So imagine my surprise when, after Rita’s charming little masterpiece this morning—and after the... *situation* at the Manor with Harry—I suddenly find myself being watched and followed by none other than my former best friend.”

She turned to face him now, brow arched, eyes narrowed. “Care to explain?”

Draco exhaled slowly. “I asked him to.”

Her eyes flashed. “You *what*?”

He moved toward her, voice calm but firm. “I asked Potter to keep an eye out for you. To listen. To watch for any threats. Because I can’t be everywhere. Because there’s not a chance in hell I’m leaving you exposed with this circus outside our door.”

“Draco—” she started, but he gently cupped her face.

“Love,” he whispered. “I trust you to fight your own battles. But I also know how exhausting it is to always be the one fighting.”

She tried to look cross. Failed.

“It’s not that simple,” she murmured. “Not with him.”

“I know,” Draco said softly. “And for what it’s worth... not everything may be what you think, Granger.”

Her brows pulled together. “What does that mean?”

“Maybe...” he hesitated, choosing his words carefully. “Maybe at some point, you should hear him out.”

Her jaw tightened. “I’m not ready for that.”

Draco nodded, brushing his thumb across her cheek. “I’m not asking you to be. I just don’t want you shutting every door before you know what’s behind them.”

She exhaled shakily, leaning into his touch despite herself.

“I hate how complicated this is,” she whispered.

“So do I,” he breathed against her hair. “But I love you more than I hate the mess.”

And she smiled, small, tired, but genuine. “You’re still a prat.”

He grinned. “Undoubtedly.”

They stayed there for a moment, wrapped in each other, as Cassy twirled behind them and Scorpius dramatically announced, “And then the hero saved the princess from the evil toad who was definitely not based on anyone we know!”

Draco snorted, and Hermione rolled her eyes, laughing softly.

Long after Hermione had finally fallen into exhausted sleep and the house had grown quiet, Draco slipped out of their bedroom, going into his townhouse’s study.

He wasn’t surprised to find Blaise and Theo already waiting for him.

Theo was perched in one of the armchairs, legs casually crossed, swirling a glass of brandy like the smug chaos demon he was. Blaise, more reserved as always, leaned against the far wall, arms folded, his sharp gaze cutting through the dim light like polished obsidian.

They had both seen the Prophet’s latest filth. And they knew exactly why they were there. Draco closed the study door with a soft but deliberate click, sealing it with a charm for privacy. His jaw was tight, his shoulders tense with barely restrained fury.

Theo was the first to speak, voice smooth and full of mockery. “Well. Shall we discuss the absolutely vomit-inducing excuse of journalism Rita Skeeter calls ‘reporting?’”

Blaise spoke next, his tone calm but laced with venom. “She crossed a line this time.”

Ours To Keep

Draco's voice was rough, almost a growl. "She went after my children. My wife. Our unborn child."

His hands clenched into fists. The air around him seemed to pulse for a moment—his magic, still newly restored, reacting instinctively to his emotions.

"She doesn't get to touch my family," he continued, voice low, dangerous. "Not now. Not ever."

Theo raised an eyebrow, swirling his brandy. "I rather thought we were past playing defence, mate. You want to respond?"

Draco's eyes burned. "No. I want her destroyed."

Theo smirked. "Excellent. Because I've already started drawing up some ideas."

Blaise pushed off the wall and stepped closer. "You need to be smart about this, Draco. You're not just some private citizen anymore. They'll be watching you. Any move you make that looks too aggressive will backfire."

"I don't care if it backfires," Draco snapped.

Blaise gave him a flat look. "Yes, you do. Because it won't just hit you—it'll hit Hermione. The kids. Your parents. And you'd burn before letting that happen."

Draco exhaled sharply, pacing. "Then we do this properly. The Slytherin way."

Theo's grin was wicked. "Now you're speaking my language."

Blaise gave a small nod of approval. "Discredit her. Expose her. Remove her allies. Sever her influence."

Draco's jaw twitched. "I want her credibility shredded. I want the Prophet to fear printing her name. I want her career buried so deep she won't be able to get a column in the fucking Knockturn Alley Gazette."

Theo lifted his glass in mock salute. "To war, then."

Draco crossed the room, grabbed his own glass, and clinked it against Theo's.

"To family."

Blaise poured himself a drink as well, his voice quieter, more calculating. "You know Kingsley won't intervene publicly."

Draco nodded. "He can't. But off the record? He won't stand in our way."

Theo leaned forward, eyes gleaming. "Rita's network is fragile. She's made enemies in the Ministry for years. Unsourced use of her Animagus abilities, blackmail, illegal enchantments, bribery... And her files, oh, she keeps files, Draco. *Private* files."

Blaise smirked. "And we just so happen to know a few former Unspeakables who wouldn't mind sharing a lead or two."

Draco's knuckles flexed. "Start digging. I want every skeleton in her closet dragged into the fucking sunlight."

Theo drained his glass with satisfaction. "Consider it done. Skeeter won't know what hit her."

Draco rubbed his temples, the anger inside him humming like an overcharged ward. He had never hated the press more than he did now.

"She picked the wrong fucking family to target," he whispered.

Theo leaned back, his grin feral. "She'll learn. Slowly. Publicly. And very, very painfully."

Blaise added softly, "We'll make sure she never writes another word about you. Or Hermione."

Head over heels016

long held under lock and key. Her hand covered her mouth, eyes wide and bright, a soundless sob wracking her chest.

Theo let out a howl. "YES!" he shouted, grabbing Draco in a full-bodied bear hug. "My boy is back! Wand and all!"

"Put him down, you absolute troll," Pansy snapped, slapping Theo's arm but smiling.

Draco could barely hear them. The pounding in his ears drowned everything out, until—"Hermione."

She was already moving.

He turned and caught her, arms wrapping around her as if he hadn't seen her in years instead of mere minutes. She was warm, she was real, and for the first time in a decade, they were standing together in England without fear.

"I told you," she said, laughing and crying and furious with love. "You're home."

"I don't deserve you."

"Yes. You do."

He kissed her then. On the floor of the courtroom, in front of the press, the Wizengamot, the world. It wasn't performative—it was survival. It was years of hiding erupting into a truth no decree could deny.

Flashbulbs popped. Magic cracked. Somewhere in the room, Luna sniffed into a handkerchief while Blaise muttered, "Well, there goes our chance of sneaking out unnoticed."

They left the courtroom not as fugitives or secrets, but as something far more dangerous.

Free.

Outside, a wall of reporters surged, only held back by Kingsley's firm Auror guard. George slipped out a side door with Ginny, smirking. Theo grabbed Pansy's hand and twirled her like a showgirl down the Ministry steps. Blaise casually hexed a Daily Prophet photographer for zooming too far.

And Hermione, holding Draco's hand, looked up at the sky for the first time in years and saw no barriers.

"We should go get the gremlins," Theo declared, arms stretched like he was ready to fly. "I think this calls for a full-scale family invasion."

Hermione nodded and smiled. "Let's go get our children."

Draco grinned. "I'm never letting them out of my sight again."

Theo, of course, couldn't help himself. "Speaking of family—Narcissa has apparently planned something that would give the Yule Ball an identity crisis. I saw caviar and confetti. Possibly dragons."

Hermione groaned. Ginny laughed.

"Oh, and..." Theo's voice dropped into that infuriatingly sly tone he used when he was about to stir chaos. "Harry. You're invited."

Harry, who had been trailing behind silently for some reason, blinked. "Am I?"

Theo shrugged, looked at Hermione, and murmured to Harry. "She wants closure, always has. You want forgiveness. I want wine. Let's make a night of it shall we?"

Hermione had of course overheard all of this and hesitated, her expression unreadable. She turned to Draco, who watched her carefully, never pressing.

"It's your call love," he said quietly. He knew what he would do and he did need to have a

muttering among themselves.

Hermione stood slowly, hands braced against the bench, and made her way toward Draco. No one told her no. *No one dared.*

Draco didn't move—not until she reached him.

And when she did, he looked like a man whose entire life was still caught in a moment too sacred to shatter.

"I'm proud of you," she whispered.

He let out a shaky breath, brushing his knuckles against hers. "No matter what happens, this is enough."

"It's not enough. You deserve *everything*."

Theo leaned back in his seat and muttered to Pansy, "If they kiss again before the verdict, I swear to Merlin, I'm going to weep into my shirt."

"You're already crying, you sap," she snorted, dabbing her own eyes.

One Hour Later

The courtroom reconvened with less noise and more anticipation—a storm wound tighter, but no less charged. Magic practically buzzed in the walls, anticipation rising as the Wizengamot filed back into place behind the curved bench.

Judge Thorne stood and her gaze swept the room. There was a certain warmth in her expression now, something settled and steady beneath her sharp features.

"This court has reached its verdict," she began, her voice once again echoing throughout the space. "But before I deliver it, I would like to say this: The purpose of justice is not vengeance. Nor is it simply punishment. The purpose of justice is to seek truth, and when truth is found—to have the courage to change."

She paused, her gaze flicking toward Draco, and then toward Hermione, who sat once again with her hands gently curved over her stomach.

"We live in a world shaped by war, loss, and legacy. But we are not bound to repeat it. Change is possible. Growth is possible. Redemption is *real*. And love—" she smiled faintly, "—love is the most radical form of magic any of us will ever wield."

A hush fell again, sacred this time.

"And so, with full authority granted by the International Confederation of Wizards and the British Ministry of Magic, this court declares: the magical exile of Mr Draco Lucius Malfoy is *herely lifted*."

A wave of silver light burst from her wand, swirling like smoke through the air before colliding with Draco's chest and dissolving with a warm pulse of sound.

"His wand is reinstated. His magical tracking removed. His access to vaults and inheritance restored. He is a full citizen of the British wizarding world, with all rights afforded therein."

The courtroom *exploded*.

No sooner had the final word left her mouth than the courtroom exploded in sound.

Cheers. Gasps. Laughter. Magic rippled from the gallery like applause. Enchanted quills scribbled frantically as cameras sparked, capturing history.

Hermione burst into tears.

Not quiet ones, either—but the kind that came from years of tension, terror, and hope too

Or the children."

For a moment, the room was silent except for the soft clink of glass and the shimmering undercurrent of magic swirling around them.

Draco exhaled, voice lower now but still vibrating with fury. "They can come for me. But if they think for one second they can come for my wife or my children—" his voice cracked slightly, his eyes burning, "—I will burn the whole bloody system to the ground."

Theo placed a steady hand on his shoulder. "That's why you've got us."

Blaise nodded. "We're with you, brother. All the way."

Draco's shoulders lowered slightly as the weight shifted—no longer carried alone.

They were Slytherins.

And Slytherins protected their own.

Head over heels016

“Because exile led me to her. To this. To everything that makes me the man I am today and to the life I have with her.”

And for once even the Wizengamot had no response.

Percy opened his mouth, but the Chief Warwitch raised a hand.

“That’s enough Mr. Weasley.”

Draco straightened.

“I’m not perfect. But I am better. And if justice means anything in this courtroom, then it should mean that people are allowed to grow. To learn. To live.”

He exhaled.

“*Stop* making me a symbol of *hate*. I’m just a man who wants to be allowed to go home with his wife.”

A long pause followed, heavy as stone.

Then Draco’s solicitor stood.

“Mr. Malfoy has served his sentence in accordance to the law,” she said, calm and clear. “He has paid in isolation, in restriction, and in decades of stigma. He did not evade punishment. He accepted it. Lived it. Built something good in spite of it.”

She looked directly at the judges.

“We do not ask this court for forgiveness. We ask for fairness. For perspective. For the lifting of a sentence no longer rooted in justice, but in prejudice. Doctor Malfoy was a boy, groomed by fear and bloodlines. He has spent ten years proving he is no longer that boy.” She closed her folder with a quiet snap.

“And we believe he deserves the right to come home.”

The silence that followed was a living thing—thick with emotion, tense with reckoning.

At the centre of it all stood Draco Malfoy.

Still.

Unflinching.

Waiting.

The gavel rang once. Then twice.

Chief Thorne stood from the bench, her black robes gleaming like ink beneath the enchanted dome of the Wizengamot Chamber. Her presence, though not loud, commanded silence the way only true authority could. Calm. Certain. Final.

“That concludes all witness testimonies,” she said, voice amplified and precise, echoing across the marble and the murmuring rows of witches and wizards. “At this time, the Council will enter a closed deliberation session. We ask all present to remain calm and respectful while we review the evidence.”

Her gaze landed on Draco.

“Mr. Malfoy,” she said, her voice softening just slightly, “this court thanks you for your testimony.”

Draco inclined his head. “Thank you, Chief Thorne.”

Thorne nodded once. “We will return shortly with a final decision. Court is in recess.”

The gavel cracked and Draco made his way back to the defense table.

Instantly, the tension in the room split like a fault line. Whispers bloomed like wildfire, robes swished, journalists scribbled, and even the portraits on the far walls leaned in closer,

A decorative horizontal border featuring intricate, symmetrical floral and scrollwork patterns, framing the chapter title.

Chapter 21

Sins and Confessions

“Some truths must be spoken. Others must be protected.”

It was meant to be the day of reckoning.

The morning dawned grey and hesitant, light spilling through the windows in soft, watery streaks like even the sky wasn't sure it was ready. The Malfoy townhouse, normally alive with the soft patter of children's feet and breakfast charms, stood quiet. Tense.

Hermione woke before the sun had dared breach the horizon, her body already braced for the storm. Every nerve was taut, every breath a silent countdown. Her courtroom robes hung neatly on the door across the room, charmed crease-free and ink-resistant—ready for war.

She sat up, spine stiff and aching, hand instinctively pressing to the swell of her belly. The baby kicked once, like it too felt the weight of the day. She exhaled slowly.

And then came the rapping.
Sharp. Purposeful. Official.

A Ministry owl slammed against the glass like it had something personal to say. Hermione winced at the sound, already dreading what was tied to its leg. She crossed the room barefoot, nightdress brushing the floor, and unlatched the window.

The owl dropped the scroll into her palm and flew off without ceremony.
“Cheeky bastard,” she muttered, unrolling the parchment.

Her eyes scanned the words, and her blood went cold.

NOTICE OF TRIAL DELAY

RE: Ronald Bilus Weasley

Issued by the Office of Magical Judiciary
Effective Immediately

Due to the last-minute submission of new testimony and evidence relevant to the psychological impact of Mr. Weasley's actions on multiple parties involved, including key witnesses, the Wizengamot has rescheduled the trial. The new date of proceedings is: Wednesday, 10:00 AM.

“What the actual fuck?” Hermione whispered, blinking hard.

She sank onto the edge of the bed, the parchment crumpling in her fist.

“New evidence?” she repeated aloud, voice brittle. “What else could possibly—?”

She barely had time to gather herself before she felt his presence—Draco, already awake, already dressed in black robes that fit him like shadow and silence. His wand was tucked beneath his sleeve, boots soundless as he stepped into the room.

He didn’t speak right away. Just looked at her. Took in the tension on her face, the clenched paper in her hand, the unspoken war brewing behind her eyes.

“What happened?” he asked quietly, crossing the room.

Hermione passed him the scroll, watching his expression darken as he read.

“Fucking hell,” he muttered. “Wednesday?”

She nodded. “They cited new testimony. Psychological damage. Some sort of late-stage evidence from one of the victims.” Her lips were pressed into a thin, pale line, and her eyes glinted—not with tears, but with the edge of fury.

“I’m so bloody tired of delays,” she muttered, pacing. “Of stall tactics. Of people protecting him.”

Draco was silent for a long moment, just watching her move across the room like a brewing storm.

Then, finally, he said it. Calm. Firm. Unavoidable.

“Hermione, I need to speak to you about Potter.”

She stopped mid-step. Her brow furrowed. “What about him?”

“I need you to contact Kingsley,” Draco said carefully, eyes fixed on her with steady intensity. “Ask him to remove Harry as a witness. Or—if you can’t do that—make it so his testimony is taken privately. Sealed. No public record.”

Hermione stilled, the breath catching in her throat before the weight of his words sank in. She turned to face him fully, the parchment still clutched in her hand. Her brow furrowed, lips parting slightly in disbelief.

“I’m sorry..what?” she asked, her voice sharp and clipped like a snapped wand.

“You heard me.”

Her spine straightened like a sword pulled from its sheath. “And I’m asking again,” she said, each word landing like a curse, “what the actual fuck are you playing at, Malfoy?”

Draco didn’t flinch. He didn’t raise his voice. But his jaw tightened, and his hands curled loosely at his sides.

“It’s not a game, love.”

“You want Harry Potter,” she hissed, stalking across the room until only inches separated them, “the one person who *outed* when I was attacked in public at *your trial*—one of the *few* who saw the *abuse* in the past, the mistreatment, the *fight*s, who knew something was wrong even if he said nothing—you want *him* off the list?”

Her arms folded tightly across her chest, fingers digging into her skin. “Tell me why?”

Draco’s expression barely shifted, but the tension around his eyes gave him away. “I can’t.” Hermione laughed. Cold. Unamused. “You can’t or you won’t?”

He exhaled through his nose. “I *can*,” he repeated, voice level. “Healer’s oaths. You know this.”

one. No offence to Molly, but I will not be assembling a damn Quidditch team.”

“Oh, *absolutely* not,” Pansy shuddered. “The stretch marks. The noise. The *sickness*.”

“You’ve never held a child in your life, other than mine,” Hermione pointed out.

“Exactly,” Pansy said smugly. “And look how radiant I am.”

They all laughed until Theo, lounging sideways on the rug like a cat, raised his glass. “As for me—I fully intend to let the Nott line end with me. Burn it to the ground. Let the goblins sort it out.”

Harry, who had been quietly nursing a drink near the fireplace, snorted. “That’s... dark.”

Theo grinned at him, sharp and unrepentant. “It’s the Slytherin way.”

Ginny leaned over and nudged Harry’s arm, her voice teasing. “In case you haven’t noticed or forgot, Scorpius is my godson. Theo’s his grandfather. Cassi’s got Neville and Pansy. And the one on the way?”

Luna clapped. “That little boy’s ours! Mine and Blaise’s!”

Blaise coughed into his glass. “Excuse me—I specifically requested a *girl*.”

“Oh no,” Pansy said sweetly, smirk curling. “That’s why it’ll be twins. One for each of you. Because Merlin knows neither of you can share. You’re worse than Draco.”

“Absolutely fucking not,” Draco groaned from his spot on the couch.

“I hate you all,” Hermione said with an exasperated laugh, as she leaned into Draco’s side. “Honestly. I’m not a breeding program. And I have to carry them you know.”

Draco chuckled, wrapping his arms around her from behind and kissing the crown of her head. “You’re the one who never wants to know what we’re having. Or how many.”

“Because I thought one of us had *retruning*,” she deadpanned. “But after this one, we are *done*.”

“Yes, love, whatever you say.”

More laughter. Hermione kissed Draco and whispered something in his ear that made him smirk and look at her with wickedness. The group looked at them fondly, doing their best to give them space and ignore their obvious bubble of love.

And through it all, Harry watched.

He didn’t speak much. He didn’t need to.

There was warmth everywhere—light spilling from every charmed lantern, laughter weaving through the room like song, limbs tangled, drinks shared, stories swapped. They were all broken people, in one way or another. Torn apart by war, stitched back together by stubborn love and stupid courage.

And yet here they were. Whole. Loud. Radiant.

A Family.

Not by blood. Not all of them. But by choice. By fire.

And as the chaos swelled and the night deepened, Harry leaned back into the armchair, drink in hand, eyes glinting behind his glasses.

Maybe, just maybe, they would let him stay.

Ours To Keep

together with a quiet *ting*.

"Anyone," Theo said, then smirked. "Future lover."

Harry choked on his drink, coughing. "What?"

"Nothing," Theo said, biting back a grin as he leaned back with maddening nonchance. "Absolutely nothing."

But Harry was still looking at him, flushed and startled, his heart thudding with something he didn't have a name for.

Theo winked at him again and turned to yell at Draco about House Elf nights.

The laughter carried on until, as if summoned by mischief itself, the girls crashed the party. The door to the family room burst open in a flurry of laughter and Ginny's unmistakable voice.

"Your night is boring boys. We're saving it."

She strode in with a conjured cooler hovering behind her, filled with refilled wine bottles, mocktails, and snacks that looked suspiciously like they came from the girls' stash. Behind her trailed Luna, wand still glowing, Pansy in silk and heels, Padma with a smirk, and Hermione—glowing, barefoot, belly gently curved under her dress, shaking her head in mock exasperation. Theo raised an eyebrow. "And here I thought this was a *boys'* night."

"You thought wrong," Pansy quipped, flouncing onto the arm of Neville's chair and stealing his drink. "You're lucky we let you pretend for this long."

"You lot couldn't go one night without us," Blaise muttered, but his grin betrayed him as Ginny curled into his lap and stole a crisp from his bowl.

Luna waved her wand and the sitting room rearranged itself - sofas scooting, cushions multiplying, a small fire blazing in the hearth, soft jazz playing in the background. It was warm and chaotic and already better than before.

Soon, the conversations blurred, drinks were passed around, and the group settled into their usual rhythm—their found family's unique brand of magic.

They talked about old Hogwarts memories, worst detentions, who actually threw up in the lake during sixth year (*Theo*) and whether Blaise had, in fact, snogged a Beauxbatons girl on a dare during the Yule Ball. (*He had. She hexed him after.*)

Then came the conversation that always circled back, in one form or another: children.

"I love them," Hermione said, her voice soft, "but I never imagined I'd have them so young. And now, now I can't imagine not having them."

"You say that like you aren't the most terrifyingly competent mother I've ever seen," Padma said with admiration. "Your child draws dragons anatomically correct. He's five."

Hermione beamed. "That's all Draco."

Pansy sipped her drink. "I'm good with the godmother role. I love Cass and Scorpi, but I am far too selfish to breed."

Neville grinned, arm around her waist. "And I've got an entire generation of greenhouse-destroying students to keep me busy."

"I'd rather raise Kneazles and Nifflers," Luna chimed in. "They don't judge and they glitter in the sun."

Padma chuckled and tugged Luna closer. "You've got me. No need for anything else."

"I might consider one," Ginny admitted, stretching her legs across the pouffe, "but only

Head over heels016

She turned away with a sharp, frustrated motion, pacing toward the window and back. "Then don't even bloody *ask* me, Draco," she snapped, spinning on her heel. "Don't ask me to protect the same man who *watched* me get broken down, humiliated, isolated—who stood there while Molly Weasley *called me a whore* and Ron—"

Her voice cracked. She blinked fast and looked away.

"Ron shattered me," she whispered. "And Harry just *watched*."

Draco closed the distance slowly, his own chest rising with effort. He reached for her arm but stopped short of touching her.

"I know," he said, low and raw. "I know what he did. Or didn't do. I hated him for it too." "Then *why*—" She turned toward him, eyes rimmed with unshed tears, fury and heartbreak and confusion all fighting for dominance. "Why are you defending him?"

"Because I know what it's like," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "To be so deep in your own pit that you convince yourself you *deserve* it. That there's no point in crawling out."

Her breathing quickened. "That's not an excuse—"

"I'm not making one," he interrupted, finally reaching out, gently catching her wrist. "I'm just saying—I recognise the look in his eyes, Hermione. I see it. Every time. He's not doing well. He hasn't been for years."

Hermione pulled her hand back, needing space to keep herself upright. Her body shook as she backed away, a trembling fury in every step.

"He should've *spoken* to me," she said through clenched teeth. "He should've *done something*. Anything."

"He didn't know how," Draco said, voice trembling now too. "You—Me!in, Hermione—you were *fire*. You were *power*. He didn't know how to exist in your light. And that's not your fault. That's his. But I think he punished himself by staying silent."

She swallowed hard. "So now I'm too strong for him to *shake*? Do you know how that sounds?"

Draco's mouth twisted. "I'm not saying you're too strong. I'm saying he's too *broken*."

The air between them tightened, charged with pain and years of unsaid wounds.

"And that's my problem because?" she asked bitterly.

Draco took a step forward, slower this time, and rested a hand on her shoulder. His thumb moved gently along her collarbone, grounding her. Softening her.

"It's not your problem," he said. "But you have the *power* to stop him from walking into that courtroom and ripping himself open for the world. And I think... I *know*... he won't survive it."

She looked at him then, properly—really looked at the man she trusted more than anyone. His eyes weren't pleading. They were heavy. Worn. Terrified.

"Draco..."

He pressed his forehead to hers. "He won't say it, Hermione. But I will. He's barely holding on. If that truth comes out—if he has to say it all out loud, in public, in front of you and the entire fucking Wizengamot—it'll *kill* him. Maybe not with a wand. But it will *end* him."

Hermione's lips parted, but no sound came.

Draco's hands moved to her waist, holding her steady. "Some truths, love... they're not meant for public air. Not because they don't matter, but because they'll consume the person

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who speaks them. Some wounds don't heal by being shouted from the rafters. They only fester."

Silence stretched, except for their shared breathing.

"He has to say it if he's a victim," she whispered at last. "If he's been hurt, he needs to say it. That's the only way anything *changes*."

"And if he dies doing it?" Draco asked softly. "If he drinks himself into a grave after that courtroom session? If he finally decides he doesn't want to keep waking up? Then what changes, Hermione?"

Her chest tightened painfully.

"I'm not asking you to forgive him. Or absolve him. But please—just... *watcher* protecting him now. Because he didn't know how to protect you then."

Hermione trembled in his hold. He pressed a kiss to her temple, anchoring her.

"Talk to Kingsley," he said again, more gently now. "No promises. Just... ask."

She didn't nod. She didn't speak. But her eyes closed slowly as she let her forehead fall to his chest, and her hand curled into the fabric of his robes.

"I'll think about it," she whispered at last.

And that, Draco knew, was everything.

His arms came around her fully then, holding her tight, like he was afraid if he let go, she might shatter.

"Thank you," he murmured against her hair, brushing a kiss there. "That's all I needed."

Hermione didn't reply straight away. She just listened to his heartbeat beneath her cheek—steady, strong, hers.

"I hate that we're arguing about *him*," she said quietly.

Draco tilted her chin up gently. "We're not," he said. "We're standing in different places... but we're still facing the same direction. That's what matters."

She met his eyes—those grey eyes that had once been cold and cruel but now looked at her like she was the centre of his bloody universe.

"I love you," she said, voice thick.

He smiled—soft, honest, a little broken. "I love you more."

Her mouth quirked up. "Impossible."

"Prove it then," he whispered, leaning in until their lips brushed.

She kissed him—slow, aching, real—and when they pulled apart, their foreheads touched once more.

No matter the battles ahead, the ghosts behind, or the names on the parchment, they were still a team.



Later that morning, Hermione stood tall within the Minister's office, shoulders squared, jaw set with the kind of grim determination that had once carried her through war.

The room was quiet—strangely so, considering the storm that raged beyond its enchanted walls. Thick velvet curtains blocked out the bustle of the Ministry atrium, while the enchanted fire crackled softly in its hearth. Above it, a large portrait of a sleeping Falmouth falconer

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its own. I should know, I was raised on it."

Neville chuckled, patting Harry's knee like a patient older brother. "Don't mind them. You're doing great. Pansy's not here to bite your head off. You're safe. For now."

"She's probably hexing someone as we speak," Blaise added dryly. "Hopefully Ron. If anyone can find a way to hex the git while he's in prison it will be her...and Ginny."

Theo raised his glass. "May they never run out of rage."

Harry smiled despite himself. It wasn't easy being here—in their lives, back in his own skin—but this felt almost like belonging. Not quite, not yet. But close. Later, when the others were deep in a passionate debate over which Hogwarts house had suffered the worst dormitory meal—Neville loudly insisting it was Gryffindor while Blaise declared every dish at Hogwarts a war crime—Theo slid onto the cushion beside Harry and nudged another drink into his hand.

Harry blinked, slightly startled. "You trying to get me drunk, Not?"

Theo smirked. "You? One and a half glasses of firewhisky and you're already blushing. I'd call it a public service, honestly."

Harry rolled his eyes, but he didn't move away. He didn't realise how close Theo had shifted until their knees brushed.

"You alright, Potter?" Theo asked, more softly this time. The playfulness dropped just enough to let sincerity peek through.

Harry hesitated, fingers tightening around the glass. "Yeah."

Theo tilted his head, studying him with an unreadable expression. "You're not, though. Are you?"

Harry swallowed hard, not answering.

Theo's voice dropped lower, almost lost beneath the din of the others. "I know what it feels like. To sit in a room full of people who care and still feel like you're the ghost in the corner. Like the second you let yourself enjoy it, it'll vanish."

Harry glanced over at him then, lips parting slightly. He didn't say anything, but his eyes did. "I get it," Theo said gently. "I lived like that for a long time. Wondering if I'd ever really be wanted. If I'd ever be more than tolerated."

Harry's jaw clenched, and he looked away, blinking hard.

"But you do deserve it," Theo said. "The people. The peace. The bloody noise. You deserve the softness, Potter. Even if it didn't show up the way you thought it would. Even if it's wrapped in chaos and charm and your best mate's daughter calling you Uncle Scarhead."

Harry gave a soft, shaky laugh at that, still not quite trusting his voice.

"Don't talk yourself out of love just because it didn't look like what you were taught to expect," Theo murmured. "Love doesn't always look like safety first. Sometimes it looks like survival. Like showing up. Like this."

Their eyes met.

For a long moment, the world around them blurred—reduced to voices in the background, flickering firelight, and the sudden, jarring realisation that Theo's warmth didn't feel foreign. It felt... grounding.

"Thanks," Harry said at last, voice hoarse.

Theo gave him a soft smile, far more sincere than Harry expected. He clinked their glasses

his nose.”

“Old Drakey’s a menace and a marshmallow,” Ginny declared.

“Aren’t they all?” Padma added. “Neville pretends to be all stoic but sobs if he accidentally cuts a flower too short. I remember when he was preparing a bouquet for Pansy and he asked me to help. It was horrible to watch to be honest.”

The girls all laughed while taking sips of their drinks.

“And Harry? Does anyone know anything about him? he’s been hanging out a lot more now,” Luna asked gently.

Hermione hesitated, and the group stilled.

She looked into her drink. “Trying. I think. Still broken, maybe. But less alone now. According to Draco.”

Ginny placed her hand over Hermione’s. “He talks to Draco? It’s weird. But it’s working. He’s... changing. Even had coffee with me the other day. Have you...?”

“I’m not ready,” Hermione whispered interrupting her. “But I don’t want him to be alone either. If he has you now and Draco then I won’t stand in his way.”

“He’s not alone,” Luna said with absolute certainty. “Not anymore.”

“And that,” Pansy announced, standing with her glass raised high, “calls for a toast...”

They all stood, lifting their drinks under the shimmering glow of fairy lights.

“To survival,” Ginny said.

“To healing,” added Luna.

“To revenge,” said Pansy with a wink.

“To second chances,” Padma offered.

Hermione looked around at the faces of the women who had become her sisters, her confidantes, her family.

“To love,” she said softly. “And to never doing it alone.”

They clinked glasses, and for that moment—under stars and spells, above gossip and grief—they were not warriors or wives, not mothers or Ministry legends.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the house, in the magically soundproofed family room—the boys’ night had started with less grace and more chaos. Firewhisky flowed freely, charmed coasters hovered beside each man like obedient familiars, and the floor was already littered with stray bits of Honeydukes popcorn and Bertie Bott’s wrappers.

The enormous chesterfield—stretched and expanded with Theo’s best Undetectable Extension charm—was packed with bodies. Blaise lounged like a painting, pristine in all black, sipping something aged and French. Neville, already two drinks in, was laughing about a failed greenhouse spell that had nearly destroyed his cloakroom at Hogwarts. Theo sat cross-legged like a chaos demon in joggers, swirling his glass like it held secrets instead of whisky.

And Harry—Harry sat near the edge, tense but present, hands wrapped around a crystal tumbler like it might anchor him.

“Alright, Potter,” Blaise said, leaning forward and tapping Harry’s glass with his own. “You’ve been initiated. Survive this evening without bolting or weeping, and you’re officially one of us.”

“I’m not weepy,” Harry muttered into his drink.

“Yet,” Theo added, flashing a wicked grin. “Give it time. Draco’s friendship is a trauma all

snored gently under his hat.

Kingsley Shacklebolt regarded her carefully as he poured two cups—one of strong black tea for himself, and a warm herbal blend for her, the kind she’d reluctantly accepted since giving up caffeine. He slid the steaming cup across the polished desk without ceremony, and she took it with a small sigh, missing immensely the bitterness of coffee.

“You want Harry removed?” Kingsley asked, getting straight to the point, voice low and even, like thunder wrapped in velvet.

Hermione sat straighter in the plush chair across from him, her fingers tightening slightly around the steaming cup of calming tea he’d placed before her. The scent didn’t soothe her. Nothing would today.

“Draco asked me to consider it,” she admitted carefully. “He... believes Harry testifying could do more harm than good. To him. To all of us.”

Kingsley studied her, dark eyes heavy with thought. His fingers curled loosely around his own mug—black tea, no sugar, same as always. “He’s not wrong.”

Hermione blinked. “You knew?”

“I am the Minister of Magic,” he said simply, no triumph in the words. “I’ve worked with Harry a long time. I know what he looks like when he’s holding something too heavy for one man to carry. I know what he’s been through, or at least parts of it. It’s not pretty.”

He set his cup down and steeped his fingers together on the desk. “After that mess seven years ago—the public disagreement, the field accident, all of it—I removed Ron from joint field duty. Reassigned him. He’s been benched ever since. Harry’s the one who requested the full separation.”

Hermione stared at him, shocked. “You knew something wasn’t right... and you never told me?”

Kingsley’s voice softened. “It wasn’t my place, Hermione. That story isn’t mine to tell. The same way I kept your secret, I also kept his.”

Her mouth opened, then shut again. She hated how familiar those words were. Draco had said the same. She wrapped her arms around herself like armour, as if curling in could protect her from the guilt that flickered just beneath the skin.

“I just... I don’t understand,” she said quietly. “Why wouldn’t he come to me? Why wouldn’t you?”

Kingsley exhaled slowly, folding his hands before him. “You left. And when you did, you weren’t just grieving. You were *right/mean* in your pain. You had every bloody right to be. But Harry? He stayed. Not because he didn’t care—but because he didn’t know how to do anything else. Guilt has a way of rotting a person’s voice, Hermione. And he was already half-eaten by the time I stepped in.”

Hermione looked down into her tea, watching the steam swirl like storm clouds in a cup. “If I could’ve protected you more than I did,” Kingsley added gently, “I would’ve. You know you’ve always been one of my favourites.”

That earned a ghost of a smile from her. He leaned forward slightly, his tone dipping into the gentle cadence reserved for secrets and truths. “You remind me of my niece. And if I’d had a daughter, I’d have wanted her to be just like you.”

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Hermione swallowed around the tightness rising in her throat. “Kingsley—”

“But this,” he said, tapping the parchment she’d brought, “this I can’t do. Not the way Draco wants.”

She nodded slowly, resigned but not defeated. “Then what can we do?”

He paused, then leaned back in his chair, fingers drumming against the armrest. “There’s an alternative. It won’t remove him, but it will protect him.”

Her brow lifted slightly. “Meaning?”

Hermione looked up, sat forward, interest piqued.

“I can’t do something directly, but you might. We could petition for the trial to be classified under *Level Seven Internal Protection Protocols*,” Kingsley explained. “It’s rare. Almost never used domestically. But it’s available under the International Confederation of Wizards’ Charter—for cases where testimony presents a significant psychological threat to the witness or the public’s perception of magical stability.”

Hermione’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully. “You’re suggesting we take it to the ICW?”

Kingsley gave a subtle smile. “I’m suggesting *you* take it to the ICW. You are, after all, the Director of the War Council and sit on two other advisory committees. You are being considered to become the youngest Supreme Mugwump in Wizarding history. That means something.”

Her lips curved upward just slightly. “You want me to invoke international magical protection to get around the Ministry’s own legal red tape.”

“I’m saying you have sway, Hermione. Use it. If you petition the Wizengamot to escalate the trial to Level Seven and the ICW backs you—which they will—the rest will fall into place. All testimonies scaled. All attendees bound by magic and oath of your choosing. Nothing leaves that courtroom. Not even the verdict, unless the full Council approves its release.”

The weight of his words sank in slowly. Hermione’s mind ticked through the implications - shielding Harry, yes. But also herself. The things she might be forced to say about the war, about Ron, about the family that once called her their own.

Confidentiality would shield more than just pain—it would shield dignity.

A flicker of hope lit in her chest, small but stubborn. “And you’d support it?”

“You’re a ranking Director within the ICW,” he said with a small smile. “And one of the primary victims in this case. Your recommendation would carry weight. Maybe enough that you won’t need me. The papers have changed directive in the last couple of days and all is praise when it comes to you, except for those nasty Skeeter articles.”

Hermione felt the power settle on her shoulders like a familiar cloak. She sat a little straighter, jaw tightening in decision.

Kingsley watched her, pride flickering behind his tired gaze. “You don’t owe him forgiveness, Hermione. But maybe you can offer him silence. And sometimes, silence is a mercy.”

She nodded, quietly resolute. “I’ll file the motion.”

Kingsley inclined his head. “I thought you might.”

She stood and straightened her robes. As she turned for the door, she paused and glanced back at him.

“Thank you Kings.”

He gave her a look that spoke of battlefields past and burdens understood. “You’ve fought

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because watching half the Ministry finch when I walk past brings me more joy than Azkaban ever could.”

“That’s the most Slytherin thing I’ve ever heard,” Padma said, raising her glass of elderflower fizz in salute.

Ginny snorted. “Honestly, Hermione, if I didn’t know better, I’d say you married into your true house.”

“I’m still a Gryffindor,” Hermione replied primly, lifting her chin.

“But a *married* Gryffindor,” Luna said dreamily, twisting a daisy into her braid. “With claws and strategy.”

The women howled with laughter. Even Hermione couldn’t suppress her grin.

“You know,” Pansy mused, eyes twinkling, “I always assumed you were one hex away from turning me into a newt in school.”

“I was,” Hermione replied sweetly, “and I still am.”

Padma cackled. “This is why I never sat between you two in Transfiguration.”

Ginny waved her wand to refill everyone’s glasses and leaned back against a floating cushion. “Alright, truth circle. One moment this week that made you nearly cry, but then didn’t. Go.”

Luna clapped her hands. “Oooh, emotional vulnerability! My favourite!”

Hermione rolled her eyes fondly, but it was Ginny who answered first.

“Alright. I saw George holding one of Fred’s old joke boxes. He didn’t cry. I didn’t cry. We just stood there and *didn’t*. And that was enough.”

A soft silence fell.

Pansy nodded. “Mine was yesterday. Cassi gave me a drawing—said I was her fairy godmum.” Her voice cracked slightly. “It was a terrible drawing really. Stick figures and too much glitter. I’ve never loved anything more. It’s hanging on my vanity mirror.”

Padma placed a gentle hand on her friend’s knee. “That’s not even fair. Now I’m going to cry.”

“I was in Diagon Alley,” Luna offered, “and a girl asked if she could be a Magizoologist like me one day. And I said yes. And she said, ‘Even if I’m not normal?’ And I said, ‘Especially then.’ And she hugged me.”

“Bloody hell, Luna,” Ginny muttered, wiping her eye.

Hermione exhaled slowly. “Mine was this morning. Scorp asked if his baby sibling would know who Fred was because George was speaking about him the day before. And I said yes. Because we’d tell them. Every story. Every stupid, glorious, ridiculous tale.”

Another pause. A reverent kind of quiet.

Then Ginny looked up and smirked. “Okay, now that we’re all emotionally wrung out—let’s talk about the boys.”

“Ugh,” Padma groaned dramatically. “Which one’s doing something stupid this week?”

“My darling husband,” Pansy said with a smirk, “tried to flirt with me by sending a bouquet of roses via *but*. Said it was ‘more dramatic.’ Gave me a heart attack.”

“Theo keeps stealing my *socks*,” Luna said airily. “Claims it’s for good luck. I don’t question it anymore. Padma hexed him.”

Hermione laughed. “Draco showed me a spell today to shield our entire home from magical surveillance. Then ten minutes later, cried because Cassi called him ‘her dragon’ and kissed

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Draco, still watching the direction Harry had gone, reached out and gently took the summons from her hands. He folded it neatly, like it was just another letter. Tucked it into his coat.

“Of course he is.”

Hermione turned her eyes on him, her brow furrowed with something that looked dangerously close to heartbreak. “But why now?” she asked softly. “Why list him as a victim and not a character witness?”

Draco didn’t answer right away.

He stepped closer and brushed a thumb beneath her eye, where the faintest shadow of exhaustion had settled. His hand found her arm and stayed there, warm and solid.

“Maybe because there are things you don’t know yet,” he said carefully. “Things he couldn’t say before. Things no one ever asked about. I think that’s his story to tell. You don’t have to forgive him today,” he added, voice gentling. “You don’t even have to understand him. But I think... someday... you’ll want to know.”

Hermione didn’t respond. Her expression was unreadable. Guarded.

She let herself be guided into the lift with the children. Scorpius was already prattling on about dragon-shaped candy from the shop around the corner, and Cassi clung to her father’s sleeve, sucking her thumb and yawning dramatically.

Hermione leaned against Draco’s side, her gaze fixed on the grate as the lift began its slow descent.

Behind them, the Ministry floor disappeared, her eyes fixed on the grate, her thoughts trailing in a direction she hadn’t wanted to revisit. Ahead of them, Monday loomed.



That weekend, the Malfoy townhouse lit up with the kind of magic no wand could conjure—just friends, laughter, and the brief illusion that the world wasn’t tearing at the seams outside their front door.

Ginny had declared it *Girls’ Night* with all the finality of a Ministry decree.

“In the garden,” she’d said with a flick of her hair and a tone that brooked no argument. “No excuses. Wine’s already chilling. Come dressed for war or wine. Your choice.”

By sunset, the garden had transformed.

Enchanted fairy lights floated in lazy loops across the night sky, suspended between carefully trimmed hedges and low-hanging apple trees. Soft instrumental music drifted from the wireles, and a sprawling nest of magical cushions and rugs had been summoned under a transparent warming charm to ward off the late spring chill. Luna had brought glowing moon lilacs in floating pots, which bobbed like lazy fireflies between their heads.

Hermione, Ginny, Pansy, Luna, and Padma were draped across the scene like queens of old magic, shoes discarded, hair unbound, and their laughter echoing into the twilight.

Pansy passed Hermione another chilled glass of apple juice, her manicure catching the candlelight as she sighed dramatically. “Dadling, you’re glowing and all, but honestly—how you’ve not hexed Skeeter into the next era is beyond me.”

Hermione accepted it with a tired but grateful smile. “Mostly because I enjoy my job. And

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enough wars for the truth, Hermione. There’s no shame in keeping some of it sacred.”

And with that, she left the office, her mind already forming the wording of the petition—sharp, airtight, and in the voice of a woman who would protect what mattered. Even when the truth cost more than it gave.



The pub smelled of stale beer and despair.

It clung to the walls like mould, soaked into the threadbare curtains and scuffed wooden bar. The floor was sticky underfoot, the booths patched with duct tape and worn-down woodplanks, and the only light came from a series of flickering sconces that cast everything in jaundiced yellow. A jukebox warbled something slow and mournful in the corner, the tune drowned beneath the low murmur of voices and the occasional clatter of glass.

Harry Potter sat hunched over the bar like he was trying to disappear into it. Shoulders curled in, hood up, half a bottle of Whisky hugged against his chest like a lifeline. His glasses had slid to the tip of his nose, smudged and useless, and his eyes were bloodshot, rimmed with a sleep-deprived red that looked almost feverish in the dim light. His wand was nowhere in sight.

He looked like someone who hadn’t come in to drink—he’d come in to vanish.

“You look like absolute shit,” said a voice behind him, dry and far too casual for the weight of the air.

Harry didn’t even lift his head recognizing the voice instantly. “Cheers, Theo.”

Theo Norr sauntered up beside him, trench coat trailing behind like smoke. He took the barstool next to Harry without asking, leaned his elbows on the counter, and gestured for the bartender with a flick of two fingers.

“He’s done,” Theo said smoothly pointing to Harry. “Water for him. With lemon, for show. And something strong for me.”

The bartender gave him a look, then obliged with a grunt, showing the drinks across the counter.

Harry stared at the water like it had personally offended him. “You’re such a bloody nuisance.”

“You say that now,” Theo said, swirling his drink idly, “but in about fifteen minutes, you’ll be sobbing on my shoulder and thanking me for saving your sorry arse.”

Harry groaned and buried his face in his hands.

Theo didn’t touch him. He didn’t joke either—not yet. His gaze swept over Harry’s form, lingering on the tremble in his fingers, the exhaustion that dragged at every line of his body. The way he flinched when someone bumped into him from behind.

“You’re spiralling,” Theo said softly.

Harry snorted. “What gave it away? The whisky or the crippling existential dread?”

“The fact that you came here at all. That you stopped pretending to be okay. You always lie better in company. Or at least think you do.”

Harry didn’t respond, just dragged a hand down his face, leaving red marks where his nails had pressed too hard into his skin.

They sat in silence for a while. The kind of silence that clings to grief, heavy and thick, like a second skin.

Then, barely audible over the music, Harry whispered, “I don’t want to testify. I told Draco, he told me only Hermione could help. So I guess I will go testify because she hates me and I deserve it, her hate.”

Theo said nothing at first. Just took a slow sip of his drink, like he’d been expecting it.

“I figured it had something to do with that.”

Harry’s fingers clenched tighter around the glass.

“If I do...” His voice cracked, and he pretended Theo was not there. “If I go up there and say it—*say everything publicly and the world finds out*—I’ll go home, drink a full vial of dreamless sleep, and that’ll be it. I’ll make sure I don’t wake up.”

The world stopped.

Theo’s hand froze on his glass. His entire body went still.

“Don’t *fuck* say that,” he said at last, voice low and sharp and terrified.

Harry didn’t flinch. His eyes were glassy. “It’s not a joke. I’m tired, Theo. I’m tired of lying to myself. Of pretending I was, am, okay. Of pretending what Ron did wasn’t real just because he never raised his wand *at* me.”

Theo’s throat tightened. He wanted to scream. To hex Ronald Weasley into pieces and scatter the ashes across the Thames. But he didn’t. He forced his voice to stay level.

“No,” he said quietly. “It’s the guilt talking. It’s the Weasel talking. You know it is.”

Harry let out a bitter laugh. “Yeah? Then he’s been living rent-free in my head for almost a decade. And if the world hears what he *did*—if they see how long I let it happen *to me*—what I also let happen *to Hermione*.”

He broke off, eyes shining with tears he wouldn’t shed.

Theo slid closer, not touching, but close enough that his warmth reached Harry through the hoodie.

“I’ve seen war survivors crack less than this,” Theo murmured. “You were a hero, Harry. And then you were made into something quiet and obedient and ashamed.”

Harry turned his head away, jaw tight. “I let him. I *let* it happen. Me. The fucking Chosen One. What kind of *man*—what kind of *coward*—”

“A man who needed someone to tell him it wasn’t his fault,” Theo interrupted firmly. “A man who was too young, too tired, and too used to suffering to know when it stopped being love.”

Harry’s breath hitched, shoulders trembled, and his voice cracked like glass under pressure. “It didn’t start like that,” he murmured, eyes fixed on the condensation sliding down his glass. “It was slow. Quiet. He knew how to make it seem like nothing. He was my best friend. Knew me since I was eleven. Knew my insecurities and my doubts.”

Theo stayed still, letting him speak. The bartender, sensing something sacred or dangerous, backed away and didn’t return.

“After Hermione left... it was like something snapped in him. He said she’d been poisoned by Muggle ideals. That she was always going to leave us behind. That when he left us during the war it was because he was jealous that Hermione could show her love so freely and he couldn’t. That he always loved me more than her. That she left and he stayed—for me.

“Mummy, what’s ‘bi-po-naed’ mean?” she asked, her little voice full of curiosity.

Hermione dropped to her knees, blinking back the sting in her eyes. “It just means Mummy and Mr. Harry need to answer some questions next week, sweetheart. Nothing for you to worry about.”

Cassi nodded solemnly, clearly unconvinced, and tucked her face into Hermione’s shoulder. Scorpius, standing nearby with his wand-shaped toy clutched in his hand, tilted his head like his mother always did when she was analysing something. “Is it because of Godmother Ginny’s brother? Is he in trouble?”

“Yes,” Draco said, crouching beside him and smoothing a hand through his son’s hair. His voice was calm, but behind it sat a quiet rage, simmering like molten steel. “He is.”

Harry looked like he was barely breathing. His hands trembled slightly. His eyes flicked to Hermione and then back down. “I need to go,” he said abruptly, the words sharp and splintered, like they hurt to say.

Hermione straightened quickly. “Harry—”

But he was already taking a step back, shaking his head.

“I’ll see you. At the trial.”

His voice cracked on the word. Draco moved instinctively, his arm shooting out to stop him. A hand on Harry’s shoulder—not threatening, but grounding. Familiar. Strange.

“Boys’ night’s still on,” Draco said evenly, his voice losing none of its edge. “I told you. If you need to talk. Or drink. Or punch something. I’ll owl you the details.”

Harry blinked at him. For a moment, he looked like he might say something else. But in the end, he just nodded.

The corner of his mouth twitched into something like a smile. “Thanks.”

He turned to go—but not before crouching slightly beside Cassiopeia, who was still clinging to Hermione’s robes with wide, curious eyes.

“Bye, Miss Dragon,” he said gently, brushing one of her curls behind her ear. “Don’t let your brother boss you around too much, yeah?”

She giggled and offered him a crumpled sweet from her pocket with sticky fingers. “It’s got sparkles.”

Harry took it like it was a gift from the Queen herself. “That’s very kind of you. I’ll keep it safe.”

Then he shifted to Scorpius, offering a small fist bump. “Keep an eye on everyone for me, alright? I hear you’re good at that.”

Scorpius puffed up his chest with pride. “I’m the best watcher. Daddy says I’ve got a Slytherin stare.”

Harry chuckled, his voice a little rough around the edges. “Reckon you got that from your mum.”

He stood slowly, his eyes flickering to Hermione one last time. She didn’t speak. Neither did he. And then he was gone—vanishing into the corridor with a haunted kind of grace, like the weight on his shoulders had doubled the moment he turned away.

Hermione watched him disappear into the corridor. She exhaled, long and slow, the scroll still clutched tightly in her hand. Her fingers had gone numb.

“He’s hiding something, isn’t he?” she muttered.

"Hi, Hermione."

Scorpius wrinkled his nose at the tension and whispered to Draco, "They need pudding." Draco leaned down, deadpan. "They need something stronger."

"Firewhisky?"

"Don't tell your mum I said that."

Scorpius grinned like a true Slytherin.

Draco laughed and looking at Hermione said, "Come on love, let's head out. Potter is headed home and so are we."

As the Ministry lift chimed and the final owl swooped off into the Level 4 lobby, everything shifted.

Scorpius was still chatting animatedly to Harry, holding out his Gryffindor trading card and detailing his future Hogwarts house plans. Cassi had one of Hermione's curls in her hand and was humming to herself. Draco stood beside Hermione, arms casually wrapped around her waist, his presence grounding.

Then—

The owls.

Two of them, bearing the scarlet Ministry seal.

Hermione caught hers first. It landed neatly on her palm, a sense of dread already trickling down her spine. The second landed in front of Harry.

He blinked. Unrolled it. And went utterly still.

Hermione placed Cassi back on the floor and tore open the parchment. Her eyes flicked down, scanning quickly and her heart sank. She couldn't speak as she handed the notice to Draco.

"You've been subpoenaed as a witness," Draco read aloud, his voice low and clipped as he stared down at the parchment. Hermione had just passed him. The paper crinkled under the pressure of his fingers, and a sharp, controlled exhale flared from his nostrils.

Hermione nodded tightly. Her throat felt dry, constricted. "For Ron's trial," she confirmed, barely above a whisper. The words tasted sour in her mouth. Like old pain. Like betrayal left to rot.

Draco's jaw tensed, the muscle ticking just below his ear as he turned to Harry, his expression like stone. "And you?" he asked sharply. "Why do you have a letter? Is it because of what happened at the trial too?"

Harry didn't answer at first. His face had gone pale—truly pale—like something under the surface had cracked. His eyes darted over the scroll in his hands, knuckles blanching white around the edges as he gripped it too tightly.

"I..." He swallowed. Then again. Finally, he spoke, his voice quiet and hoarse. "Apparently yes... and I'm also listed as a 'victim.'"

The word fell into the space between them like a stone into a still lake.

Victim.

Hermione flinched. She wasn't sure why—but the air shifted with it. The floor tilted.

Silence stretched, taut and strangled.

Cassi, oblivious to the adult tension, tugged at the hem of Hermione's robes with her chubby fingers. Her curls bounced as she peered up, wide-eyed and confused.

Because I was all he had left."

Harry's fingers tightened around the base of the glass. "He called me lucky. Said I owed it to him to be grateful. To have someone who still wanted to be near me after the war. After everything."

Theo's brow furrowed, but he didn't speak.

"And I believed him. For a long time, I really fucking believed him. I thought... maybe he was right. Who would want someone who keeps dying and coming back? Who had a bit of Voldemort rattling around in his head for 18 years? Who wakes up screaming?"

He swallowed hard.

"He started saying I shouldn't see Teddy anymore. Said Andromeda was corrupting him. That she was like Hermione—too clever for her own good. Said Teddy didn't need someone broken like me in his life. And when I argued, he locked me in."

Theo's jaw twitched. His voice, when it came, was low. "He what?"

"Locked me in," Harry said flatly. "Sometimes for days. Took my wand. Took the fucking windows off the frames. Took my owl. Filtered my mail. Even at work, he wouldn't let me partner up with anyone else."

He rubbed his hands over his face, the weight of the memory pressing into every bone.

"He said I wasn't safe with anyone but him. That no one else would understand. That I should be grateful I had someone who loved me enough to protect me from the world."

"That's not love," Theo said darkly. "That's prison."

"I know that now," Harry whispered. "But back then..."

His voice faltered.

"I've always been alone. I only ever had Hermione and the Weasleys. He started giving me tea before bed. Said it would help with the nightmares. I thought it was just Dreamless Sleep. Until I started waking up... disoriented. Sometimes naked. With no memory of the night before. And Ron would just be sitting there. Watching me."

Theo's entire body went rigid. His fingers curled into fists.

"I didn't even know it was Compulsion until I found the vial in the bin one night," Harry continued, voice hollow. "And even then... *I still fucking stayed.*"

"Harry—" Theo began, but the words didn't come.

"I thought I deserved it," Harry said. "That I was too broken. That maybe he was right and I couldn't be trusted with people I loved. That maybe all I could ever be was his."

He looked at Theo then—really looked at him—with red-rimmed eyes and a haunted shadow behind his glasses.

"Andromeda saved me. She took one look at me and said, 'This isn't love, Harry. This is imprisonment.' And something just... snapped. I packed a bag I left. I never went back."

Theo placed his hand gently over Harry's on the bar.

"You didn't deserve any of that."

Harry gave a bitter laugh. "Don't I?"

"No," Theo said firmly. "You didn't. You were a boy who saved the world and got handed a life no one taught you how to live. And Ron, he used that. Twisted it."

Silence settled over them like dust. Then, quieter, softer, Theo added, "And if you need someone to remind you of that every

single day, I'll do it. I'll stay!"

Harry stared at him, too broken to speak, too overwhelmed to breathe.

A beat passed.

Then another.

Harry slowly tipped sideways until his head rested against Theo's shoulder, not quite leaning, not quite collapsing—just touching, like an anchor.

Theo let him stay.

"Come on," he said eventually. "We're going to mine. You're going to drink something that won't kill you. And then you're going to sleep."

Harry grunted but didn't protest as Theo coaxed him to his feet, arm around his back.

By the time they reached Theo's flat, Harry was dead on his feet. Theo helped him onto the sofa, transfigured a pillow from a cushion, conjured another blanket. He passed out moments later.

But his sleep was anything but peaceful.

He tossed and murmured, whispered Ron's name and begged someone not to lock the door. He said Hermione's name too. And Theo's. And the word "sorry" like it was sacred and stained all at once.

Theo watched him, heart aching, fists clenched at his sides.

He knelt beside the couch, brushed damp curls from Harry's forehead, and whispered, "I like you, Potter."

Harry didn't stir.

Theo sighed and pressed a soft kiss to his temple.

"I'll wait until you like yourself back."

Theo didn't sleep that night. Not once.

He sat there, beside a broken boy in a man's skin, and quietly swore he wouldn't let Harry face this alone again.

Not now. Not ever.



Wednesday came with stormlight.

The kind of grey, heavy-skied morning that seemed to press against the skin like wet wool. The Ministry atrium was buzzing with whispers, the gilded lifts packed with solicitors in tailored robes and journalists with Quick-Quotes Quills hidden up their sleeves.

Hermione Malfoy walked through the sea of tension like a blade.

Her black robes billowed behind her, formal and unadorned save for the silver sigil of the International Confederation of Wizards embossed at her collar. Her hair was twisted into a severe knot, her wand sheathed at her side. She did not smile. She did not blink. She was the storm now.

By the time she stepped into Courtroom Ten, the gallery was already filling with foreign diplomats, Wizengamot elders, legal observers, and more than a few prying eyes from *The Prophet*, *Inquisitor*, and *Witch Weekly*. Cameras were being discreetly charmed. The air felt like it might ignite with the wrong spell.

Draco covered his mouth to hide the snort. Harry turned, wide-eyed. "You're *keeling*—" Scorpius shrugged. "He said you'd laugh and maybe blush. You are blushing. I'll have to tell him that."

"I-Merlin," Harry muttered, utterly defeated.

Draco just patted his shoulder again. "You've been flirted at via a five-year-old proxy. Welcome to our life."

"Truly a chaos demon that one," Harry muttered, but he passed the card back with a faint smile.

Cassiopeia squinted up at him suspiciously. She had only seen him twice, once when he destroyed Draco's espresso machine and the other at the Manor. They've barely interacted.

"Who you?"

Harry looked momentarily horrified. "I-I'm Harry. Harry Potter."

She blinked. "You not Godric. From Scorp's card?"

"No, I'm not."

"You not a dragon either."

Draco smirked. "Harsh, but accurate."

Cassi narrowed her eyes, clearly unimpressed. "Mmmm...I want Mummy."

"She's almost done, darling," Draco said soothingly. "Shall we surprise her?"

Scorpius nodded eagerly. "Uncle Scarhead come with me! I want to learn more about Gryffindors."

Harry froze.

Draco glanced at him. "You coming, Potter?"

Harry swallowed. "Yeah, sure. If it's alright."

Draco shrugged. "Your funeral."

The four of them headed toward Hermione's office, the children bouncing with excitement. Cassi chattered about her Niffler, while Scorpius pointed out International Council employees like he was giving a tour of the family manor.

"—and that one's Mr. Linton. He smells like burnt toast. Daddy says it's because he's a terrible cook."

Harry choked on a laugh.

Draco didn't even flinch. "Facts are facts."

When they reached Hermione's office door, Scorpius knocked once—loud and proud.

"Mummy! We came!"

Hermione looked up from her desk, tired but glowing.

As she stood, Cassi squealed and launched herself at her mother. Hermione caught her mid-air, cradling her bump and daughter with ease.

"You brought them?" she asked Draco softly, tears pricking her eyes.

"They wanted you," he said simply. "So I brought them before we go home."

Harry hovered by the door, awkward again, until Hermione caught his eye.

For a moment, they just stared at each other.

Then, she nodded. Polite. Reserved.

"Harry."

Ouns To Keep

He carried Cassiopeia in one arm, her tiny fingers wrapped around the lapel of his robes, and Scorpius trailed beside him, holding Draco's hand with one and clutching a chocolate frog card with the other.

"Daddy, look!" Scorpius beamed up at him. "I got Godric Gryffindor!"

Draco glanced down. "Uncle Theo's going to be livid."

"He said I'd be a Slyffindor," Scorpius said proudly.

Draco smirked. "You'll be whatever you want to be, mate. Just don't tell Theodore until after he's had his tea."

Cassiopeia let out a delighted squeal and clutched a plush Niffler to her chest. "Mummy now?"

"Almost," Draco murmured, adjusting her on his hip.

The lift chimed again—and out stepped non-other than the boy who lived twice—Harry Potter. He looked, as usual, about five hours behind on sleep and half a cup short of tolerance.

"Oh," Harry said, blinking at them.

Scorpius's eyes lit up. "Uncle Scarehead!"

Harry blinked, mid-step, nearly choking on his own breath. "Er—hello, Scorpius."

Draco let out a long-suffering sigh looking at Harry like a man who has suffered enough of his best friends chaotic ways. "Theo told him to call you that."

Harry blinked. "Theo—?"

Draco's mouth twitched. "Apparently, it's a 'term of endearment' now. He said if you hexed him, it just meant you cared."

Scorpius nodded solemnly. "Uncle Theo says that when you're mean to someone, it means you want to kiss them. Is that true?"

Harry flushed scarlet. "What?"

"Oh?" Scorpius beamed. "He also said to tell you something if I saw you today—" He cleared his throat with theatrical drama. "*Hello... I'm your lover!*"

There was a silence so sharp it could have sliced glass. Draco choked on a laugh.

Harry turned a shade of red that might've put a Fanged Geranium to shame. "He did *not*—"

"He absolutely did," Draco confirmed, grinning now. "And I think he made him practise it twice. Over toast at breakfast."

"I like toast," Scorpius added proudly, completely unaware of the chaos he'd just unleashed.

Harry opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again. "He's five."

Draco clapped a hand on Harry's shoulder. "And already a menace."

Scorpius held up a chocolate frog card with a grin. "Wanna see my Gryffindor card?"

"I—yes. I would very much like to redirect this conversation," Harry muttered, crouching down.

The boy thrust the card at him proudly, still smiling, while Cassiopeia tugged on Draco's sleeve and declared she wanted to fly on the lift again because "it goes wheeeee!"

"You know," Harry said thoughtfully as he examined the card, "Gryffindors don't usually like being called Uncle Scarehead."

Scorpius frowned. "But my Godfather says that's how you flirt. He hasn't flirted with anyone in a long time."

Head over heels016

Draco was already seated, tension taut through his shoulders. Ginny, Blaise, and Padma had arrived early to support her, all dressed in the plain black robes of neutral witnesses. Luna sat beside them, her expression unusually grim.

Across the room, Ron Weasley sat upright and stiff. His hair had been combed, his robes pristine, and his solicitor leaned in, whispering in his ear. But it was the *look* he gave Hermione that stopped her breath for half a beat.

That smug, hollow-eyed gaze. Love twisted into a weapon. That same old glint of control that once kept her chained to doubt.

And then she saw Harry.

Standing just beyond the arch, his expression utterly wrecked.

His hands shook as he tugged at the cuffs of his dress robes. His wand hand kept flexing and curling. His jaw was clenched so hard the muscles ticked.

He looked like a man about to be sent to the gallows. Theo stood beside him, almost like a bodyguard, but his expression Hermione knew well. Worry hidden under disdain.

Ron turned slightly in his seat, catching Harry's eye—and smiled.

That same soft, sweet, *loving* smile that had once made Harry stay and never defend her, always take his side.

Hermione's blood boiled because she knew, Harry didn't have to tell her, Draco didn't have to tell her, *because she knew*. Her entire body locked with something she hadn't felt in years—not rage, not fear, but *righteous fury*. And before the presiding Chief Warlock could even call for witness number one, Hermione stood.

Her voice rang out like a wandshot.

"Madam Chief Warlock."

Heads turned. The chamber held its breath.

Hermione stepped forward, steady as stone.

"Before this trial proceeds, I am invoking Article 43B of the ICW International Charter for Magical Safety and Witness Protection."

A ripple of confusion swept the room. Kingsley smiled.

"Given the nature of this trial in regards to myself and the charges both initial and new—the war crimes, the abuse testimonies, and the identities of those involved—I am formally requesting that these proceedings be classified under *Level Seven Shielding* per International Protocol."

The courtroom *exploded*. Gasps and raised voices filled the air. Even several Wizengamot members turned sharply, conferring in hushed voices.

Ron's solicitor shot up to his feet. "Objection! This trial has public interest—"

"Public interest be damned!" Hermione cut in sharply, not even sparing him a glance. "The law exists to *protect*, not entertain. As a Director of the International Confederation of Wizards War Council and a primary survivor of the Second Wizarding War, I have the legal authority to implement shielding for cases involving classified trauma and active magical instability for our community."

The room fell quiet again—silent, except for the pounding of blood in every wizard's ears. "Furthermore," she continued, her voice like iron through silk, "a magical Confidentiality Accord will be required. Anyone present during the trial—Wizengamot, solicitors, and

witnesses—must sign. Everyone else must leave as this will now be considered a private, closed-door session. The terms of the Accord are as follows: breach of silence in any way results in a five-year severance from magical access, the freezing of Gringotts accounts, and permanent blacklisting from all magical employment within the EU and Commonwealth.”

A beat.

“The spellwork is my own. Adapted from an earlier version I created at fifteen to keep secrets safe during those tenuous times. Ask Marietta Edgecomb if you’d like to know its efficacy. She still can’t speak about it.”

Draco looked at her and smiled. She threw him a classical Malfoy smirk and raised her wand. A shimmering scroll appeared in midair, hovering above the chamber.

The Chief Warlock, the same formidable witch who had presided over Draco’s trial weeks prior, fixed Hermione with a sharp, appraising stare. Her parchment-thin hands folded neatly atop the bench, and her voice, when it came, was calm but laced with steel.

“Minister Shacklebolt,” she said, her gaze never leaving Hermione. “You are both Head of Government and a key witness in this matter. What is your opinion on this request?”

A murmur of tension rippled through the courtroom.

Kingsley Shacklebolt stood slowly from his seat in the front row. His deep purple robes shimmered faintly under the magical wards, and his expression was carved from stone.

He looked to Hermione, then to Harry, then briefly—coldly—to Ron.

“I support Director Malfoy’s motion,” he said firmly. “In full. The testimonies at stake involve individuals who were instrumental in ending the war. If we allow public scrutiny to distort or weaponise their trauma, we risk not only personal devastation but magical instability in one of the most delicate political climates since the war ended.”

He paused.

“The law was made for moments like this.”

The Chief Warlock studied him for a long moment, then gave a single nod, slow and deliberate.

“So ordered.”

Hermione inclined her head. Let them try to take this from her now.

A low hum filled the room as every wand of those forming part of the trial was drawn and one by one, names signed themselves in curling ink across the scroll. The moment the last signature landed, the courtroom shuddered with magic. An enchantment swept through the seats and walls like a wave, cutting off every possible leak.

The press, general public, and all those not directly involved in the case were ushered out. Draco murmured something in her ear before he left with their family of friends, including a reluctant Theo.

Doors sealed. The gallery disappeared. The trial shrank to only those who mattered. And for the first time that morning, Ron looked *junior*. His lips curled. His eyes burned with contempt. His shoulders stiffened. The arrogance drained from him like blood from a wound. He turned toward his solicitor, who was pale and quietly panicking.

Hermione didn’t look at him.

She looked at *Harry*.

His hands were still trembling. His face was still hollowed from too many sleepless nights

They could resent her.

They could watch her.

But they would *never* break her.

And tomorrow, she’d be back—quill in hand, heels sharp, head held high—dragging this broken world a little closer to the future they all claimed to want.

Whether they liked it or not.

While Hermione faced the Ministry head-on, Draco, Theo, and Blaise wove their silent campaign against Rita Skeeter behind closed doors—Slytherin precision, quiet fury, and ironclad strategy at the helm.

Draco’s study had become a war room. Maps, newspaper clippings, magical contracts, and charmed parchments hovered mid-air, tethered by layered security charms. It was controlled chaos, the kind only they could manage. Blaise sat in the corner with his wand lazily spinning above his shoulder, while Theo paced like a restless fox, manic energy laced with malicious glee.

“I’ve got something on Skeeter’s publishing contracts,” Blaise said, arching a brow and tilting a folder toward Draco. “Illegal clause modifications. Bribes to suppress sources. A Ministry records leak or two. Nothing concrete yet, but damning enough to start whispers.”

“She’s got half of Magical Publishing in her pocket,” Draco muttered, snatching the file and scanning it with a scowl. “But once we pry it open - she’ll bleed in print before we ever need to take her to court.”

Theo leaned across the table, eyes glinting. “Oh, I’m not stopping at print. I’ve been—*investigating*—her Gringotts ledgers. Legally, of course.” He gave a toothy grin. “She’s hiding income under a fake foundation for ‘witching orphan relief.’ Which is interesting, because she hasn’t donated a knut.”

Blaise barked a low laugh. “That’s vile. Even for her.”

Draco’s jaw tightened. “She dared attack *my* wife. *My* children. She’s going to find out what happens when you threaten a Malfoy.”

Theo smirked. “Careful, mate. You’re starting to sound like your father.”

Draco didn’t flinch. “He taught me how to protect what matters. I just took it further.”

There was a pause. Blaise glanced between them, then gave a slow, approving nod.

“To family, then,” Theo murmured, raising his glass.

Draco clinked his against it. “To war.”



At precisely five o’clock, the lift doors slid open on Level Four, and Draco Malfoy stepped out like he owned the place.

He didn’t, technically. But no one in the Ministry dared to argue with a man whose magic had been restored and who had spent the last week being splashed across the front page of the *Prophet*—usually under headlines like *Malfoy Menace* or *Misunderstood Healer?* and *The Golden Girl’s Golden Boy*.

Ours To Keep

Malfoy, others questioned her judgment, her loyalty, her influence. The war might have ended years ago, but prejudice didn't go down with the Dark Lord. It simply wore a shinier robe and carried a clipboard.

But Hermione walked through it all with her chin lifted and her shoulders square, her heels clicking like metronomes of defiance.

Her staff, however, were a different story.

"Director," said Amia Singh, her Senior Liaison to the European Magical Coalition, bursting in with two scrolls under her arm and a face like thunder. "Another complaint from the Romanian Ministry. Something about 'improper influence' in the last defensive spellwork regulation vote. Bastards are just mad you didn't fold to their dragons-and-steel proposal."

"Add it to the list," Hermione said, not looking up.

"Last is four feet long now."

Hermione finally glanced up. "Is it alphabetised?"

Amia snorted. "Of course it is. What do you take me for?"

Behind her, Jasper Noit—Theo's younger second cousin and an absolute nightmare with inter-office protocol—peeked his head around the doorway.

"There's a bloke from the Prophet trying to schedule an interview. Should I hex him or simply feed him to the Kelpie in Records?"

Hermione didn't even blink. "Kelpie."

"Brilliant," Jasper vanished with a *pop* of Disillusionment.

Hermione allowed herself the smallest of smiles. Her team had been handpicked—loyal, smart, just as tired of old bloodline politics and backward systems as she was. They were younger, sharper, and fiercely protective. And they knew the storm they were in.

Still, it didn't stop the Ministry from simmering around her like a cauldron on the brink.

At lunch, the atrium had been unbearable. She'd walked through it on her way to meet with the Irish delegation and had felt every stare like a hex between her shoulder blades. She'd caught a senior official sneering into his teacup. Two junior clerks had gone silent mid-laugh as she passed.

She was used to scrutiny.

But this... this felt like being carved open, inch by inch.

By the time she returned to her office, her head was pounding and her heart sat too heavily in her chest.

She pressed her fingers to her temples and took a slow breath.

Then another.

Then her eyes flicked to the family photo frame on her desk—enchanted to rotate through snapshots. One of Scorpius riding his first broom in their backyard. One of Cassi asleep against Draco's chest, his eyes soft and unreadable. One of Hermione, caught off guard and laughing during their wedding toast, champagne fizz clinging to her lashes.

She pressed a finger to the frame. The photo of Draco shifted in the frame and winked at her.

Her mouth softened.

No matter what they said—no matter the headlines, the whispers, the way the Wizarding world clawed at her name like dogs at a door—*this* was why she stayed.

Head over heels016

and memories that refused to fade.

But something in him flickered.

Relief.

She took a breath, walked to where he was standing, and said quietly—but clearly—to him.

"We may never be what we once were. We may never find our way back to being best friends."

She met his eyes.

"But you were more than my friend, you were my brother, once. And I won't let your pain become spectacle for *his* benefit. Families fight, but they also love and forgive."

Harry swallowed hard. His lip trembled. And in a voice no louder than a whisper, he rasped - "Thank you."

And for a moment—just one brief, quiet heartbeat—what was broken felt a little less shattered.

Hermione nodded at him and turned, her chin high once again, and took her seat.

She'd just started the trial. On her terms. And Ronald Weasley will burn.

A decorative horizontal border featuring symmetrical, intricate floral and leaf patterns in a black and white line-art style.

Chapter 20

The Line Between Us

“Some wounds scar deeper not from the cut - but from the silence that followed.”

The headlines hadn't slowed.

If anything, they'd gotten worse.

Every morning, another owl arrived—sometimes two or three—scraping at her office window like harbingers of hate, each parchment sealed in that now-familiar gaudy green wax. The Prophet, the Inquisitor, *Witch Weekly*, and every other rag that fancied itself a “publication of note” carried the latest slander.

“Hermione Malfoy Too Powerful to Be Trusted?”

“War Council Director Raises Eyebrows with Dark Wizard Husband”

“Malfoy Empire Expands: Political Power Grabs or Modern Love Story?”

Each headline was a blade, sharp and precise.

And yet, Hermione Granger—no, *Hermione Malfoy*—sat behind her desk in the newly expanded office within the Ministry for the International Confederation of Wizards' Magical Security Council, her quill gliding with ruthless precision over a pile of parchment. Her tea had long gone cold. Her jaw ached from how tightly she was holding it. But she did not—*would not*—break.

Her office in Australia had been modest. Now it was grand: high ceilings, mirrored scones, charm-burnished mahogany furniture, enchanted windows that cycled through views of international war zones and diplomatic summits. Her title, carved elegantly onto the door in burnished brass, glowed faintly with an ever-present security charm.

Director Hermione J. Malfoy

International Confederation of Wizards' Magical Security Council

British Ministry of Magic Branch

It was supposed to be an honour. Instead, it was a bloody invitation for vultures.

The corridor outside echoed with murmured gossip. Ministry officials, foreign delegates, and journalists passed her door with not-so-quiet contempt. Some whispered about *Draco*

that signature Nott brand of cheeky menace, but his eyes scanned her for damage like a trained Healer.

Draco, by contrast, was utterly still. Hands loosely at his sides, but every muscle taut beneath his crisp black robes. His grey eyes, stormlight and shadow, met hers with unspoken understanding.

She didn't slow. Didn't hesitate. She crossed the space between them and stepped into Draco's arms like coming home after a long war. Her hands fisted the front of his robes, and his arms locked around her in return. She tilted her face up and kissed him.

It wasn't polished. It wasn't pretty.

It was trembling lips and aching breaths and the kind of kiss that stitched torn pieces of your soul back together.

When they broke apart, Draco didn't speak right away. His hands moved to her face, thumbs brushing dampness she hadn't realised had gathered at the corners of her eyes. His voice, when it came, was low and reverent. "It's done."

She nodded, but the motion was jerky. "It's over."

He leaned forward, resting his forehead against hers. "And we're still standing."

A breath, uneven and sharp, left her as tears gathered in her eyes. 10 years ago this never would have happened but now justice had prevailed.

Theo finally stepped in, arms still crossed. "Feels anticlimactic," he muttered. "I was ready to hex someone. Had half a dozen curses lined up."

Hermione huffed out a dry, broken laugh, the kind that still trembled at the edges. "Save it for tomorrow. I'm sure the Prophet will spin some new drama. Or Ginny will lose her mind at the latest Quidditch scandal and need a distraction."

Theo smirked. "Merlin help us all."

Hermione turned to him fully then, more serious. "Where's Harry?"

No one flinched at the use of his name.

Theo's mouth sobered. "In his office. Told the press to sod off. Slammed the door. You know. Classic dramatic Gryffindor exit."

Hermione nodded, inhaled slowly. Her fingers brushed against Draco's arm in silent reassurance. "Will you give me some time. I need to speak to him. Alone."

Draco didn't argue. He only nodded once, brushing her knuckles with his lips. "We'll wait in your office. Come find us when you're ready. Or I can go get you if it's too much for you. Just send me word."

Theo flicked her a mock salute. "Don't take forever. There's a bottle of Ogden's Old I'm planning to drink whether you're there or not."

She smiled, just slightly. "Tell the others we'll be home soon."

Draco kissed her forehead. "My parents have the children at the Manor. Mum and Fraher are absolutely spoiling them. Cassiopeia built a fort in the parlour room."

Hermione let out a soft, genuine laugh. "Of course she did."

And then, with the sound of camera shutters fading behind her, Hermione turned and began the long walk down the corridor to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

The grand halls of the Ministry were empty now, echoing and still. Every step seemed to land louder than the last. Her hand brushed against the wall once, grounding herself as the

weight of the day settled into her bones.

Harry's office was half-empty when Hermione arrived. The shelves were barren, save for a forgotten copy of *Defensive Magical Theory* tucked behind a desk lamp. Folders were stacked in uneven piles across the desk, parchments spilling from their edges. The frames that once held photographs, snapshots of victory, loss, and fleeting happiness, now lay face-down in a box by the window. The air smelled like parchment and old dust, tinged with the faintest echo of something burnt out. Something finished.

Hermione hesitated at the door, hand on the frame like crossing the threshold might undo her resolve.

Inside, Harry was kneeling by a bottom drawer, carefully tucking away a stack of worn case files. His shoulders were hunched, spine bowed, as if the weight of the years they'd lost had finally caught up with him.

"You're leaving?" she asked gently.

He didn't answer right away. Just kept folding a folder shut, then another, before standing and turning slowly to face her.

His hair was still as untamable as ever, but thinner now at the temples. His eyes were tired, war-worn in a way no amount of sleep could fix, and rimmed with shadows. The kind of fatigue that went deeper than the body.

"Yeah," he said simply.

Hermione gathered her Gryffindor courage and stepped inside, closing the door behind her with a soft click. For a moment they just looked at each other until finally...

"Going to teach Defence," he added, trying to sound casual and failing. "At Hogwarts. McGonagall offered after Draco's trial. Said I'd be bloody stupid not to take it."

There was a flicker of something in his voice, uncertainty, maybe even hope, but it was quickly swallowed by resignation.

"She's right you know," Hermione said, moving further in. "You'd be brilliant."

He gave a humourless huff. "Figured the next generation deserves better than what we got. Someone who won't just teach spells, but how to *live* through them."

She stopped beside the desk, fingers brushing over the edge of a stack of notes that hadn't yet been filed.

"And you?" she asked, quieter now. "What do you deserve, Harry?"

He shrugged. "Still trying to become someone worth forgiving I guess."

Her chest tightened.

"Harry..." she stepped closer, voice barely above a whisper, "you were always worth it."

He looked up at her then. Really looked at her.

And for a long moment, nothing moved. The silence between them buzzed like a wound trying to close.

"Gods, I should've written," he said finally, his voice raw. "I should've asked if you were okay after you left. I knew something was wrong with Ron. I *saw* it. But I was... ashamed and so tired, so very tired. Of the war. Of the aftermath. And eventually, of what I let him do. Of what I didn't stop."

Hermione's throat clenched. "It wasn't only you Harry. I should've seen it too. I was so

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wrapped up in surviving Ron myself and overcoming the war, I didn't realise he was dragging you down too. I thought... I thought if you were still friends, maybe I had been the problem. You always took his side or at least I thought you did."

"*I hated you*," Harry admitted, the words like shrapnel. "For a long time. For leaving. For being free. For *getting out*. And when I finally had some sort of freedom I resented you, and I was ashamed of myself and I couldn't bear the thought of reaching out and getting burned out of your life again."

She blinked hard. "Well, *I hated you* for staying. For choosing him. For not coming after me. For leaving me alone. But I think... we were both just broken. In different ways."

He gave a sharp nod, as if it hurt to agree.

"But it doesn't have to be the same as it was, does it?" he asked, voice suddenly small.

Hopeful.

"No," she said, stepping close enough to reach for him. "It doesn't. I don't think it will ever be the same. We can't have what we lost and let go off. But we can build something new. Hopefully, something better."

Harry's hands twitched at his sides, like he didn't know where to put them.

"Do you mean it?" he whispered.

Hermione didn't answer. She just stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him. It wasn't like the hugs of old—not really. They weren't teenagers after battle anymore. They were two adults, cracked but still standing, stitched together by shared grief and stubborn love.

But when his arms came around her—tight, sure, grounding—something inside her eased.

"You always gave the best hugs," she murmured against his shoulder as the tears finally fell. "I've missed them."

Harry let out a shaky breath, somewhere between a laugh and a sob. "I've missed you too, Mione."

She tightened her hold. "We're not what we were Harry. But like I said yesterday we'll always be family. Brother and sister. That bond doesn't break no matter how stretched thin it is."

He pulled back just enough to meet her eyes. His smile was crooked, but real.

"Yeah," he whispered. "Always."

They stood there a moment longer, letting time and silence do what it needed to do. No more blame. No more pretending. Just... possibility.

Hermione finally stepped away, brushing her palms down the front of her robes.

"I should go," Hermione said gently, glancing toward the door. "Draco and Theo are waiting in my office which scares me more than I care to admit. Everyone else at the house. The kids are with Lucius and Narcissa at the Manor, which means..." she smirked, "adult night for us."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Adult night?"

She grinned. "Wine, board games, questionable dancing, and Pansy trying to hex the telly because it won't respond to wandless magic. You should come."

He chuckled. "I'll think about it."

She tilted her head. "You don't need to be alone anymore, you know. Not tonight. Not after today. We've got space for you. Always."

He gave her a look, equal parts touched and wary.

"And," she added slyly, "Theo's already there. You might want to give that a shot."

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council.

Hermione sat frozen in place, fists clenched in her lap. She didn't flinch. She just breathed, eyes locked on the stand where Ron still sat, panting and silent.

It took hours.

The verdict, when it came, rang like a funeral bell.

"Ronald Bilus Weasley," the Chief Warwich announced, her voice ironclad, "you are hereby found guilty on all charges."

Ron didn't move.

"You are sentenced to eighty years in Azkaban Prison under maximum security. Your wand is to be broken. Your magical privileges revoked permanently. You will serve your sentence under solitary confinement for the first ten years and undergo mandatory psychological rehabilitation. You are forbidden from contacting any of your named victims, their families, or any known associates."

Burke said nothing. His head was bowed. There would be no appeal. He knew he lost the moment Ron opened his mouth.

Hermione did not cry. She did not smile. She simply let out a breath she hadn't known she was holding.

Not relief. But something close to release.



The heavy oak doors of the courtroom creaked open, the sound like a crack splitting through the hush of a storm after it's passed.

Hermione stepped over the threshold, the hush behind her replaced at once with chaos.

Flashbubs exploded in rapid-fire bursts. Dozens of reporters surged forward like a wave held back only by Ministry warding spells and the firm line of Aurors forming a human wall between her and the press. The air buzzed with the hum of cameras and the rustle of parchment. Every voice clawed for her attention.

"*Mrs Malfoy, do you believe justice was truly served today?*"

"*Was Mr Potter's testimony fabricated? Can you tell us what was said?*"

"*Are you seeking full restraining orders against Ronald Weasley?*"

"*What about your children? Are they safe?*"

She kept walking, the heels of her boots echoing sharply against the polished Ministry floor. Her eyes, dry and burning, ignored the swarm of headlines already being written. Her pulse still hadn't settled, her hands trembled with restraint, but her spine remained straight—steel wrapped in silk.

She didn't need to speak to them.

Her gaze moved past the eager journalists, past the onlookers gathered like spectators at a public execution, and locked onto the only two people that mattered in that moment.

Draco and Theo stood just beyond the edge of the fray.

Theo leaned against a marble column, sleeves rolled to the elbows, his wand dangling between two fingers like he was deciding whether or not to use it. His mouth twitched with

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got knocked up by a Death Eater that makes you some kind of martyr?”

Gasps and murmurs erupted across the room.

Burke’s face had gone completely bloodless.

“You’re the one who broke it,” Ron spat, still staring at Hermione. “You broke us. You always had to be the cleverest, the best. But I kept us together during the war. Me. I protected you. I fought for you. And *you* made a mockery of everything.”

“Mr. Weasley,” the Chief Warwitch warned, voice like thunder.

But Ron was spiraling, now unable, or unwilling, to stop.

“And Potter,” he added, sneering. “Always so bloody fragile. Pathetic little orphan looking for someone to hold his hand. I gave him everything. I gave him *love*. I kept him grounded. And he betrayed me.”

“You manipulated him,” Callista said, rising slowly. Her voice was quiet, lethal. “You drugged him, gaslit him, used his shame as a weapon.”

“I gave him what he *needed and deserved!*” Ron barked, chest heaving. “He would’ve fallen apart without me!”

“Did you love him?” she asked softly.

Ron sneered. “I owned him.”

The courtroom recoiled.

Even Burke took a full step back, as if struck by the weight of those words.

Callista’s eyes flashed. “Mr. Weasley, are you telling this court, under oath, that you feel no remorse for the pain you caused Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, or anyone else named in your charges?”

“I told you,” Ron growled. “I did what I had to do. I was the only one who had the balls to do what needed to be done.”

“And if you could go back, would you change anything?”

He grinned. “Yeah. I’d make sure I had more control.”

Disgust tripped across the room like a wave.

Madam Chief Warlock Calliope Thorne rose to her feet, robes billowing with restrained fury.

“Mr. Weasley,” she thundered. “You have not only shown no remorse, you have made it abundantly clear that your actions were intentional, calculated, and devoid of conscience. You insult your victims. You defy the court. You call yourself a hero while dismissing the pain you’ve caused with smug pride.”

Ron stood, chains clanking. “Spare me your speeches. This trial is a bloody farce. You want a villain? Fine. But I won this war as much as any of them. I *deserve*—”

“Enough!” she shouted, her wand flaring with golden light. “You will be silenced again, immediately.”

The Aurors stepped forward, one of them casting a Silencing Charm so strong it seemed to vibrate in the air.

Ron’s mouth kept moving, but no sound came out.

The Warwitch turned to the assembled Wizengamot, who had watched it all in cold silence.

“I believe we have heard all we need to. Deliberation begins now.”

The chamber dimmed slightly as the protective dome shimmered into place, isolating the

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Harry blinked, cheeks turning the faintest shade of pink. “You’re *shipping* me with Theo the Chaos Goblin now?”

“Oh, I’ve been rooting for this ship since *before* you admitted it to yourself,” Hermione teased. “Honestly, Harry, you stalked Draco half of sixth year, made actual googly eyes at Cedric, and George told me you had the *biggest* crush on Fred.”

Harry’s ears went bright red. “Oh, that was private!”

She laughed. “Please. I was just waiting for you to tell me. But then everything happened and... well, I suppose we both lost the thread for a while. Ten years, lost, in fact.”

Harry swallowed thickly. “I didn’t think I could ever say it. Out loud. But today... I didn’t feel ashamed. Just tired of hiding. Besides Theo gave me some good advice last night.”

Hermione laughs and wrapped her arms around him again, tighter this time, anchoring him.

“You don’t have to hide anymore,” she whispered. “Especially not from us. Especially not from me.”

And just like that, the last of the dam broke.

Harry shook in her arms, silent tears spilling freely as years of shame and silence crumbled into something softer. Something survivable. Her fingers moved through his hair as he buried his face into her shoulder, and for the first time in too long, Harry Potter let himself be held, truly held, by his best friend. His sister.

When he finally pulled back, his eyes were glassy but calmer.

“I’ll finish packing up,” he said hoarsely. “Then I’ll come meet you.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

She started to turn, but he caught her wrist.

“Don’t tell Theodore.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Don’t tell Theo what?”

“That I’m coming. I want to surprise that Chaos Goblin.”

She let out a genuine laugh. “Oh, Merlin. He’s going to combust when he sees you just show up.”

“Good,” Harry said, smiling now. “I want front-row seats.”

Hermione shook her head fondly and kissed his cheek. “We’ll leave the floo open for you.”

And with that, she turned and left—her steps lighter, the hallway less lonely, the war between them at last beginning to mend.

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“You lost me the moment you decided control was more important than love. I survived a war. I died and came back. I carried the weight of the entire bloody world. And still—*still*—you managed to break me more than Voldemort ever could. But I’m done,” Harry said, his voice rising like a spell breaking chains. “I’m done carrying your shame. I’m done making excuses for your cruelty and calling it grief. I’m done being silent so you don’t feel small.”

He turned to the Chief Warvich Thorne.

“You wanted my testimony. You have it.”

She gave a single nod, regal and grave.

“Mr. Potter,” she said, “you are excused. With gratitude.”

Harry exhaled shakily and stepped down from the box.

As he passed Hermione, he hesitated. His eyes flickered toward her—still familiar, still full of ghosts.

She rose slightly, as though drawn by instinct. But no words came. None would be enough. She wanted to reach for him. Wanted to scream, *I’m sorry, I didn’t know, I should’ve known*.

But he just looked at her, eyes shining with tears unshed and pain endured, and gave the smallest nod.

“I see you now,” he said quietly. “All of you. And I hope one day... you’ll see me too.”

Then he walked out of the courtroom, shoulders straighter than they had been in years.

Hermione sat back down slowly, her vision blurred. Her heart ached, not just for him, but for the boy who’d never had peace, not even when the war was over.

She’d thought the trial would bring closure. Instead, it ripped open something raw and gaping.

And now the moment they had all been waiting for.

Ron Weasley was unsilenced and escorted to the witness stand, flanked by two grim-faced Aurors. The iron bindings on his wrists clinked with every step. His jaw was set. His expression unrepentant. There was no trace of shame, only simmering defiance. As he took his seat, he smirked. Not at the court, not even at Hermione, but at the air, as if the whole thing were a joke only he understood.

Solicitor Burke rose, smoothing his robes with deliberate calm. He approached the stand with the air of a man walking a tightrope.

“Mr. Weasley,” he began, with a carefully measured voice, “the court has heard some troubling testimony, strong words from once-trusted friends. But would you say your intentions, misguided though they may seem, were ever to cause true harm?”

Ron leaned back against the chair, the chains at his wrists rattling like punctuation. “I did what I had to do,” he said smoothly. “If that made people uncomfortable, maybe they should’ve tried harder to see my side. They never bloody listened anyway.”

Several members of the Wizengamot shifted uncomfortably.

Burke hesitated, but continued. “Do you feel regret for any of your actions, Mr. Weasley?”

Ron snorted. “Only that I didn’t get more control when I had the chance.”

“Mr. Weasley, you—” Burke tried to cut in, but Ron had found his audience.

“Hermione was supposed to be mine,” he snapped, voice rising. “We were *meant* for each other. Everyone knew it. And then she runs off to fucking Australia without a care, and suddenly I’m the villain?” He twisted in his seat to glare at Hermione. “You think because you

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Harry stared straight ahead. “Ron used my sexuality to trap me. To shame me. To keep me isolated. When Hermione left, he told me she’d turned me soft, that she didn’t understand what it meant to be broken like we were. He told me Andromeda, my godson’s grandmother and my godfather’s cousin, was poisoning Teddy against me. That if I tried to go to anyone, I’d lose the only family I had left.”

He turned toward the bench now, voice steady despite the visible shake in his limbs.

“He kept me under control with potions, some of which I didn’t even know I was taking. Culpotion mixes. Mind-soothing charms disguised as tea. I woke up in bed more times than I can count with no memory of how I got there. Sometimes... I wasn’t wearing anything.”

Hermione’s hand covered her mouth. Kingsley looked sick, for even he did not know the extent of torture Harry had gone through.

Burke cleared his throat, but for once, had no glib reply.

The air had shifted.

The room was no longer a courtroom. It was a battlefield. Not of spells, but of truth. Of pain unsilenced.

Callista stood, slow and deliberate. She inclined her head at Harry as though bowing to something holy. “Mr Potter,” she said, voice strong but reverent, “thank you for your bravery. No one should have to live through what you’ve just described. And it should never have taken this long for someone to ask you what happened.”

Harry blinked hard, lips pressed together to keep them from trembling.

“Do you consider yourself a victim of Ronald Weasley?”

He took a shaky breath, then met her eyes.

“Yes,” he whispered. “But I’m more than that. I’m still here. I’m still healing. And I know now, this isn’t on me. It never was.”

The words didn’t echo, but they resonated. Like a wand humming with perfect resonance. Callista gave a single nod. “Do you believe Ronald Weasley is capable of change? Of redemption?”

The silence that followed was heavy.

Harry looked across the room—his eyes locking with Ron’s.

Ron was flushed and stiff, his expression caught between panic and fury. His fists were clenched, his mouth curled in disgust. He shook his head slightly, as though trying to rewrite the past with a sneer.

“No,” Harry said, voice steady. “Because everything he did, he chose.”

Ron surged to his feet, fury snapping through his body like a hex gone wild. “Of course you’d say that!” he spat, his voice venomous. “You’re just a broken coward, a faggot, you should have stayed d...”

“Mr Weasley!” the Chief Warwitch thundered, her gavel slamming down like a thunderclap. “I warned you. You will now be silenced for the remainder of this trial.”

A wave of magic rushed over Ron like a curtain drawn shut. His mouth kept moving, but no sound followed. He looked stunned, furious, small.

Burke leaned over to his client, hissing furiously, but Ron shoved him away.

Harry didn’t flinch.

He looked at Ron, calm and quiet, as though staring at a tombstone.



Chapter 23

After the Storm

“Some battles are fought in silence, some in courtrooms, and some in your own bloody kitchen, with firewhiskey and friends.”

The soft glow of the late afternoon sun bled through the stained-glass windows of Hermione’s office, painting fractured rainbows across the worn oak floor and casting warm hues across the tall bookshelves that lined the walls. The scent of parchment and lavender still lingered in the air—a strangely comforting reminder that, despite everything, some things had remained untouched.

Hermione sat at her desk, hunched slightly, her fingers wrapped around a now-cold cup of tea. The rim had been worn smooth by her constant circling, a nervous rhythm she hadn’t realised she’d fallen into. Her body felt heavier than it had in months—drained, but not defeated. Her mind was still reeling from the weight of the day. From the screams. From the silences. From the truth that had finally been named out loud.

Across the room, Draco stood by the window, arms folded across his chest, watching her with a kind of steady patience he reserved only for her. The sun caught the sharp edge of his jaw, highlighting the faint scar near his temple—the one she’d traced a hundred times in the dark.

He didn’t speak at first. He didn’t need to.

“So,” he finally said, voice low, like a pebble dropped into deep water, “how did it go with him? Really?”

Hermione released a breath that had been living in her chest since the trial began and then ended. It left her slowly, as if afraid to be let go.

“He’s... he’s going to teach Defence at Hogwarts. McGonagall offered. Said the next generation deserved better than we had.” Her eyes stayed fixed on the cooling tea. “We talked. We cried. We hugged. Not everything’s mended. But... it doesn’t have to be to start anew. Not all at once.”

Draco nodded slowly and turned to face her fully. His expression softened, the crease

between his brows smoothing. "I'm proud of you, Granger."

She arched an eyebrow, lips twitching. "You only call me Granger when you're about to get sappy?"

He shrugged, the corner of his mouth lifting in a lopsided grin. "Maybe I like watching you squirm."

She let out a tired laugh and stood, crossing the room to him. Her arms slipped around his waist with practiced ease, her head coming to rest just below his chin. He smelled like bergamot and old parchment, like home. She closed her eyes and let his heartbeat ground her, each beat steady and real.

"What do you think the papers will say?" she whispered into his chest. "The trial was sealed, but that won't stop them. You know what they're like. A leak here, a headline there—? Golden Girl Breaks Silence? or Weasley Betrayed By His Own."

Draco kissed the crown of her curls, holding her just a little tighter. "Let them talk. You stood up and told the truth. That's what matters. Besides..." He pulled back enough to look her in the eye, mischief glinting. "Blaise, Theo and I had a little pre-emptive intervention."

Her brows rose. "Intervention?"

He smirked. "Rita Skeeter will no longer be a problem."

Hermione stepped back, suspicious. "You didn't kill her, did you?"

Draco gave her an affronted look. "Sadly, no. I considered it. Briefly. But Blaise pointed out it would make headlines for all the wrong reasons. So we did the next best thing."

"And that is..."

"We leaked multiple stories about her *bugging* the Minister's office." His grin turned wicked. "Including a very detailed transcript of her latest failed attempt to blackmail Kingsley. Plus, her history with multiple fabricated stories, extortion, and so many other wonderfully evil things. She's currently on the run as the aurors look for her to question her under magical perjury. Her Quick-Quotes Quill has been... permanently hexed."

Hermione blinked. "You cursed her quill?"

Theo's voice suddenly echoed from the doorway. "Technically, Blaise did. I just provided the cursed ink."

Hermione turned as Theo strolled in, looking far too pleased with himself for someone who had just committed a media assassination. He dropped a parchment-wrapped bottle of Firewhisky onto the desk with a wink.

"Remind me never to get on your bad side," Hermione said dryly.

"Oh darling," Theo drawled, "you're not capable of being on anyone's bad side. Except maybe *Burke's*."

Draco snorted. "She ate him alive."

"She did," Theo agreed. "And it was *delicious*."

Hermione shook her head, a real smile tugging at her mouth for the first time in what felt like weeks. The weight wasn't gone—trauma never simply vanished—but it was finally light enough to carry.

Draco wrapped his arm around her waist again. "Ready to go home?"

She leaned into him. "Gods, yes."

Theo held the door open with a grandiose gesture. "Then come on, lovebirds. The others

forgotten."

Callista leaned forward. "Did he ever harm you?"

Lavender's voice was quiet. "Not with his fists. But yes. Every day, in every other way that mattered."

When she stepped down from the stand, even Burke looked paler than before.

The Chief Warwich called for a recess, and murmurs finally filled the magically protected chamber—heavy, grim, and haunted.

Across the aisle, Harry hadn't moved. His jaw was still clenched, his eyes fixed straight ahead. But when Lavender passed him, she gave him the tiniest nod. For the first time in a long time, Harry nodded back.

When Harry was called, you could feel the tension in the courtroom. He looked thinner than he had in weeks, face pale beneath the harsh Wizengamot lighting, dark circles etched like bruises under his eyes. The black robes he wore hung off his frame as though he were made of smoke and threadbare memories. But his shoulders squared. His jaw tightened. And as he stepped into the witness box, something old and stubborn flickered to life in him, like the boy who once stood before Voldemort and refused to fall.

A different war. A different battlefield. But still Harry bloody Potter.

The bailiff swore him in.

Ron's solicitor, Burke, was first.

He approached slowly, hands behind his back like he fancied himself some kind of benevolent academic. His voice dripped condescension.

"Mr. Potter. A hero of the wizarding world. Surely it must have been difficult, adjusting to peace after a lifetime of chaos?"

Harry didn't reply at first. Then, slowly: "Peace was never the problem."

Burke smiled thinly. "And yet... after the war, you remained unusually close with Mr. Weasley. Even lived with him, did you not?"

"Yes," Harry said tightly.

"Odd," Burke mused aloud. "Given how, by your own admission, you were growing apart. Or were you just too weak to leave?"

Harry's fingers tightened around the edge of the witness stand. "I didn't think I could leave. Not then."

Burke pounced. "So you stayed in a toxic environment out of choice?"

"No," Harry said, voice firm despite the tremor. "I stayed because I was manipulated. Threatened. Poisoned—magically and emotionally."

"And yet no one knew. Not a soul. You never filed a complaint. You never told your friends. Or the Minister. Not even Mrs. Malfoy, your supposed best friend?"

Hermione flinched at the emphasis. Harry didn't look at her.

"I was ashamed," Harry said quietly. "Ron made me feel like I was defective. Like I was lucky he even wanted me."

Burke snorted. "Wanted you? Are you suggesting a romantic entanglement?"

"Yes," Harry said, loud and clear.

A ripple of noise echoed through the courtroom before the Chief Thorne banged her gavel.

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one from the Weasley family, not even Percy, came to his aid.

First came Edgar Trask, a senior-level administrator from the Department of Magical Transportation, who was summoned by the defence. He gave a bland but polished testimony about Ron's "loyalty to the Ministry" and "unwavering work ethic," although he seemed less convincing with every awkward cough and carefully chosen word.

"I don't believe Mr Weasley meant harm," Trask said stiffly. "He simply... struggled to adjust to civilian life."

Callista Graves raised a brow. "Struggled to adjust... by threatening colleagues and misappropriating funds?"

"Objection," Burke barked. "Leading the witness."

"Sustained," said the Chief Warlock, though her expression remained sceptical.

Next came Lettie Proudfoot, a junior clerk from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. She had no political sway and no reason to lie.

"Mr Weasley once told me I should wear longer skirts and speak less if I wanted to be promoted," she said bluntly. "He made me cry in front of the whole department when I asked to be moved off his detail. Said I wasn't loyal to the 'golden boys.' I was twenty-two when he tried to come on to me, even though he was married."

Burke tried to rattle her. He failed.

A former Auror partner, Gerald Hawke, admitted under questioning that he had requested reassignment after only two months working with Ron. "He didn't take direction. He was volatile. He hexed a suspect before the case was cleared. I filed it as an accidental discharge to keep the heat off, but I shouldn't have. That was on me."

Even Seamus Finnigan was called, this time by the prosecution. He gave a reluctant but honest assessment.

"I've known Ron since school," he said. "We were never that close, but we fought together. Still, after the war, he changed. He had this anger in him. And the way he talked about Hermione sometimes, it wasn't right. I told him that once and he hexed me in the bloody Ministry cafeteria."

Dean Thomas spoke too. Calm, measured, but firm.

"Ron had every resource available to him," he said. "He had support. Friends. Ministry healers. He chose not to take the help. That's not trauma. That's arrogance. Damn shame too, he was a good bloke though."

But the most damning testimony of the day came from Lavender Weasley—née Brown.

She walked into the courtroom with trembling hands but straight shoulders. Her eyes never left Ron's as she took the stand.

"We married too quickly after reconnecting," she began. "I think I thought I could fix him. That if I loved him enough, he'd stop being angry all the time. That he'd stop talking about Hermione like she was some fallen goddess he needed to punish. But he didn't stop. He got worse."

Ron scoffed under his breath, but this time, he said nothing aloud.

Lavender swallowed and pressed on. "He used to take my wand. Told me it was for safety, that I couldn't be trusted when I was emotional. He put locks on the inside of the bedroom door. Drank himself sick some nights, then cried about Hermione, about Harry. About being

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are waiting. Pansy's threatened to conjure a dancefloor in the kitchen and Luna's teaching Padma how to 'change the crystals' in the cutlery drawer."

Draco blinked. "Is that a euphemism?"

Hermione laughed. "With Luna? Honestly, I'm not sure."

As they left the office together, arms brushing, hearts lighter, Hermione thought—for the first time in a long time—that maybe, just maybe, the future was finally theirs to write.

And this time, no one else would hold the quill.



The townhouse was alight with magic, warmth, and the distinct sound of someone—probably Blaise—charming the wireless to alternate between Bowe and Weird Sisters covers. Charms flickered gently along the crown mouldings, casting sparkles like faerie dust across the walls. Enchanted garlands fluttered like lazy serpents in the air, and someone had definitely set the cushions to bounce if you sat too hard or too long.

By the time Hermione and Draco stepped inside, laughter had already taken hold of the room.

Ginny and Blaise were standing near the fireplace, mid-argument about who had messed with the drink dispenser charms. Blaise was swearing on his tailoring wand that Ginny had set it to spill every third cup, while Ginny accused him of being tragically inept at mixing anything more complex than pumpkin fizz.

Pansy lounged across the loveseat like a purring cat, coaxing Padma into joining Luna in a game of Exploding Gobsstones. Luna, wearing one of Theo's old jumpers that had been aggressively bedazzled, was currently explaining that the stones responded better to positive affirmations before detonation.

The moment Hermione stepped into view, the room turned toward her like sunflowers chasing the light.

"The conquering queen returns?" Pansy declared, raising a glass.

"Ah, the hero and heroine of the hour?" Theo shouted from where he'd somehow already claimed the largest armchair, half-lounging and half-spilling a dram of Firewhisky down his front. "Praise be to our beautiful Overlords."

Draco raised a brow as he tugged off his overcoat and turned to Blaise. "You started drinking without us or well without me?" Hermione smacked his shoulder while rolling her eyes.

"Time is a social construct, and sobriety is for Monday mornings," Theo replied grandly. "Also, I've stress-flirted at four different people today and needed liquid courage. Now come get your official congratulations, you dramatic bastards."

Hermione laughed just as Blaise handed her a bubbling glass of something fizzy that tasted faintly like cherries and cinnamon toast, non-alcoholic, of course. She was mid-sip when the Floo behind her flared *violently* green, casting a ripple of light that made the enchanted garlands tremble like nervous serpents.

"Incoming!" Padma shrieked, barely dodging a Gobsstone that exploded with a puff of

glittering violet smoke.

All conversation halted.

And then... *he* stepped out. Harry Potter.

Wearing a button-down that hadn't seen an iron in years, his hair a crime against wizardkind, and a bottle of Firewhisky held like a shield in one hand. He looked like someone who'd been dragged through an emotional hedge backwards—but there was a lightness to him that hadn't been there in *years*.

The room was dead silent.

"Evening," he said, voice steady but unsure. "Hope I'm not crashing. The Malfoys invited me."

A glass shattered somewhere in the distance.

Theo choked on his drink.

"*POTTER?*" he sputtered, blinking as though he'd hallucinated Harry into existence.

"What—how—are you real? Did I drink too much? Blaise, am I hallucinating our formerly exiled Chosen One walking into our party looking like sin and regret had a baby?!"

"I—er—hi, Theo," Harry offered again, a little awkward.

Theo's mouth opened. Closed. Opened again. He pointed. "You're here."

Hermione raised her glass and calmly said, "He's here Theodore."

It was enough.

Instantly, the vibe shifted. Ginny let out a laugh that turned into a hiccup. Blaise muttered, "Well, shit, this just got *interesting*" while Pansy whispered something scandalous to Luna, who responded with a dreamy, "I always thought he liked boys. Has that 'accidentally kissed a boy at Quidditch tryouts' look?"

Harry stepped fully out of the fireplace, brushing soot off his sleeves.

Theo was already circling him like a shark scenting blood.

"You came to our little gathering without being forced for once," Theo said, eyes gleaming with unholy glee. "And you brought Firewhisky. Are you trying to seduce me, Potter? Because if you are, it's *welcome*."

Draco coughed. "Theo—"

Harry held up a hand, grinning—wide and genuine. "It's alright. I can handle the flirting."

Theo looked personally blessed by Merlin himself.

"*Good*. Because I've got over 15 years of pent-up sexual tension for you, a closet full of aggressively bisexual robes, and I've decided tonight's the night future lover, or you know, just *lover*."

Ginny howled with laughter. Padma clapped. Blaise offered Harry a second drink "for bravery," and Luna handed him a paper crown enchanted to hover slightly askew above his head.

But it was Hermione who stepped forward and placed a hand on Harry's arm. She didn't say anything. She didn't need to. Her smile was soft, forgiving, and steady. She then turned and went back to Draco who kissed her fully on the lips to the annoyance of their friends.

The rest of the crew, chaos incarnate, just nodded. Accepted. Moved forward like they always did.

Found family didn't ask for perfection. They just asked for *presence*. And Harry had finally

The room bristled.

Before anyone else could respond, Hermione leaned forward slightly, her eyes blazing. "Survivors can thrive, Mr Burke. Healing isn't a straight line, and trauma doesn't disqualify joy. I fought for my life, and I rebuilt it. That doesn't make me *less* of a victim. It makes me proof that recovery is possible."

A murmur of approval rippled through the room, until Ron shifted, his chains clinking sharply, and sneered through his teeth, voice just loud enough to be heard.

"Still the sanctimonious know-it-all. Only now you're a Death Eater's whore."

The silence that followed was immediate and scorching.

Hermione didn't blink.

She stood.

And in the calmest, coldest voice anyone had ever heard from her, she replied, "Better a Death Eater's wife than a coward's obligation. You see, Draco might be many things *Ronald* but he chose to *change*. You never even tried."

Gasps rang out.

Ron went crimson. His solicitor groaned.

"Mr Weasley," Chief Warwith Thorne snapped, slamming her gavel against the podium. "One more outburst, and you will be magically gagged for the remainder of the proceedings."

Burke cleared his throat and bowed his head. "The defence apologises for the disruption, Your Honour. Mr Weasley will restrain himself."

"See that he does," she said coldly.

Hermione sat again, hands folded over her bump. Her composure hadn't slipped once, and from the corner of the courtroom, Kingsley crossed one leg over the other and smiled faintly, just for a moment.

Callista stood again. "Just to clarify, your current pregnancy. Can you confirm the event in question that led to charges of attempted harm?"

Hermione looked over at Ron then. Cold. Calm. Ruthless. "During my testimony at my husband's trial, Ron drew a wand on me. In a public courtroom. While I was visibly pregnant and unarmed. Had he succeeded, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Murmurs spread like wildfire across the courtroom.

Hermione didn't look away. Not even as Ron's face contorted in a mixture of rage and shame.

"We may not have been friends anymore," she added, her gaze flicking once to Harry. "But I didn't think it would end like that."

Callista's voice was sharp now. "Do you believe he should be considered mentally unfit to stand trial, Mrs Malfoy?"

"No," Hermione said flatly. "Ron Weasley is not insane. He's entitled. He believed the world owed him something and punished everyone who proved otherwise."

She rose from the stand without being asked to leave. Her job was done.

When Hermione stepped down from the witness stand, the courtroom remained silent for several breaths too long.

But the trial pressed on.

Witness after witness was called, some from Ron's side, others from the prosecution. No

Draco's defense after the war. Then it became restrictions. Emotional punishment. Passive aggression. Guilt."

"And what about when you applied to leave the country?"

"He tried to stop me," Hermione said. "He told me I was abandoning everything we'd built. That I was 'making myself bigger than the people who loved me.' He accused me of betraying the war effort, of making it about me. But it was never about me. I just wanted to help my parents remember who they were and hopefully have them back in my life."

"Did it escalate?" Callista asked gently.

"Yes," Hermione said, and she glanced at the stone floor for a moment before lifting her gaze again. "He began to shout. Throw things. Once he punched a wall near my head so hard it cracked through to the brick. I knew then that I wasn't safe anymore."

"And that's when you left?"

"No," Hermione said, quieter now. "It took months. I didn't want to believe it. I thought I could fix it. That it was the war. That we all needed healing and time. But eventually, yes. I left when it happened a second time and this time there was a witness."

There was silence again, thick and heavy.

Callista stepped back. "Thank you, Mrs Malfoy. No further questions for now."

Burke stood next, slow and theatrical, as though preparing to perform.

"Mrs Malfoy," Burke began, rising with a flourish, his tone warm and rehearsed. "You are a brilliant witch. Respected. Powerful. A war hero in your own right. Would it be fair to say your reputation precedes you?"

Hermione met his eyes without blinking. "I suppose it would depend on who you ask."

Burke smiled, pacing slowly in front of the witness stand like he was performing on a stage. "Oh, come now. You're one of the brightest witches of your age. Founder of the Spellwork Sanctions Treaty. The brains behind the Magical Creature Rights Accord. A Director at the International Confederation. Surely, someone of your influence knows how to... control a narrative?"

She narrowed her eyes. "If by 'control' you mean 'speak the truth,' then yes. I've always been rather good at that."

Burke turned to the Wizengamot, spreading his arms as though presenting a prize. "So then, is it not possible that some of this is personal bias? That your history with Mr Weasley, your former romantic partner, may have influenced your view?"

"My *history* with Mr Weasley," Hermione said coolly, "includes being controlled, belittled, emotionally manipulated, and finally attacked in a courtroom while six months pregnant. I don't think 'bias' is quite the word I'd use."

A few members of the Wizengamot shifted in their seats. Someone coughed awkwardly.

Burke pressed on. "So you maintain that you were *always* the victim?"

"I maintain," she replied, voice clipped, "that I was in a toxic relationship that turned abusive. That I was isolated, silenced, and made to feel as though my value was in how quiet and obedient I could be. And I believe you'll find my statements corroborated by official penitence review, letters, and at least four other witnesses."

He gave a thin smile. "And yet here you are...married, pregnant, successful. Doesn't sound like someone terribly damaged."

shown up.

Theo handed him a cup. "Drink this. It'll help. Probably."

Harry sipped and winced. "What *is* that?"

Theo beamed. "Magic and emotional repression."

The night roared back to life. Music played. Drinks flowed. And somewhere in the chaos, Harry Potter found himself surrounded by a room full of misfits, survivors, and people who loved him in spite of—and because of—everything. Laughter rippled through the room as the tension finally snapped. Ginny approached Harry cautiously. For a moment, she seemed unsure whether to hug him or hex him, but finally settled on wrapping him in a warm embrace.

"I'm glad you came," she said softly.

"Me too," Harry replied, voice quiet.

The night unfolded in a beautiful chaos of food, drink, and dancing. Luna's enchanted punch turned green, then blue, then briefly vanished entirely when someone cast a vanishing charm by accident (Neville, blamed by Pansy, denied everything). Padma and Ginny charmed the trifle into fireworks that spelled out rude phrases about Burke and Ron, while Blaise and Theo took turns levitating crisps into each other's mouths with theatrical precision.

Hermione and Draco, meanwhile, were slowly retreating into their own world. Every time she looked up, he was already watching her. A touch on her lower back. A brush of his lips against her knuckles. A shared smirk. Her fingers lingered longer on his collar, and his voice dipped when he leaned to whisper in her ear.

By the third time Theo had caught them giggling like teenagers in the corner, he threw up his hands and bellowed, "Right, well, that's our cue to leave! Honestly, it's a miracle the two of you haven't christened every bloody surface in this house yet!"

Hermione flushed but didn't look away from Draco.

"Oh we have," he said smoothly, earning groans and cheers alike.

As the crowd slowly began to thin, with more than a few half-drunken hugs and slurred promises to meet for brunch, the fireplace flared once more.

Theo stood beside Harry, both still lingering near the drinks table. Hermione glanced over, curious, and caught something quiet between them—a look, a tilt of Harry's head, Theo's smirk softening into something not quite so chaotic.

She nudged Draco gently. "Look! They're leaving together."

Draco followed her gaze, then gave a short nod. "Good."

"Think it might stick?"

"With Theo?" Draco grinned. "If he's got even half a shot at making Potter scream his name, he'll make it stick."

Hermione smacked his arm, laughing.

The Floo flared again—Harry and Theo stepped through it and disappeared in a rush of green flame and soot.

The house was quiet now.

The chaos had faded into the night—empty wine glasses resting beside half-eaten platters, a single candle still flickering on the windowsill, its soft glow casting golden shadows across the walls. Somewhere, a record still spun lazily on the gramophone, playing a gentle, crackling tune neither of them had the energy to turn off.

Ours To Keep

Hermione stood in the middle of the living room, arms folded as she stared at the spot where everyone had been just hours ago—Ginny laughing into Blaise's shoulder, Padma curled up on the settee beside Luna, Theo sprawled dramatically on the rug with a biscuit in his mouth, Harry sitting quietly by the fire, a spark of something soft and new blooming in his gaze.

It had been loud. Messy. Joyful.

Home.

Draco padded in behind her, barefoot and warm, still smelling faintly of firewhisky and bergamot. He didn't say anything at first, just slid his arms around her waist like it was the most natural thing in the world, like he was meant to be there.

"Just us?" he murmured, voice thick with affection.

"Just us," she echoed, her hands covering his.

He leaned down, brushing his lips along the corner of her mouth, then lingering there, as if the taste of her was something sacred. "You still taste like cinnamon and victory."

Hermione huffed a tired laugh. "You're ridiculous."

"I'm right," he whispered, brushing a kiss against her cheek, then her jaw. "You're brilliant, Hermione. You walked through hell and didn't flinch. You saved people. You told the truth. You fought for all of us... for him."

Her breath caught. She turned to face him fully, her hand sliding up to rest over his heart. The steady rhythm beneath her palm calmed something old and frayed inside her.

"So did you," she said quietly. "You gave up everything and still found a way to come back. You found me."

His eyes shone silver in the candlelight. "You were the only thing worth coming back for." She reached up, brushing a strand of hair behind his ear. "We got Harry back, too."

Draco's lips curled. "We got *all* of them. Red. Pansy. Theo. Luna. Padma. Even Blaise in his smug, charming, insufferable way."

Hermione smiled. "They're ours. This whole mad group of war-wounded weirdos. They're our family."

His voice dropped to a whisper. "We're lucky."

She leaned her forehead against his. "We're *home*."

They stood there in the quiet hum of their shared life, wrapped in the warmth of each other and the memory of their friends' laughter still echoing in the walls. It wasn't perfect. It never would be.

But it was theirs.

And finally—*finally*—it felt like peace.

Peace, and love, and everything they'd fought to earn.

The next day

Golden light spilled lazily through the tall bay windows of their bedroom, casting long shadows across the soft linen sheets tangled around their legs. The house was quiet, the kind of rare morning silence that made the world feel briefly suspended in peace.

Hermione stirred as sunlight crept lazily through the curtains, one hand reaching instinctively for the warm shape beside her. But instead of finding Draco, her fingers brushed against cool

Head over heels016

Across the room, Ron visibly flinched. His face flushed scarlet. He shifted in his bindings, fists clenched so tight his knuckles blanched.

Callista didn't stop.

"He had access to therapy. He had the comfort of family. He had the aid of colleagues. He had the opportunity to *choose differently*. And he did not. Again. And again. And again."

She stepped forward one last time, voice low but no less deadly.

"So do not let him rewrite the past. Do not let him weep behind the shield of war. He does not deserve your pity. He does not deserve your mercy. And he sure as hell doesn't deserve your belief."

She turned, sharp and final.

"We have testimony. We have proof. And most importantly... we have the words of the people who finally chose themselves over silence."

And with that, she stepped back.

And the silence left behind was louder than any applause.

The chamber pulsed once—thick with magic, with history, with pain.

The words had been said. The stage was set. But when Hermione's eyes flicked to Harry again, she noticed the pale sheen of sweat on his brow and the way his gaze remained locked, frozen, on Ron. Ron had leaned back slightly, head tilted, continuing his watch on Harry as if watching a lover across a crowded room. This was no longer about justice. This was about protection. This was about ending the reign of a man who had worn friendship like a noose and called it love.

Hermione was the first witness to be called to the stand, a hush fell over the courtroom. She rose with practiced poise, her robes dark and formal, her curls pinned back from her face. There was no tremble in her step, but her fingers twitched at her sides; subtle, anxious tells that only Draco or Theo would recognise if they were in the room. As she reached the witness dais, she paused for a heartbeat, then sat with the same composure she wore in war rooms and political summits.

Madam Chief Warwitch Calliope Thorne gave a nod. "You may begin."

Callista Graves stood first, her tone measured and respectful. "Ms Granger—"

"Mrs Malfoy," Hermione corrected smoothly, her voice calm but unmistakably assertive. "I retained my name professionally to some capacity, but legally, it's Malfoy in every sense of the word."

Ron, bound in enchanted cuffs just metres away, went stiff.

Callista smiled slightly, then inclined her head. "Mrs Malfoy. Thank you for your bravery today. I know this is not easy."

"It isn't," Hermione said, and her voice didn't waver. "But it's necessary."

"Let's begin at the beginning," Callista said. "Do you recall when the behaviour that led to this trial first began?"

Hermione inhaled slowly, folding her hands in her lap. "It wasn't all at once. That's what people misunderstand. It wasn't some dramatic moment, a single blow or cruel word. It was slow. Subtle. Like erosion. At first, it was just... control. Comments about how often I worked. Displeasure when I stayed too late at the Ministry or travelled for research, even when I went back to help some of the restorations of Hogwarts but didn't commit full-time to help with

Ouns To Keep

Burke turned back to Ron, his expression carefully crafted—part pity, part paternal sorrow. “Do not let history repeat itself.”

Then, with the solemnity of a closing prayer, he said:

“Do not let your fear of his name outweigh your duty to his healing.”

He sat.

And the room, already tense, simmered with the thick, uneasy weight of *strategic pity*. But for those who *know* what Ron had done... Hermione, Kingsley, Harry... It wasn't justice that stank. It was the bullshit trying to *cover it up*.

Ron nodded faintly behind him, lips twitching in a ghost of smug satisfaction.

Then came the prosecution's turn.

Solicitor Graves stood like a blade drawn from its sheath, still, cold, and gleaming with restrained purpose. Her black robes whispered as she stepped forward, hands clasped neatly at her front. She didn't raise her voice. She didn't need to. The magic in the room thrummed with the weight of her words before she even spoke.

“Ronald Bilius Weasley,” she began, “stands accused of the heinous crimes against the magical community, its institutions, and the very people who rebuilt this world from ash and blood.”

She didn't look at Ron. She didn't have to.

“You've heard them all stated and I am sure there are more,” she said with ice in her voice. “Much more. Because the web of lies Mr Weasley spun for nearly a decade has only just begun to unravel.”

A low murmur passed through the chamber, cut short by the flick of her wand as she conjured a glowing scroll beside her, sealed in the colour-coded gold of Level Seven prosecution.

She turned to the Wizengamot, her voice tightening with righteous restraint.

“We are not here today to discuss the Second Wizarding War. This courtroom is not a shrine. It is not a statue garden for faded heroes, nor a place to mythologise trauma.”

Her gaze flicked deliberately toward Ron whose face had turned an ugly shade of red, and lingered for just a beat too long.

“We are here to confront what came *after*. When the dust had settled. When power was handed out not for virtue, but for *name*.”

She paced once, slowly.

“Mr Weasley will attempt to martyr himself. To convince you he is a casualty of war, a man left behind by progress, haunted by what he saw. But let me be perfectly clear... Ronald Weasley is not a martyr.”

She turned to the judges, the gallery of officials, the elder witches and wizards who had weathered more than one lifetime of deceit.

“He is a *jealous, pitiful* man who used his status, proximity to power, and undeserved influence to abuse, manipulate, and endanger the very people who rebuilt this world alongside him.”

Her voice remained composed, but the magic around her swirled with quiet fury.

“There is a reason Ronald Weasley was marked Undesirable Number Three during the war. Not because he was hunted. But because he lacked the conviction, the clarity, and the compassion to be anything else. He will always be third best to the two people he tried to hurt the most.”

Head over heels016

sheets—and the unmistakable scent of fresh coffee.

She cracked one eye open.

Draco was propped up against the headboard, spectacles low on his nose, surrounded by a fortress of newspapers and glossy publications. The *Daily Prophet* rested in one hand, *The Wizarding Times* balanced on his knee, and a half-folded copy of *The Quibbler* floated lazily nearby, enchanted to hover until summoned. His coffee steamed gently on the nightstand, untouched.

“You're reading already?” she groaned, her voice gravely with sleep.

Draco didn't look up. “It's not reading. It's recreational gloating.”

Hermione blinked at him. “Recreational—?”

He finally glanced over the rim of the *Prophet*, his trademark smirk curling at the edges. “You'll see.”

With the smug air of someone holding the winning hand in a particularly long game of wizarding chess, he handed her the front page.

Bold headlines blazed in thick, enchanted ink:

“RON WEASLEY: GUILTY ON ALL COUNTS!”

“DRACO MALFOY: FROM EXILE TO ESTEEMED HEALER IN NEW LONDON”

“MOLLY WEASLEY SPEAKS: FAMILY IN SHAME, BLAMES DAUGHTER, GOLDEN GIRL, AND CHOSEN ONE FOR SON'S DOWNFALL”

“PERCY WEASLEY, ALONGSIDE HIS PARENTS, FLEE TO FRANCE IN HOPES OF AVOIDING SCANDAL AND RUIN”

“DAILY PROPHET ISSUES RETRACTIONS ON OVER 500 PREVIOUS ISSUES”

But the centrepiece—the true gem—was plastered in shimmering gold ink across the front: **“THE SKEETER FILES: ANIMAGUS EXPOSED! MINISTRY LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION INTO RITA SKEETER”**

Hermione sat up so fast the blanket slipped down to her lap. “What the bloody hell?”

Draco casually handed her *The Wizarding Times* next. “They're calling her ‘the Beetle That Broke the Prophet’ and they also featured some interesting headlines. Take a look.”

“FROM WAR HERO TO CONVICT: INSIDE RON WEASLEY'S STUNNING DOWNFALL”

“HERMIONE MALFOY: WAR HERO, VICTIM, LEADER—AND STILL RISING”

“BLAISE ZABINI CALLS FOR PRESS ACCOUNTABILITY: ‘WE WON'T LET THIS HAPPEN AGAIN’”

Then *The Quibbler*, which declared in bright magenta print:

“Skeeter Scandal Shakes Ministry: The Bug is Finally Squashed?”

Hermione's eyes flew across the pages, her mouth falling open.

“Draco,” she whispered. “Did you... plan this?”

He looked entirely too pleased with himself. “Daring, please. I'm a Malfoy, I *coordinated* it.”

Hermione sat up so fast the blanket fell to her lap. “What the bloody hell does that even mean?”

Draco sipped his coffee with a deeply satisfied hum. “Read the Skeeter exposé. That one’s *brilliant*. The owl arrived at 6 am. Blaise sent a note. He’s giddy.”

Hermione scanned the article.

THE DAILY PROPHET

Thursday Edition · 8 Knuts

THE SKEETER FILES: ANIMAGUS EXPOSED! SKEETER STRIPPED OF CREDENTIALS: MINISTRY INVESTIGATION INTO FRAUD, LIBEL, AND ANIMAGUS MISCONDUCT UNDERWAY

By Leland Marchbanks, Senior Correspondent

In a stunning turn of events, scandal-ridden journalist Rita Skeeter has been officially stripped of her press credentials following the revelation of a decades-long pattern of illegal activity, manipulation, and journalistic fraud. The Ministry of Magic has launched a formal investigation, with officials calling it “the most egregious abuse of magical media power in modern wizarding history.”

The investigation, codenamed The Skeeter Files, was initiated after testimony and sealed evidence were presented after the recent Wizengamot trial of Ronald Weasley. The evidence unveiled not only the depths of Weasley’s crimes but also the covert influence Skeeter wielded through a network of falsified reports, bribes, and illicit magical means—including unauthorised Animagus surveillance.

“Ms Skeeter has operated with complete disregard for magical law, ethics, and human dignity,” stated Dolores Ainsley, Chief Investigator at the Department of Magical Oversight and Records. “This is not about poor journalism. This is about a sustained, targeted campaign of deception and abuse.”

Among the crimes now under formal review:

Unregistered Animagus Activity: Skeeter, a beetle Animagus, has operated without official registry for nearly 30 years, violating the Animagus Control Act of 1874.

Obstruction of Justice: Skeeter is accused of planting misleading stories to derail Ministry investigations and court proceedings.

Bribery & Coercion: Numerous confidential sources allege Skeeter paid or blackmailed Ministry officials to gain access to sealed records.

Falsified Sources: Over 500 of her published articles contain quotes or “first-hand accounts” that have since been proven entirely fabricated.

Breach of Magical Ethics: Skeeter targeted underage Hogwarts students, war survivors, and grieving families, often glamorising or exploiting trauma

“Ten: Mismanagement of Departmental funds, with unauthorised transactions from Auror Division discretionary budgets.”

Harry shifted in his seat, shoulders tight.

“Eleven: Illegal access to a Gringotts vault not registered under the accused’s name, including seizure of restricted materials.”

“Twelve: Possession and use of unregistered consumption potions, in violation of the Controlled Substances Decree, including but not limited to euphoric-based brews.”

“Thirteen: Illegal use of dowsing potions and other tracking elixirs on Ministry personnel and civilians without informed consent.”

The parchment curled inwards with a magical snap, and the bailiff’s voice dropped low, final, thunderous:

“These charges, taken collectively, constitute a severe breach of both national and international magical law. The accused shall now face trial under full Wizengamot jurisdiction.” Silence fell again—cold, complete.

Ron stood in the centre of it all, jaw tight, chest puffed with defiant pride.

But the smirk had faltered. And Hermione, watching him with eyes made of fire and steel, knew that he was finally beginning to realise the weight of what he’d done.

When the formal reading was complete, Ron’s solicitor stood. Benedict Burke, grey at the temples, clean-shaven, and sickeningly smooth. His voice had the false polish of someone who didn’t care for truth, only for spin.

“My client,” began Solicitor Burke, voice smooth and measured, “is not a monster.”

He paused, gaze sweeping the courtroom, as though daring anyone to contradict him. Then, with calculated grace, he turned and placed a reassuring hand on Ron’s shoulder.

“He is a man. A man who bled for this world before he was even of age. A boy soldier turned symbol. A child who watched brothers die and friends shatter and leave. Who rose every morning after the war with nightmares still clawing at his ribs and chose, *chose*, to keep serving the very people who now spit on his name.”

He stepped forward, arms spreading wide like a sermon.

“This—” he gestured to the courtroom, to the bound man at the centre of it “—is not justice. This is vengeance. Sanitised and served in Wizengamot ink. Ronald Bilus Weasley is not an innocent man. He is a *damaged* man. Shaped, no, *warped*, by the same conflict that raised every person in this room to hero status, but abandoned the ones who couldn’t wear the weight with grace.”

He let that land. Then turned sharp on the bench.

“And now we seek to crucify him because he didn’t survive *damn*? Because trauma left scars that didn’t match our palatable version of post-war recovery? No. I refuse.”

His hand curled into a fist atop his brief.

“What my client needs is not prison. It is *treatment*. Magical trauma therapy, supervised restorative justice, restricted home custody. Rehabilitation...not retribution.”

He paused again, voice low now. Softer. As if imploring reason.

“He has admitted to the things he cannot deny. He has shown remorse. But he is not a threat to society. If anything, *society* was the threat to him. We raised a child for war, and when the world no longer needed him, we left him to rot in the wreckage of his own mind.”

Ouns To Keep

public gallery. Nonetheless, she could still feel him through the bond they shared. The amount of years they had together had developed something deeper than anyone could have imagined and she knew she was never alone, even in times like these.

Across the chamber, Harry sat alone. Not with Ron. Not with her. His shoulders hunched like he was bracing for an earthquake. He hadn't looked at her since she spoke to him not 20 minutes ago, and when she dared to look now, really look, she saw his fingers were shaking in his lap.

Her stomach turned.

Then it began.

The courtroom held its breath as the bailiff stepped forward, a tall, gaunt wizard clad in deep blue judicial robes, embroidered with the silver insignia of the Wizengamot. His voice, enhanced with a subtle Sonorus charm, echoed off the marble pillars and stone walls with crisp, deliberate authority.

He unrolled the long scroll of parchment, the bottom of which brushed the floor.

"In the matter of The Wizengamot vs. Ronald Bilius Weasley, this court acknowledges the following formal charges, presented by the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and sanctioned by the International Confederation of Wizards."

He paused, letting the weight of the moment settle.

"One: Attempted harm of an unborn magical child, in violation of Article 14 of the Protective Enchantments Act, through intent to inflict physical or magical harm upon a known pregnant witch."

A low murmur shivered through the courtroom before it was instantly silenced.

"Two: Magical assault against a sealed representative of the International Confederation of Wizards, classified under Level Four International Diplomatic Protection."

Harry's jaw clenched.

"Three: Unauthorised use of a wand during active Wizengamot proceedings in direct defiance of Trial Protocol 927-B."

"Four: Violation of courtroom security, including hostile spellwork and intrusion into a secured judicial zone."

Hermione's fists clenched beneath the table.

"Five: Obstruction of judicial proceedings, through both magical and non-magical interference, including intimidation of witnesses."

"Six: Incitement of public violence within a Ministry-sanctioned space, with potential intent to escalate to magical riot."

Ron's solicitor shifted uncomfortably.

The bailiff turned the scroll, letting the parchment unroll further as his voice grew graver. "Additionally, following an extended investigation by Auror Command, and by authority granted under the Transparency and Conduct Act, the following charges have been added—"

Another pause. The air was thick.

"Seven: Mismanagement and concealment of official case evidence, including tampering with memory trials and magical documentation."

"Eight: Corruption and enticement, through the illegal distribution of favours, galleons, and potions to influence Ministry decisions."

"Nine: Magical abuse and coercion, as determined by testimony and forensic spell residue analysis."

for personal gain.

The exposé, which spans fourteen pages in this morning's special edition, outlines years of misconduct, including previously unreported abuses during the Second Wizarding War. Most notably, the Daily Prophet has issued a formal apology and retraction of over 500 published articles, with a front-page apology listing the first names:

"We deeply regret the harm done to Mrs. Hermione Malfoy and Mr. Draco Malfoy, whose reputations, privacy, and family lives were recklessly targeted by Rita Skeeter's reporting. We apologise unreservedly to all others affected." Since the conclusion of the Weasley trial, Skeeter has vanished. Ministry officials arrived at her home late Tuesday evening to find it ransacked, her self-writing quill broken, her Pensieve emptied, and all enchanted files wiped. She has not been seen since.

"She's gone to ground," said one Auror anonymously. "But she won't stay hidden for long. The world is watching now. And our search will continue until she is found."

Meanwhile, the Prophet has begun what it calls its "Reparations Campaign"—a full audit of its reporting standards, staff training, and editorial oversight. Editor-in-Chief Marbaras Cuffe has resigned "in shame," and an independent regulatory body has been formed to ensure compliance going forward.

For some, however, justice has already begun to take root. In a statement released to The Wizarding Times, Healer Draco Malfoy simply said:

"I'm not interested in vengeance. I'm interested in truth. And it's about bloody time."

Rita Skeeter remains at large. If seen, the Ministry urges immediate contact with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Do not attempt to approach her, as she may be armed with cursed ink and volatile charms.

This is a developing story. Updates to follow.

"I don't believe it," Hermione whispered. "We've waited years for this. She's finally—"

"Cancelled?" Draco offered. "Exposed? Publicly humiliated and unemployed?"

Hermione glanced at him, lips twitching. "You're enjoying this?"

"Oh, I'm fucking thriving, love." He tossed the paper onto the coffee table with a grin far too pleased with himself. "We didn't just silence a vulture—we clipped her wings, burned her nest, and hexed the bloody sky she flew under."

Hermione let out a laugh—sharp, incredulous, disbelieving. "You and Theo really went through with it?"

Draco leaned back on the sofa, arms draped lazily over the cushions, utterly unrepentant. "Theo wrote the Ministry report. Blaise charmed the files to self-replicate across every major news outlet. I just... nudged a few skeletons out of her closet. Metaphorically. And maybe one or two literally. We all had a hand in all the aspects involved in her downfall."

Hermione stared at him, chest rising and falling with something that was absolutely not just relief.

Ouns To Keep

“You’re—” she said, eyes narrowing, “—so fucking hot when you’re like this.”

Draco’s smirk turned devilish. “I know.”

She slid into his lap without preamble, her hands finding his collar and tugging him closer. “Merlin, I love you.”

“And I love that you love me when I’m morally questionable.”

They kissed—fierce and breathless, a clash of celebration and years of pent-up justice. For a moment, the world melted away under the weight of their shared victory.

But when they broke apart, Hermione’s brow furrowed.

“She’s still out there,” she said quietly, fingers toying with the edge of his shirt. “If she’s desperate enough... she might come for us. Or the kids.”

Draco’s jaw tightened. “She won’t get close. I’ve already reinforced every ward here at the townhouse, and the Manor’s on full lockdown. No one gets in or out without blood magic or clearance from us.”

“That’s comforting,” Hermione murmured, but her voice held that familiar note of overthinking.

Draco tilted her chin, gaze firm. “Listen to me. We’re safe. And if she comes out of hiding, the entire wizarding world will be ready to watch her burn. You and I - we’ve survived worse than Rita fucking Skeeter. And we’ve built something stronger than she ever could’ve broken.”

Hermione leaned her forehead against his, eyes closing. “Just... don’t let your guard down.”

“Never,” he whispered. “But I promise—we’re going to be okay.”

She nodded, but a chill lingered. It wasn’t fear, exactly. Just the sense of unfinished threads pulling at the corners of a tapestry they’d only just begun to mend.

Just then a loud *B-ANG* echoed through the house, followed by the telltale thud of boots. A thud they knew too well.

Draco groaned, slumping back against the headboard. “Bloody hell! Here he comes. Instead of reinforcing the wards I may just limit them to you, myself and the kids. Create new ones. Specifically those that keep out Red and Theodore. Showing up at all hours...”

The door to their bedroom slammed open. No shame whatsoever by the intruder.

“...coming into our room...interrupting my time...” continued Draco while glaring at Theo, resplendent in silk pyjamas of course, messy curls and a half-eaten croissant in one hand, burst in like the harbinger of chaos he was born to be.

“*HAVE YOU SEEN THE PAPER DR-KEY?*” he shouted, waving three more copies of the *Prophet* like victory flags. “She’s GONE. Skeeter is GONE. WELL MISSING, BUT STILL. The goblins are investigating her accounts, the Department of Magical Licensing is about to sue, and the Prophet had to—brace yourselves—*publish full retractions* on every libellous story she ever wrote about you two. And guess who edited the retraction draft?”

Draco blinked. “You didn’t.”

Theo threw himself dramatically onto the foot of the bed. “Oh, I *did*. I wrote the subheading: *‘We Own the Malfoys an Apology and a Sandwich.’* Blaise made me change it to *‘We Got It Wrong.’* He’s so dull when he’s being legal!”

Hermione laughed so hard she almost spilled her tea. “Theo...”

“Don’t Theo me curls,” he grinned, biting into his croissant. “I want it framed. I want to see it hung in St Mungo’s and in that Muggle Hospital of yours Draco, *above your office* seeing as



Chapter 22

The Trial of Ron Weasley

“Sometimes justice isn’t a blade. It’s a mirror.”

The courtroom was silent. Not the kind of silence that comforted but the kind that wrapped around your ribs like iron vines, squeezing tighter with every breath. The kind of silence that warned: nothing would ever be the same again.

Under the authority of Hermione Jean Malfoy, Director of the International Confederation of Wizards War Councils, the trial was now held under The Protective Seal of Historical Conflict Testimony, a rarely invoked clause of the ICW International Charter for Magical Safety and Witness Protection, Section 43B. The courtroom glowed with the remnants of bound enchantments, the air thick with magic that pulsed faintly against skin and soul. The binding contract Hermione had devised as a teenager had matured into something monstrous, its enforcement near mythical. Break it, and you didn’t just lose your magic. You lost your place in the world that birthed you.

No press remained. No whispering gallery. No curious eyes. Only the stone-faced members of the Wizengamot, both legal teams, a select handful of Aurors standing guard, and the witnesses.

At the centre stood Ronald Bilius Weasley.

His red hair was matted, tangled like he’d run nervous fingers through it one too many times. His once-pristine Auror robes were crumpled, the sleeves slightly wrinkled as the day went by. His eyes—now wide, glassy, and faintly bloodshot, bounced around the room. Not quite defiant. Not quite apologetic. Somewhere in between: smug. Certain. Dangerous. A flicker of worry.

His wrists were shackled in enchanted iron, etched with runes to prevent wandless casting. A faint red line chafed against his skin, but he didn’t seem to notice.

Hermione sat near the front, behind Callista Graves, the Ministry-appointed prosecutor. Her heart was pounding beneath the stillness of her outer frame. Draco’s fingers had briefly squeezed hers earlier, wordless and grounding, before he stepped out with the rest of the

A decorative horizontal border featuring intricate, symmetrical floral and scrollwork patterns, framing the chapter title.

Chapter 25

The End and the Beginning

*“In the aftermath of war, they built a home. In the ruins of legacy, they planted love.
And when the dust finally settled, they dared to dream.”*

The sterile white halls of St. Mungo’s Hospital were flooded with the soft hum of magical lights, the shuffle of trained feet, and the echo of time holding its breath.

Hermione Malfoy gripped Draco’s hand with a force that could’ve shattered bone, and he swore his knuckles had turned blue. Her face was flushed with pain, hair plastered to her forehead in sweaty curls, and her jaw was clenched so tightly he thought her teeth might crack.

“Fuck—you’re crushing my fingers, love,” Draco gasped, voice tight with panic.

“Then you’re still *bravling*,” Hermione growled through her teeth, not missing a beat.

She was trying to be brave, but he could see it. The fear behind her eyes. The tremble in her limbs that had nothing to do with exhaustion and everything to do with the erratic, magical tension cracking in the air.

The room was a flurry of motion—Mediwiches barking spells and instructions, potions being conjured mid-air, glowing diagnostic charms flitting frantically around Hermione’s belly. Her magic, normally so controlled and precise, was now a tempest - wild and volatile, uncontained and pulsing with raw, maternal instinct. Sparks crackled across the floor. A mirror shattered in the corner. The ceiling lights flickered like candle flames in a storm.

It was more than pain—it was protection.

Hermione’s magic, overwhelmed by the physical trauma of labour, the emotional shock from Rita’s attack, and the sudden descent into accelerated delivery, had entered a state of magical overdrive. Her core was pouring out unchecked energy—searching for anything to anchor to, anything to ground it.

But it wasn’t just dangerous for her.

It was dangerous for the twins.

“She’s peaking,” one of the Healers muttered urgently, watching the flux in the readings.

“Her magical output’s unstable—it’s lashing through the entire room.”

"If we don't contain it soon," another snapped, "the magical backlash could disrupt the birth entirely. We could lose both babies. It'll start affecting the ward—she'll take the whole bloody room down with her."

Draco's heart was a drumbeat of dread in his ears.

He'd read about this. Studied it. A rare condition—Magical Flux Cascade—where intense trauma or stress during labour causes the witch's core to become volatile, particularly in those with unusually high magical affinity. Muggle medicine called it adrenal overload. In magical births, it was far more lethal. Most cases required immediate sedation or magical suppression which risked harming the babies if done too early.

And Hermione had always been powerful. Too powerful to be suppressed.

Which left only one option.

"Use me," Draco said hoarsely, stepping forward without hesitation. "Anchor it through me. I can take it."

The Healer blinked. "You want to act as a magical conduit?"

"She needs someone her magic will recognise. Someone she trusts—*loves*." Draco's voice shook, but his spine was steel. "Her core's searching for a tether. I *am* that tether. She's *my wife*. Do. It. Now."

There was a pause—a breathless moment of shared uncertainty—then the Healer raised her wand and pressed it firmly to the centre of Draco's chest, over his heart.

"This may hurt," she warned.

"I'm not afraid of pain," he said. "I'm afraid of losing her."

The spell activated with a sharp, vibrating hum. Draco staggered as a pulse of pure, wild magic hit him like a thunderclap.

Hermione's magic *flooded* him—recognised him—and crashed into him with the force of a tide breaking against a familiar shore. It scorched through his veins like lightning through copper, overwhelming but not unkind. It wrapped around his magic, his body, his soul, curling into the hollows of his chest like it *belonged* there.

His knees buckled, but he held firm.

And just like that, the storm *ended*.

The air lightened. The crackling stopped. The mirror shards ceased vibrating. The diagnostic charms returned to steady glows. Even Hermione's body visibly relaxed, the tension in her limbs easing just slightly as her magic anchored itself—*in him*.

Draco breathed, shallow and shaken. "She's stabilising."

"Good," the Healer said tightly, already moving to her next spell. "That bought us time. Get ready, we're moving into final stage."

Draco gripped Hermione's hand again, never letting go, still feeling her magic hum inside him like a second heartbeat. It was overwhelming. Intimate. Sacred.

This wasn't just about love.

It was about *bonded trust*. About two cores that had chosen each other over and over again—through the aftermath of the war, through exile, through heartbreak and healing.

He was her anchor.

And she was everything he lived for.

Hermione was shaking, chest heaving, the sheets bunched in her fists. She met Draco's eyes

"Always. Lead the way, Mayhem," he murmured to Theo with a nervous grin. And with two sharp cracks, they vanished—heading straight into the storm that awaited them at St. Mungo's.

Ours To Keep

with the medics as he stood shellshocked beside her.

“No, no, no—*fuck, please—Gin, love, talk to me—*” Blaise whispered, his hands hovering uselessly over her as if afraid touching her would break her. “She was fine this morning—she was *laughing*—we were supposed to meet at the café after they were done—”

“She’s stable!” the Mediwitch snapped quickly. “Breathing. Pulse is strong. She’s unconscious but she’s *alive*. We’ve got her.”

“I’m going with her,” Blaise said immediately, voice hoarse.

“No room for arguments you hear, you follow our directives,” the Healer said. “Grab the edge of the stretcher. Portkey activating in ten.”

Blaise didn’t need to be told twice. He clutched the bar beside her shoulder, knuckles white. His lips brushed her temple. “I’m right here. I’ve got you, Gin.”

And with a shimmer of blue and gold light, they vanished together.

Theo and Harry were left blinking in the chaos that remained—Aurors detaining Rita, stunned onlookers, scattered chairs, and a scorched section of cobblestone where Hermione’s spells had hit like cannon fire.

“*What in Merlin’s left nut happened here?*” Theo demanded, his eyes darting to Pansy, who was now directing two Ministry officials and trying to keep from punching a third.

Pansy turned, hair windblown, dress half-scorched, eyes blazing. “Rita. *Skelter* happened, that’s what!”

“*What?*” Harry stepped forward. “I thought she was—”

“Gone? In hiding? Rotting somewhere in Albania? Yeah, so did we. But no, apparently she’s been lying in wait in beetle form and decided today was the perfect fucking day to attack Hermione. *Ginny took the curse meant for her.*”

Harry paled. “Bloody hell!”

“She’s been captured?” Theo asked tightly, jaw clenched.

Pansy nodded once. “Bound. Stunned. Dragged away by the Aurors, though if anyone thinks that’s the end of it, they’re idiots. Hermione hit her hard enough to crack the bloody stones, but that cow always finds a way to crawl back.”

“Where’s Draco?” Harry asked.

“Portkeyed out with Hermione,” Pansy said, voice softer now. “She went into labour. The shock, the adrenaline, the sheer amount of *raw magic*—it triggered her. Twins, apparently, from what I could overhear.”

Theo blinked and finally smiled. “*Twins?*”

“Yes. I know. Pansy wins the bet. I’ll collect my galleons later.”

Theo continued smiling and exhaled, dragging a hand through his hair. “This family can’t do *anything* the easy way.”

“No,” Pansy said. “But we always *survive*.” Her voice wavered on the word.

Harry swallowed hard. “We need to get to Mungo’s.”

“I’ll follow soon. Need to deal with the mess here, check in on the kids,” Pansy said briskly, nodding toward where Aurors were taking witness statements. “Cassi and Scorp should be with the Grangers. Let me know once you have updates.”

Theo turned to Harry, something unreadable in his eyes. “Ready for chaos, Lover?”

Harry let out a shaky breath, heart pounding.

Head over heels016

- terrified, exhausted, defiant. “Don’t leave me.”

“Never,” he whispered, cupping her face with his free hand. “You’ve got this. I swear to Merlin, you’ve *got* this.”

Then everything *awakened*.

More spells. More shouted orders. More contractions, each one hitting harder and faster than the last. The rhythm of the room shifted—no longer controlled chaos but sheer desperation. Hermione screamed as another wave of pain ripped through her, her back arching off the bed, her entire body trembling with effort.

Draco held her through it, one arm around her shoulders, the other bracing her hand in his. He whispered whatever words came to him—useless, tender, desperate things—*you’re safe, you’re strong, I love you, I’ve got you, I’ve got you, please don’t let go—*

Her magic surged again, wild and flickering despite his earlier anchoring, as if responding to something new.

Then he *smelled* it.

Copper. Sharp. Thick.

The Mediwitch closest to Hermione swore under her breath.

“Fuck—massive drop in pressure—”

Another flick of her wand, and Draco saw the diagnostic charm sputter red.

His eyes followed the charm’s glow to the source.

The blood.

Too much blood.

Dripping down the sheets. Pooling beneath her.

“She’s haemorrhaging!” the Mediwitch snapped. “Get containment up - *now!*”

Draco froze.

No. No, no, no.

He knew this. *Rarewind* this. He’d studied this scenario in med school, faced it in clinics, stabilised witches before transfer—but this wasn’t a stranger on a chart.

This was *Hermione*.

His wife. His best friend. The mother of his children. The woman who had rebuilt his world with patient, stubborn hands.

“She’s losing too much blood!” another Healer barked. “We need blood-restoration potion... someone get a transfusion ready!”

“Call the Maternal Spell Stabilisation team *now!*”

Draco’s body went cold, but his grip on her hand only tightened.

Hermione was panting now, her face ghost-pale, lips trembling as she blinked through the haze of pain and exhaustion. Her gaze flicked to his—and even in her state, she *knew*.

She saw it on his face.

“How bad is it?” she whispered, her voice paper-thin.

He couldn’t lie to her. *Not her*. Not now.

“It’s not good,” Draco choked, brushing her hair back, trying to stop his voice from cracking. “But you’re you, and you’re not fucking leaving me. You hear me?”

Her eyes fluttered, unfocused, tears gathering in the corners. “If I don’t make it—”

“No.” His voice broke like glass. “Don’t. *you damn*. I will hex you back from the

afterlife if you even think about dying right now.”

“I’m scared,” she whispered.

He bent his forehead to hers, tears slipping freely down his cheeks. “So am I. But you’re not alone. I’m right here. I’m going to get you through this. We are *not* doing this without you.”

She gave a weak laugh that cracked into a sob. “You’re so bossy.”

“You married a Slytherin,” he murmured. “Now *listen to me*. You’ve got to push. One more. Just one more. I’ll carry the rest—I promise, I’ll carry *everything*. Just bring them into the world.”

Hermione sucked in a breath as another contraction slammed into her, harder than before. She clenched his hand so tight he thought the bones might break.

“Come on, love,” he begged, voice thick with tears. “Come back to me. Bring them into the world. Please—”

Her body tensed, her jaw clenched, and with the last of her strength, she *pushed*.

A scream—guttural, raw—filled the room.

Then—

A cry.

Sharp. Loud. Angry.

A baby’s cry.

Draco’s breath stuttered, chest heaving.

But there was no time to rejoice. The Healers were already moving, already delivering the second baby. Hermione was slumping back, barely conscious, chest rising in shallow gasps.

Draco pressed kiss after kiss to her forehead, her cheeks, her temple. “You did it. Merlin, Hermione, you *did it*. Just stay with me now. Please. Just stay.”

And then—Hermione gave a final push. Weaker but exactly what was needed.

Another cry sounded in the room. Softer. Sleepier. A second voice entering the world.

The Twins were finally here. Both alive. Both breathing.

The Healers cast stabilising charms and diagnostic spells. The babies were safe. The bleeding was slowing. Potions were being administered. Hermione was breathing.

But Draco didn’t move.

He stayed pressed to her, holding her hand with shaking fingers, whispering over and over into her hair:

“You’re alright. You’re safe. You’re here. You stayed.”

Because for a moment, he hadn’t known if she would.

The Healers were moving in sync, wrapping and examining and charming, but Draco didn’t register the words. He only knew Hermione was still breathing.

Her body slumped against the pillows, soaked in sweat, trembling, but *alive*.

Draco sobbed. He didn’t care how it looked. He pressed his forehead to her temple, whispering broken thank yous to every deity he didn’t believe in.

“They’re perfect,” Hermione rasped, her voice thick with tears, her eyes locked on the ceiling as if trying to hold the moment in place—afraid it might disappear if she blinked.

Draco looked up from where he’d been holding her, his face still damp, his chest still heaving from the storm they’d just weathered. The Healer stepped forward with a smile and gently placed a tiny, swaddled bundle into Hermione’s waiting arms.

“Merlin’s bollocks,” she gasped, teeth clenched. “Baby’s not waiting. Draco. Gods...*coming now*—”

One of the senior Healers leaned over her, wand glowing pale blue as he moved it in a practiced arc over her abdomen. His brow furrowed. “She’s right. It’s accelerated labour - likely triggered by magical overstimulation. Twin readings - yes, both reacting strongly. One is already descending.”

Draco’s eyes widened. “*Time*—?”

Hermione groaned. “We didn’t...*know*, Draco. Surprise.”

“Well, that explains the bloody chaos,” he muttered, brushing sweaty curls from her face. “Of course it’s two.”

“Vials are holding Doctor Malfoy, but we can’t wait any longer,” another Medwitch said, conjuring a warming field around Hermione’s lower abdomen. “We need to get her to St. Mungo’s *now*. I’m giving her a Stabilising potion, 0.25 dose.”

A vial was uncorked and gently pressed to Hermione’s lips.

“I’ll dull the edge of the pain for transport,” Draco said softly. “Just sip, love. That’s it.”

Hermione swallowed, chest heaving, and sagged slightly as the potion began to take effect. The tremors in her limbs didn’t stop, but her breathing evened out - just barely.

“Portkey’s set,” a third Healer called out, holding a glowing medallion hovering just above the edge of the stretcher. “Calibrated for emergency wings, obstetrics entrance.”

“Are you coming with her?” the lead Healer asked Draco, not even looking up - he already knew the answer.

“Like hell I’m not,” Draco snapped, climbing onto the stretcher without hesitation, bracing himself beside Hermione. His arm slipped around her shoulders, and he pressed his forehead to hers. “Ready, love?”

She nodded weakly, gripping his robes. “Don’t let go.”

“Never.”

The healer tapped the medallion.

In a flash of blue light and wind, they vanished—leaving behind a bloodied cat, a stunned crowd, and the aftermath of a day that had gone from laughter to warzone in seconds.

Padma wiped her face with a trembling hand, turning to Luna as Ginny was finally getting lifted onto a second stretcher.

“Ria picked the wrong bloody day,” she whispered.

“She always does,” Luna murmured, taking her hand. “But this time... she didn’t win.”

A second later, Blaise, Theo, and Harry appeared at the edge of the chaos, appearing in tandem with loud cracks, wands already drawn.

“The fuck happened?” Blaise barked, eyes scanning the scene—until he *saw her*.

Ginny.

His wife.

Lying motionless on a stretcher, her red hair fanned out like a banner of war, her limbs askew, her face pale beneath a fine layer of dust and blood. A Medwitch was stabilising her chest with a shimmering charm as two more finished levitating her onto the stretcher.

“*G/N/NY?*”

His voice tore through the street like a physical blow. He sprinted forward, nearly colliding

Ouns To Keep

"I wasn't about to let her *kill Ginny*!" Hermione shrieked, another wave wracking her.

"Pansy, summon someone!" Luna said quickly.

"I'm on it," Pansy said sharply, her wand already raised and she cast a Patronus. A glowing *lynx* shot from it and vanished as she gave it instructions to get Draco. "Draco. Come. *Now. Diagon Alley.*"

She then quickly conjured another one and sent a message to St. Mungo's. "*St. Mungo's team, NOW. Diagon Alley. There's been an attack.*"

"Draco's going to lose his mind," Luna whispered.

"He can bloody well lose it after we get her off the street," Pansy snapped, conjuring a floating stretcher with trembling fingers.

Just as Hermione gave another ragged cry, the air cracked again—this time a split-second before Draco appeared, robes windswept, eyes wide and frantic, wand drawn.

"HERMIONE!"

She looked up, sweat slicking her brow. "I didn't mean to—it just happened—I tried to stay calm but she—Ginny—*Druno*—"

"I've got you," he said instantly, dropping to the ground beside her and gathering her into his arms. "I'm here now, alright? *I'm here.* You're not doing this alone."

"She's in labour Draco," Luna said gently. "It's happening fast. The magic, she pushed too hard. Baby is coming quicker than normal."

Another *crack* of Apparition, and Medi wizards flooded the alley, immediately sweeping in on both Hermione and Ginny. Padma was sobbing softly as she held Ginny's hand, refusing to move as they scanned her.

"She's alive," one of the Healers said quickly after assessing Ginny. "Unconscious, but breathing. Pulse is strong. We'll take her into the Emergency Ward after we stabilize her."

Draco gripped Hermione's hand as another group of healers carefully inspected her. "I've got you," he whispered, pressing a kiss to her sweat-dampened forehead. "We're going to the hospital. You're safe. Baby Malfoy is safe. I swear it."

"I didn't bring the hospital bag," she whispered, panicked.

"We've got three," Pansy called over her shoulder, shoving the Aurors toward the still-unconscious Rita Skeeter. "One in my bag, one at George's shop, one in your office, *and* you have the full set at home. You'll get your unicorn on-site Hermione, I promise!"

"I want the bag from the house," Hermione gasped as she tried to give instructions. Even under extreme stress she was still so bossy.

"We'll bring the whole bloody *library* if we have to," Draco murmured, gripping her hand tightly. "Just breathe, love. I'm not leaving you. Pansy and Luna will take care of the bag and other essentials. Padma is with Ginny while we get Blaise."

She gripped his hand like a lifeline as another contraction hit. "Draco—fuck—it hurts. This doesn't feel normal. Something is wrong!"

"I know, I know, darling. Just breathe. You're the strongest witch I've ever met and I've seen you hex twelve wizards in heels. The healers are taking a look at you."

Hermione let out a strained laugh that dissolved into a groan as her body seized again, tighter, sharper, faster than before. Her back arched involuntarily against the cushioning charms.

Head over heels016

A baby girl.

And from the moment she touched her mother's skin, she *howled*—a fierce, indignant cry that echoed off the ward's high ceilings with startling strength. Her tufts of hair were already shock-white, her cheeks flushed, and her tiny fingers gripped Hermione's finger with a grip that made even the Healer raise a brow.

"She's fierce already," Hermione whispered in awe, cradling her daughter against her chest.

"Like someone lit a fire in her."

Draco let out a shaky breath and turned as the second Mediwitch approached him with the next bundle.

A baby boy.

Quieter. Dark chestnut hair, so soft it was barely more than a whisper on his scalp. His grey eyes blinked up at Draco, calm and curious—like he was *studying* the world before passing judgement.

"Merlin," Draco murmured, his voice cracking as he reached out with reverence, gently brushing a fingertip across his son's downy head. "He looks like he already knows all the answers."

"Like Theo," Hermione said softly.

They looked at each other then, and the moment caught between them. No titles. No war. No headlines. Just *them*, and the two tiny lives they had brought into the world.

Hermione kissed the crown of her daughter's head and whispered, "Vela Gin. After the Sails in the stars, and after Ginny."

Draco's throat tightened.

"She's brave, fierce, and too damn loud," Hermione continued, smiling through her tears.

"She saved my life today. She's always had this fire in her—protective, stubborn, blindly loyal. She's been my sister in arms through it all."

Draco nodded, pressing his lips to Vela's temple. "And mine. My annoying little sister Vela Gin... she deserves to carry that flame."

Then Draco turned to the tiny boy still curled against his chest, their breathing synced.

"And him," he said, voice trembling. "Volans Teo. Another constellation—one rarely used. For the flying fish in the sky, for quiet strength. And for Theo."

Hermione chuckled weakly. "The chaos goblin himself."

Draco laughed through his tears, nodding. "Yes. But he's more than that. He's been our anchor, our light in the dark. The most thoughtful, ridiculous, loyal bastard I've ever met. He saved me more times than I'll admit. He loves harder than anyone I know."

"And he's been there for me," Hermione added, her voice barely more than a breath. "When I couldn't stand. When I didn't think I could love again. He made space for healing, and laughter, and family."

They looked down at the twins—Vela with her spirited squirming and defiant lungs, Volans with his wide, steady gaze and silent wisdom.

"They're already like them," Hermione whispered. "It's like they *knew*."

Draco leaned in and pressed his forehead to hers. "It's our tradition—Black family stars, yes—but this time... it's not about legacy. Not that kind of legacy."

"It's about *found* family," Hermione said. "The one we chose."

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“The one we *built*.”

And as they sat there—exhausted, bloodied, but whole—the weight of what they’d survived gave way to the wonder of what they’d built.

Vela Gin and Volans Teo.

The third and fourth stars in their sky.

Proof of everything they had overcome. Everything they had *become*.

The door to the future had opened and this was it.

A new beginning.

Back in England. With their friends, their children, their home.

Not just Scorpius and Cassi waiting with excited hearts and biscuit crumbs on their fingers—but now these two new souls, born into love and chaos and fierce, unshakable devotion.

They would conquer the world—not with wealth, not with legacy, not with names carved into marble—

But with love.

And in that room, once filled with pain and panic, there was now only the soft rustle of newborn breath, whispered promises, and the steady, sacred rhythm of *six* hearts beating in time.

A constellation of their own.



It had been six hours since the chaos.

Six hours since the blood. The screaming. The heartbreakingly strong cries of two brand-new lives.

And now, silence.

Or as close as you could get to silence in the St. Mungo’s waiting room, which had been commandeered entirely by the tight-knit whirlwind that was Draco and Hermione’s circle of misfit warriors and loved ones.

The chairs had long since been rearranged. Theo was stretched across three of them, legs dangling over Harry’s lap as he transfigured hospital pamphlets into tiny origami snitches. Pansy had kicked off her boots and was curled against Neville, whispering updates from The Granger’s about Cassi and Scorpius. Luna had conjured a floating mobile of softly glowing stars above Padma’s head, and Blaise—who hadn’t let go of Ginny’s hand once since her discharge—sat with his wife’s feet in his lap, watching her like she might disappear.

They were all pretending not to be worried anymore. Pretending to be calm. Pretending they weren’t hanging on every footstep down the hall.

Then the door opened.

Draco stepped in, now in clean robes and not his blood-smearred ones he arrived in, his sleeves pushed up, his shoulders stiff—but his eyes were alive.

Every head in the room turned to him in unison.

His voice was quiet, rough around the edges. “They’re alright.”

A collective exhale.

“They’re both alright,” he said again, firmer this time, as if needing to hear it himself.

Head over heels016

“Ria,” Hermione breathed, her heart slamming against her ribs.

“Get down!” Ginny shouted just as the curse fired.

A bolt of deep crimson light screamed through the air.

“GINNY!” Padma’s shriek split the alley.

The spell struck Ginny full in the chest with a sickening *thud*, hurling her backward like a ragdoll. She slammed into a wrought iron café table, which cracked beneath her weight and collapsed in a tangle of splintered legs and broken chairs. Her body lay twisted, unmoving.

Hermione’s scream tipped from her throat. Something inside her *snapped*. Her wand was already in hand, her fingers trembling, adrenaline surging like fire through her veins.

“*Pentifias Totulus!*” she roared, voice cracking with fury.

Ria had only begun to pivot when the spell hit, locking her limbs with a jolt.

But it wasn’t enough. Hermione’s rage—the panic, the terror, the sheer bloody *grief* of seeing someone she loved fall—spilled over like a tidal wave.

“*Inimicus!*” she screamed, louder, stronger, her magic surging wildly through the wand.

Thick, cursed ropes shot from the tip of her wand, glowing faintly blue from the force behind the spell. They wrapped around Ria’s frozen form like snakes made of vengeance, binding her until she collapsed face-first onto the cobblestones, unconscious and bound.

The world tilted.

Hermione staggered back, clutching at her stomach. A sharp, stabbing pain tore through her abdomen like fire licking across her skin. Her vision blurred. Her knees buckled.

“Hermione!” Luna’s voice came from somewhere nearby, but it sounded underwater, distant.

Hermione gasped, hand pressed to the swell of her belly. The baby—*Martin*—was moving frantically, reacting to her magic, her fear, her anger. Another wave of pain crashed over her like a tidal surge, stronger than the last, and her muscles clenched, involuntarily, painfully.

Her knees hit the cobblestones.

“I,” she choked. “I’ve...been having contractions all day, but I thought—I thought it was just practice ones and—oh *fuck*—” Her voice cracked as liquid spilled beneath her, pooling around her knees.

“My water just broke,” she whispered, her hands trembling as she braced herself against the uneven ground. “Oh, God. It’s too early. I still have a month to go.”

Luna dropped to her side at once, her face pale, eyes wide. “You’re in labour Hermione. Calm down.”

“I can’t—Ginny—*Ginny!*” Hermione’s voice rose into a sob. “She needs help—someone needs to—”

“Padma’s with her!” Pansy barked, already conjuring magical barriers around the scene and sending a series of sharp silver sparks into the sky-emergency signal flares.

Hermione whimpered, another contraction hitting her like a whip of fire through her spine. Her wand clattered to the ground. Her hands pressed to the cobblestones, knuckles white.

“Shit, shit, it’s *fast*,” she gasped, tears burning her eyes. “Everything’s too fast.”

“Your body’s in overdrive from the spellwork,” Pansy muttered, casting cushioning charms around Hermione, voice clipped and sharp with controlled panic. “You poured too much into those curses. You *know* it was dangerous in your condition, Granger!”

“Harry Potter Leaves Auror Office, Joins Hogwarts Staff as Defence Professor”

After nearly a decade of service in the Auror Office, Harry Potter has officially taken up the post of Defence Against the Dark Arts professor at Hogwarts. Students are already buzzing about his hands-on lessons and duelling demos. One Slytherin fourth-year was overheard saying, ‘He’s a right nutter, but he made a Boggart explode and that was wicked.’

Ginny snorted into her tea. “Theo told me he cried when a Ravenclaw firstie gave him a thank-you biscuit shaped like a wand.”

“Neville told me he has it kept in a preservation charm,” Pansy added, grinning. “Showed it to every professor like it was a bloody Order of Merlin.”

“He’s *adorable*,” Luna sighed. “And terribly overwhelmed.”

“Who isn’t,” Hermione murmured, rubbing her belly as the babies gave a solid kick. “But he has help and according to Theo he’s taking it slow.”

“International War Council Head Hermione Malfoy Launches New Campaign to Further Protect Children of Conflict”

The campaign aims to expand the protective sanctuaries for children displaced by magical conflict, with support from allies in over 20 countries. Hermione Malfoy has been called the voice of a generation.

Hermione blinked at it. “That photo makes me look like I’m scolding the entire ICW.”

“You *were*,” Pansy said calmly. “They deserved it. Make them cry.”

Once they shopped to their hearts delight the girls headed to one of the new restaurants in the Alley. Outside, they stood chatting, bags in hand, the street glowing golden in the late afternoon sun. The air smelled of honeyed tarts and wand polish, and Hermione, for once, felt at ease, surrounded by laughter, friendship, and the kind of silly joy she hadn’t let herself savour in too long.

Until they heard it.

A *snick*, sharp and unnatural, tipped through the soft hum of Diagon Alley like a whiplash splitting the calm. Birds scattered from the eaves, and a ripple of magic shuddered through the air.

Hermione froze mid-laugh.

Near the edge of the café’s outdoor seating, the space beside an overflowing rubbish bin shimmered unnaturally, like heat on cobblestones—but colder, fouler. The light fractured.

Then—

“Did you see that?” Ginny hissed, her Quidditch instincts kicking in as she threw her arm in front of Hermione, stepping protectively into her path.

The shimmer twisted—and before their eyes, the unmistakable grotesque form of a beetle began to shift. Legs extended, the shell cracked and warped until, with a bone-like snap, a grunt, wild-eyed woman emerged from the shifting mass. Her hair was a rat’s nest of frizz and ink, and her robes hung like rotting curtains. Her wand was already raised.

“Hermione... she’s resting. Exhausted. But strong. Of course she is.”

“And the babies?” Luna asked softly, sitting upright.

Draco nodded. “A girl. And a boy. Both healthy. Loud as hell. Took after their mother, clearly.”

A few quiet chuckles rose through the room. Harry closed his eyes, relief written all over his face.

“We didn’t come out earlier because the Healers were running postnatal checks, monitoring Hermione’s vitals... stabilising her magic,” Draco explained, his voice dipping. “She lost too much blood. They were worried. I was so worried.”

Theo stood and clapped a hand on Draco’s shoulder. “We all were.”

“I know,” Draco whispered. He swallowed hard, his eyes sweeping across the room—and then landed on *her*.

Ginny.

She was curled beneath Blaise’s arm, tucked in a hospital-issued blanket, her legs curled under her like she might disappear if she moved too fast. Her freckles stood out stark against her too-pale skin, and her red hair—usually wild and blazing—looked limp with exhaustion. But her eyes... her eyes were still sharp. Still full of fire.

Still *alive*.

Draco didn’t think. He couldn’t.

He crossed the room in three unsteady strides and sank onto the low table in front of her, knees aching, hands trembling.

And then he reached out and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her into him with the kind of grip that said *don’t ever do that again and I’m so fucking glad you’re here*.

“Thank you,” he choked, burying his face in her hair. “Merlin, Gin, thank you.”

Her breath hitched. “Draco—”

“You *wound* her,” he whispered, his voice breaking completely now. “You saved *all* of them. Hermione. The babies. I—fuck, Red, I don’t know how to—”

Ginny pressed her face into his shoulder, shaking against him. “I couldn’t let her get hurt. Not her. Not again.”

“I know,” he said hoarsely. “But you were hit. I saw the table—it splintered. You could’ve—”

“*I didn’t*,” she cut in firmly, pulling back just enough to look at him. “And I’d do it again. A thousand times.”

Draco’s jaw clenched, the weight of it all pressing into his bones. “When I was exiled... when I thought I was not good enough for Hermione or anything... you were there. You didn’t have to be, but you were. You didn’t let me disappear. You fed me those godawful sandwiches, taught me how to do cleansing spells, and blimey, you made me soup in that huge pot.”

Ginny let out a watery laugh. “You called it a *magic cruck cauldron* for three months.”

He smiled, but it faded fast. “You’re family. You’ve *been* family. And today... I almost lost you.”

Ginny blinked rapidly, tears brimming. “I wasn’t going to let Rita take her. I saw her wand. I saw the spell. I just moved. I didn’t think. I love her. I love *both* of you. I wasn’t going to watch another person I love die.”

Ours To Keep

Draco's shoulders shook with silent emotion. He pulled her into another hug and whispered fiercely, "You'll never have to prove that. Ever again."

"I wasn't trying to prove anything," she said softly. "She's my best friend. She's my sister. I *love* her."

"I know," he breathed. "And I chose *you*. You're my family too."

Blaise stepped closer then, placing a hand on Draco's back, steadying the both of them. His other arm was wrapped tightly around Ginny's waist, like he hadn't let go since the moment the Healers had cleared her.

"She's alright," Blaise said quietly. "Mostly bruised and high as a kite. She's been trying to sneak a Pepper Imp past the potion restriction, but I caught her."

"Traitor," Ginny muttered into Draco's shoulder.

Draco gave a breathless laugh and finally pulled back, brushing her hair from her forehead.

"You ever scare me like that again, Zabini, I'm hexing Blaise and blaming you."

"I'll take it," she whispered, voice cracking. "As long as you're all okay."

"We are," Draco promised, his voice like a vow. "Because of you."

He stood slowly, wiping his eyes as Pansy approached, her face tight with emotion and relief.

"Scorpius and Cassi are alright," she said gently, sensing the moment but stepping in anyway.

"They're with the Grangers. Cassi's been nesting in Hermione's mum's scarf and demanding a 'celebration cake' because she has a 'baby sissy and baby bruvver' now."

Draco smiled through his tears. "Good. That's good. I don't want them seeing Hermione until she's rested a bit more. She needs space."

"They'll come later," Neville said. "We've got it covered."

"Thank you. They'll love them. The moment they meet." Draco exhaled and turned back to the group, his voice a bit steadier now, but still full of awe. "Do you want to come see them? Hermione says she wants to see you all."

The nods came instantly. No hesitation. No second thoughts.

Theo was already dragging Harry to his feet. Luna and Padma followed arm in arm. Neville gave Pansy his hand, and Blaise helped Ginny up slowly, casting a subtle cushioning charm on her feet just in case.

"You're not going to tell us their names?" Padma asked, as they followed Draco toward the ward corridor.

Draco smirked, glancing back over his shoulder. "You'll find out soon enough."

"Cryptic bastard," Theo muttered. "You love the dramatics."

"Pot. Kettle. Chaos incarnate," Harry said, elbowing him with a grin.

Draco opened the door to Hermione's room and stepped aside, letting them in one by one. The ward was dimly lit, warm with soft golden lamplight and faint magical melodies that pulsed gently through the walls, enchanted to soothe new mothers and their children. The air smelled of healing potions and lavender-infused spellwork.

Hermione lay propped against enchanted pillows, hair still slightly damp, her face pale but radiant in that quiet, powerful way only mothers could achieve—part exhaustion, part triumph, part something ancient and unshakable. Vela was curled against her shoulder, tiny fists clutching the edge of her hospital gown, her little mouth slack and pink from feeding.

Head over heels016



A few hours later, Hermione met Ginny, Pansy, Luna, and Padma in Diagon Alley, swanning through *Star Thread & Stitch* like queens.

The boutique was breathtaking, with charms woven into every surface to shimmer in soft pastel hues. Gowns floated midair in enchanted displays, silks whispered as they passed, and every mirror offered compliments with varying degrees of sass.

"Oh, this one says I've got an arse that could end a bloodline," Pansy announced with a smirk, twirling in a clingy emerald dress.

"Sounds accurate," Ginny muttered, fanning herself. "Though Blaise still insists you flirt with the waiters just to keep him on his toes. You know he's very protective of you."

Pansy smirked. "Please. I flirt with everyone. Keeps *Neville* on his toes, too."

Padma rolled her eyes fondly. "You're incorrigible."

"I'm *charming*," Pansy corrected, striking a pose in the mirror.

"You're lucky Neville finds chaos attractive," Luna added dreamily, adjusting a lilac sash around Hermione's waist. "Otherwise we'd have had to banish you years ago."

"Rude," Pansy sniffed. "I'd haunt you in lace and heels."

Ginny grinned. "We'd expect nothing less."

Hermione was laughing as Luna draped another flowing lavender gown over her bump, tilting her head as if consulting the stars for approval. "You look like an ancient forest queen," she declared. "Or a very powerful pastry."

"That's oddly flattering," Hermione said, rubbing a hand over her belly as the baby kicked. "I'll take it."

They fussed over fabrics, laughed over tea in the boutique's floating lounge, and snapped charmed photos—Pansy teasing them mercilessly as she directed the frames. "Theo's making another collage wall," she explained. "Says it's his way of pretending he was included in the girl things. He is so dramatic sometimes."

They flipped through the boutique's enchanted newspaper rack while waiting for scones. The headlines hovered midair, each framed in glittering gold:

"Lucius Malfoy Hosts Golf Charity Tournament: Proceeds to Fund Muggle-born Scholarships at Hogwarts"

In a surprise collaboration with Dr. Richard Granger, father of Golden Girl Hermione Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy is hosting the first ever Wizarding Golf Tournament at Malfoy Manor. Sources say the idea came from a conversation with Draco and Hermione Malfoy about integration and atonement.

"I never thought I'd live to see the day," Padma murmured, eyebrows raised. "Lucius hosting a muggle sport tournament for Wizards. Has the world gone mad?"

Ours To Keep

His jaw tightened. “And what if she is Granger?”

Hermione softened. “I refuse to let her rob me of these moments. I’m nesting, I’m glowing—don’t argue with me—and I want a bloody dress. I’ve earned it.”

Draco studied her eyes full of both pride and worry. He ran his thumb over her hand where it rested on her belly.

“Alright love. But you wear the emerald ward bracelet I gave you. And you send me a Patronus the moment anything feels off.”

“I promise.”

He kissed her again, slower this time, lips pressed to her temple. “You’re impossible.”

“And yet,” she murmured, “ten years later and you’re still utterly besotted.” He smirked.

“Disgustingly so.”

And as the children resumed their babbling, and breakfast devolved into another battle between enchanted napkins and rogue toast, Hermione thought, not for the first time, that even with a war behind them and uncertainty ahead, they had carved something real. Something worth protecting. Even from Rita bloody Skeeter.

Hermione was still smiling when she glanced at the time. “Right, I should get dressed. Pansy will have a conniption if I show up late. Last time, she threatened to hex my toenails bubblegum pink.”

Draco’s brow furrowed. “You’re still sure about going?”

“Yes.” She turned and kissed him lightly. “I love you for worrying, but I want to feel normal for a few hours. Let the girls fuss over me. Let me feel pretty and ridiculous and pampered.”

He watched her, gaze soft but hesitant. “You’re already all of those things. Especially ridiculous.”

She swatted his shoulder. “Git.”

“I’ll make sure the house doesn’t collapse while you’re gone and I’ll take the kids to your parent’s house before I head to the hospital,” he said solemnly. “Though if Cassi declares herself queen of the jam kingdom again, I make no promises to being on time.”

Cassiopeia gasped. “I *AM* Queen Jam!”

And with that, Hermione waddled—*gracefully*, thank you very much—up the stairs, hand on the rail, heart full. Their world was messy and loud, imperfect and unpredictable. She paused at the landing, one hand resting on her belly as a tight, slow wave of pressure curled through her abdomen. A contraction. Not the first one today.

She closed her eyes, breathing through it, counting backward from ten the way her Healers had taught her for her other two pregnancies.

It wasn’t quite time yet. Probably just Braxton Hicks. Still... they were getting closer together so she kept it to herself.

If Draco knew, he’d lose what little chill he had left and insist she lie flat on a sofa wrapped in seventeen diagnostic charms until the babies decided to arrive. And she *really* wanted to go dress shopping first.

So she rolled her shoulders, lifted her chin, and continued on.

One foot after the other.

Head over heels016

Volans was nestled against her opposite side, wrapped in a soft grey blanket, his chest rising in slow, peaceful rhythm.

Her eyes met Draco’s the moment he stepped through the door.

And she smiled.

That smile—soft, real, knowing—was enough to undo him all over again. He walked to her side, brushing a hand across her curls and pressing a kiss to her temple. “They’re here,” he murmured.

Hermione nodded, eyes already misty as she looked past him at their family.

Theo was the first to break the silence.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” he whispered, clutching his chest. “They’re so *small*. And *ugh-cute*. Like magical potatoes with perfect eyebrows.”

Pansy rolled her eyes and smacked his arm. “Shut it, Theo. You’ll scare them.”

Ginny had a hand over her mouth, tears already spilling down her cheeks as she stepped closer, Blaise steady behind her.

“Oh—Hermione,” she whispered, her voice cracking as she stared at Vela. “She looks like you. But she *glared* at me like Draco. You both make the most perfect babies.”

“She glared at *me* too,” Pansy added, sounding faintly traumatised. “I think I’ve been marked.”

“She’s selective,” Hermione said with a tired laugh. “But she’s perfect. Both of them are.”

“Alright,” Draco said, his hand resting protectively on Hermione’s shoulder. “Time for proper introductions.”

Everyone leaned in a little closer.

“This is Vela Gin,” Hermione said, her voice thick with emotion as she kissed her daughter’s soft hair. “Vela, for the stars—she’s fierce and burning and impossibly bright. And Gin... for Ginny.”

Ginny gasped and covered her mouth again, her shoulders shaking.

“You saved my life today,” Hermione went on. “You’ve protected me since the way, since before. You’re my sister in every way that matters. And I want our daughter to grow up with that kind of fire in her bones.”

Ginny let out a strangled sob. “You didn’t have to name her after me,” she said, voice trembling.

“I did,” Hermione said softly. “Because she wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for you.”

Draco stepped in then, gently placing a hand over Ginny’s. “You were there for Hermione... and for me.”

Ginny shook her head as if to laugh, but it came out in a sob. “I’m going to spoil the shit out of her...well I spoil all of them really...your kids have my heart but these little nuggets will be special.”

“Good,” Draco said. “We expect nothing less.”

He turned then, reaching for the bundle curled against Hermione’s other side. “And this... is Volans Teo. Another constellation—quiet, steady, and a little mysterious. And Teo, for the most insufferable, chaotic, kind-hearted bastard I’ve ever met. Switched the name up a bit. Can’t have you being too smug.”

Theo blinked, stunned. “You’re joking.”

Ouns To Keep

"No," Hermione said with a smile, her eyes shining. "He's already got your hair. And the attitude."

"Merlin help us," Harry muttered.

Theo staggered back a step like he'd been struck. "Well, shit," he breathed, blinking fast. "I'm honoured. Deeply moved. Emotionally overwhelmed. I shall now demand a crown and visitation rights."

"He already demanded to be called Prince Theo of the Star Court," Hermione added dryly.

Theo beamed. "I'm so proud. Don't worry, Volans, I shall teach you how to curse in eight languages and master passive-aggressive compliments by age four. Scorpius will aid me."

"You'll do no such thing," Draco said. "You'll be supervised."

"By who? You?" Theo laughed. "You let Hermione rule you. Your judgement is flawed at best."

Everyone laughed—and just like that, the tension from the day began to melt into warmth. While everyone hovered around the babies—Theo whispering poetic nonsense to Volans, Pansy offering parenting tips with questionable accuracy as if she were an expert, and Blaise trying to charm Vela's tiny booties to flash Slytherin green—Harry lingered near the foot of Hermione's bed, hands in his pockets, awkward and hesitant.

She noticed.

"Harry?" she asked gently.

He stepped forward, eyes flicking from her face to the twins. "They're beautiful."

"Thank you," she said softly. "We're lucky."

He nodded. "I'm... glad I'm here."

"I am too," Hermione said, tears building in her eyes.

Harry knelt beside her, gently taking her free hand. "I'm going to be better this time. I want to be in their lives. In *your* life. No more hiding. No more running. I want to be the person you believed in."

"You already are," she whispered. "You came back."

Harry kissed her hand, voice thick. "Then I'm staying."

Just then, a faint *pop* echoed from the windowsill. An owl appeared, a small stack of wrapped gifts charmed to hover behind it.

Draco opened the note attached to the nearest package, brows lifting.

"Narcissa and Lucius," he murmured.

Hermione blinked. "Already?"

"They can't leave the Manor and she's been preparing for this," he said, unfolding the parchment. "Aha, they've sent presents. Seven of them. And a list of acceptable middle names for any future Malfoy children since we decided to name these after chaos and fire. That tapestry updated rather quickly didn't it?" He finished with a laugh.

Theo cackled. "Please tell me one of them is Marius."

Draco deadpanned, "Also suggested: Hyperion, Octavian, and Thaddeus the Third."

"Bless her," Pansy snorted. "She's already nesting from afar. Four grandbabies. Definitely a Malfoy record that will never be beat."

"I'll write to them," Hermione said softly, stroking Volans' head. "They deserve to know how much this means. Hopefully, they'll be able to meet them soon."

Head over heels016

Draco groaned and summoned a flannel with a flick of his wand. It hovered midair like a ghostly guardian before swooping in on Cassi, who screamed with joy and darted under the table.

"It's the wipery beast! Save me, Toast Boy!" she cried.

Scorpius grabbed a napkin and dove after her. "Don't worry Cass, I'll vanquish it!" From beneath the table came the sound of delighted shrieking and thudding feet.

"I'm outnumbered in this house," Draco muttered, picking up the wand with mock dignity. "Even the furniture takes your side."

"You married a war hero," Hermione said airily. "Comes with perks."

Draco walked over and kissed the side of her head, arms slipping around her waist as his hands slid to rest over her belly. "And here I thought I was the hero in this marriage."

She leaned back into him. "You're the backup singer, darling. A very pretty one."

Both Cassi and Scorp screamed with joy as Draco stepped beside her again, setting his now-cold tea down with a resigned sigh. "They're *bloody feral* before eight o'clock."

She smiled while looking at her husband. "They're *ours*. And they're happy."

He looked at her sideways, then crouched slightly to press his lips to her belly, murmuring, "If you come out half as loud as your siblings, I'm running away to the Alps."

The baby, or babies, kicked in response. Hermione winced and laughed. "Apparently, baby disagrees."

Cassiopeia popped up from beneath the table, her curls even wilder than before. "Mummy, Mummy! We saved the kitchen! Scorp threw a napkin and I ROARED and then the beast went away!"

"Brilliant work, sweetheart," Hermione said, accepting a very damp, very jam-streaked cuddle.

Before Draco could respond, a sharp tapping interrupted them. A tawny owl sat on the windowsill, looking thoroughly unimpressed by the breakfast chaos and with more pride than an owl should have. Hermione opened the window and untied the scroll. She unrolled it and scanned it quickly.

"It's from Pansy. She says all is set for the baby shower happening next weekend at the Manor, and oh the girls are dragging me to Diagon Alley this afternoon to pick out a dress. New boutique called *Star Thread & Stitch*."

Draco froze mid-sip. "What? You're *eight* months pregnant Hermione."

Hermione shot him a glare. "And?"

He held up his hands begging for mercy. "And I'm just saying...shouldn't you be, I don't know, reclining like a queen instead of stomping about Diagon Alley with a herd of witches and your swollen ankles?"

"I have a lot of things swollen right now, Malfoy," she said sweetly, "but my patience is not one of them. Stop being overprotective Malfoy."

Scorpius giggled. "Mummy's cranky! Do you need a nap?"

"I'm not and I do not," Hermione muttered, eyes narrowing at Draco.

"Fine. I'll stay calm. But only if an Auror escort goes with you."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm not being followed like I'm still on the run. I need to live, Draco. We can't keep hiding just because Rita Skeeter might be lurking in some cupboard."

mummy?”

Draco, smiling, looked up at him. “Already written. It’s on the fridge.”

His oldest beamed. One of their traditions is reading the daily notes Draco leaves Hermione on the fridge. Every day a new one, ever since they moved in together all those years ago in Australia, this was the one thing he has never stopped doing for her. Sometimes its small reminders, sometimes its poems or quirky little messages, sometimes its just a word that says more than a sentence ever could.

“Is it a love one again?”

“Of course,” Hermione said softly, brushing a kiss to the top of Cassi’s head. “Your father’s quite the romantic.”

“Is romantic when you kiss and say weird things?” Cassiopeia asked, scrunching her nose.

“Exactly,” Draco said. “And then you get jam all over your face and live happily ever after.”

“Ew,” Scorpius muttered while making his way to the fridge to read his father’s latest note.

“To my terrifyingly brilliant wife, who still manages to outsmart me even when waddling like those flightless aquatic birds you like to much,” he announced with great pride, sounding out each syllable slowly. Hermione choked on a laugh from the kitchen counter where she was cutting apples.

“That she does,” Draco said absently, opening one cupboard after another with increasing annoyance. His reading glasses perched on top of his head like a crown of frustration, a half-drunk cup of tea floating behind him. “Love, have you seen the bloody hospital forms? I left them right—”

“Under the moon bear in the nursery,” Hermione said, pointing with her wand. “Same as your wand. Again.”

Draco didn’t move. “Summon them for me?”

She raised an eyebrow. “Say *please*.”

He dropped the parchment he’d been holding and turned, giving her the most exasperated expression. “Please, my luminous, ferocious, goddess of a wife, terror of bureaucratic paperwork and bringer of sexy destruction.”

Hermione snorted and gave her wand a lazy flick. Both the wand and the forms came zipping through the air-smacking Draco squarely in the chest. “Oof, bloody hell.”

“Daddy, what’s a bringer of sexy destruction?” Scorpius suddenly asked, blinking up at him with far too much curiosity.

Draco froze, mid-sip.

Hermione looked like she might actually combust.

“Er...what?” he asked cautiously, glancing at Hermione for help.

“That’s what you said. When you were being dramatic just now,” Scorpius clarified, eyes wide with innocent interest. “Bringer of sexy destruction. What does it *mean*?”

“It means,” Hermione said briskly, “that Daddy is very silly and should not say things before breakfast.”

Draco coughed. “It’s an adult term. You’re not old enough yet, Scorp.”

Scorpius crossed his arms. “But I’m five and three-quarters. That’s basically six. Six is big.” Cassiopeia nodded solemnly. “I’m two. That’s *two hands*.” She held up both sticky palms.

“Exactly,” Hermione murmured. “Two very sticky, jammy hands.”

Draco leaned down, kissed her, and nodded.

Later, after Vela had laughed again and Volans was contentedly snuggled between them both, Draco cleared his throat and glanced toward Blaise and Luna, the corners of his mouth twitching in that rare way that meant something *mischievous* and *sappy* was about to happen.

“We have a bit of news,” he said, tone casual. Too casual.

Hermione smirked knowingly. “Though let’s be honest—you lot already knew this was coming.”

“Still,” Draco added, “we want it said properly. For the record. And for dramatic effect.”

Everyone leaned in. Luna was already clutching Padma’s hand like she’d been waiting for this her entire life.

“Vela’s godfather,” Hermione said, turning to Blaise, “is you.”

Blaise blinked. Then blinked again. “Oh, *thank fuck*,” he exhaled. “I was ready to fight Theo for it.”

Theo raised a brow. “Mate, we *agreed* I’m a menace to infants until they can talk back. Besides I already have Scorp.”

“You’re calm, dependable, and terrifying when necessary,” Hermione continued speaking to Blaise. “You love Ginny like she’s magic. You’ve been there for both of us in ways we can never repay.”

“And let’s be real,” Draco added, “Vela’s going to be clever, stubborn, and devastatingly charming. She’ll need you to teach her how to win an argument with nothing but a well-placed eyebrow.”

Blaise wiped his eyes subtly, then stood and bowed dramatically. “I accept. She will be spoiled, protected, and possibly taught a few hexes her parents should never find out about.”

“We *will* find out,” Hermione warned, eyes narrowing.

“I’ll deny everything.”

“And Volans...” Draco turned then to Luna, who had tears brimming in her eyes before he even finished.

“Volans’ godmother is you, Luna.”

Luna gasped softly. “Really? He’s mine?”

“We always said you’d be the one,” Hermione said. “We just didn’t realise we’d get lucky enough to have *two babies*—and not have to make either of you share.”

“It’s fate,” Luna whispered, brushing her fingers over Volans’ soft curls. “He’s so still. But I can *feel* him thinking. He’s already asking questions.”

“He’s already got a star chart, doesn’t he?” Draco asked knowingly, rolling his eyes.

“Oh, three,” Luna beamed. “One for his sun sign, one for his rising, and one for the specific cosmic alignment of the room when he was born.”

Padma let out a soft groan. “I warned you.”

“I accept,” Luna said formally, turning to Hermione and Draco. “He will grow up with wonder, and wildness, and a heart full of stars.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“And now,” Draco said, pulling his family closer, “they both have someone of their own.” “No shading,” Blaise said, holding up a hand. “Just as we bloody planned.”

Luna nodded solemnly, high fiving Blaise. “The dream lives on. Just like the starts predicted.”

Ours To Keep

Everyone laughed but beneath the humour was something deeper. Something unspoken but universally understood in that room.

That these children—Vela and Volans—alongside Scorpius and Cassiopeia, would be and are eternally loved. Not just by their parents, but by something greater.

A village.

A mismatched, glorious, loyal-as-hell village made of misfits and warriors, survivors and dreamers, chaos goblins and quiet anchors. A family built not by blood, but by choice. Bound by scars and shared laughter, by second chances and stubborn hope.

In that small, golden-lit room, with babies wrapped in starlight and hearts laid bare, the air shimmered with something sacred.

Laughter danced through the air.

Hands reached out to hold, to rock, to protect.

Old wounds felt just a little lighter.

And two new lives began, surrounded by more love than the world knew what to do with.

It had taken years.

It had taken war. Exile. Pain. Healing. Terrifying choices. Impossible forgiveness.

But they had made it.

Together.

They had rewritten the legacy they were born into. Chosen softness in a world that once demanded steel. Found love where it wasn't supposed to exist.

And from this moment forward, it was *theirs*.

Messy. Beautiful. Unapologetically loud. And best of all, FREE.

Theirs to keep.

The End.



Chapter 24

Shopping in Diagon Alley

“Some storms come not to destroy, but to reveal the strength of what was built in calm.”

The Malfoy townhouse hummed with quiet life, that sweet, lazy kind that comes with slow mornings and full hearts. Sunlight slanted in through the charmed kitchen windows and the jam on Cassiopeia’s nose was now spreading, somehow migrating to her curls and the hem of her little corduroy overalls. She had taken it upon herself to butter the toast Draco had made for her—using, naturally, her hands instead of the spoon sitting not two inches away.

“Cassi,” Hermione said in that singsong voice she’d mastered after five years of parenting, “what did we say about using spoons and not your fingers?”

Cassi looked up, wide-eyed and unbothered. “I’m a jam monster,” she declared proudly.

“Roar!”

Scorpius immediately picked up on the cue and leapt down from his chair, brandishing a crust like a sword. “I’ll fight the jam monster!” he shouted heroically, pointing the toast at his sister. “No sticky creatures allowed in this kitchen!”

“You’re not a knight, you’re a toast boy!” Cassi shrieked with glee, flinging a blueberry at him.

It splatted against his jumper. “Oi!” Scorpius gasped, affronted. “This is my good dragon shirt!”

“Children,” Draco warned in his best attempt at a stern voice, which was entirely undone by the crinkle of amusement around his eyes. “If a single crumb ends up in my tea again, I swear to Merlin—”

Hermione leaned against the counter, hand instinctively rubbing her belly in slow, thoughtful circles. The baby was active this morning, responding to the chaos like it had already been sorted into its house and was competing for the Quidditch Cup. It moved everywhere. Hermione couldn’t tell where one leg started and the other finished. Sometimes she did wonder if it was twins in there.

Scorpius climbed back into his seat. “Sorry Daddy! Can I have today’s note to read to

Head over heels016

you will have two now. Brava by the way”

“Please no,” grumbled Draco.

“Too late, Red already had it printed and framed. She told me via floo just now as I was talking to Blaise.”

Hermione shook her head, still beaming. Then, casually seeking to change the topic before her husband committed morning murder, she asked, “And how’s Harry?”

Theo went uncharacteristically still and then grinned like a Cheshire Cat.

Draco made a strangled sound and immediately threw a pillow over his head. “Nope. Don’t tell. Don’t want to know. I don’t need that image haunting me while I’m trying to work.”

Theo just smirked and turned to look at his brother’s wife. “Let’s just say your favourite Chaos Goblin might have spent the night turning Harry Potter’s world upside down.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped. “Theo! Oh Godric!”

“What?” he said, all faux innocence. “We had *tea*. And *feelings*. And *more tea*. And a *lot* of touching.” He paused. “Emotionally, of course. I’m very respectful.”

“You’re a menace,” Draco mumbled from beneath the pillow.

Theo raised his croissant like a toast. “Thank you, darling”

Hermione sat back, watching the two men she loved in different ways argue like siblings over the end of the world, or breakfast. Her fingers traced the edge of the paper still spread over the duvet. Ron’s name was there. So was Rita’s. But more than that, so were hers. And Draco’s. And now Harry’s.

And for once, not a single sentence misrepresented them.

No lies. No shame. No twisted half-truths.

Only forward.

“Let’s go pick up the kids,” she said after a long moment. “I want them to see their names in the paper—just not yet. But one day.”

Draco lifted his head. “We’re telling them their father destroyed corruption in the press, right?”

“And their uncles made half of Magical Britain question their news choices.”

Theo chimed in. “And more importantly that their uncle Theo taught Harry Potter what a *real world* can do.”

“Get out of my bed Theodore. My Room. My House. Now,” screamed Draco while hexing Theo with stinging jinxes until he left through the floo laughing and screeching.

Hermione facepalmed, but she was laughing. Laughing in that deep, aching way that felt like healing.

And in that moment—in their shared ridiculous, fractured, joyful life—
Everything finally felt right.