

Stillness

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Stillness

by [ittyxbitty](#)

Summary

Hermione didn't know how to get over the war. She thought returning to Hogwarts would help but after a break down the most unlikely person helped her up and taught her that it was ok to not be ok.

Notes

This story has just come pouring out and I can't seem to focus on anything until its finished. It's 80 percent completed so I will be updating daily on it.

****TRIGGER WARNINGS****

PTSD, SELF HARM, SUICIDE ATTEMPT, ALCOHOL ABUSE, SEXUAL SITUATIONS, MENTAL ILLNESS.

THESE CHARACTERS ARE GOING THROUGH SOME SHIT SO THEY ARE NOT MENTALLY HEALTHY PEOPLE.

THE RELATIONSHIPS ARE TOXIC, THERE WILL BE AN ATTEMPT AT SUICIDE, THERE WILL BE MENTIONS OF SELF HARMING.

Chapter 1

War. They say that war is hell but it's so much more than that. In hell, it's an endless, eternal suffering but with war, well, there's an after. There comes a time where you have to look at yourself in the mirror and rationalize it all. There's a silence after war, a stillness that you forget exists during. It's like being born, going from the calm soothing softness of the womb and suddenly getting thrown into the chaos of a delivery room, except it's the opposite. One moment you're one wrong move from death, nothing matters but your next spell, and then suddenly, everything stops. Everything is hushed voices and soothing words and admiration. Then you're expected to move on.

Hermione didn't know how to move on. Her mind didn't know how to adjust to the stillness. She didn't know how to enter a room and not immediately seek out each exit. Didn't know how to feel comfortable without her wand on her. Couldn't stop the way her body tensed at loud noises, or the list of curses she could use that flies through her mind when she's unexpectedly touched. She had watched everyone cope, watched Harry throw himself into rebuilding Hogwarts and Ron bury himself in his family. Watch Seamus drink himself into stupors with Parvati. Saw Neville lose himself in Luna. Percy threw himself into his work, Ginny into Harry, and no one had seen George while he adjusted to life without his twin. Molly mothered all of them a bit extra and Arthur fretted over Molly. Everyone had something that helped ease them back into normal life, everyone but Hermione.

When McGonagall approached and told them the school was reopening, that everyone who had lost their 7th year was being welcomed back to finish up their schooling, Hermione had hoped that this was it. School could be the thing that helped her move on. School was familiar, something she was good at, she could do school. But as the Hogwarts Express wound its way through the countryside her stomach began knotting up and she had to shove her hands under her legs to get them to stop shaking. As they approached the newly rebuilt Hogwarts she couldn't help but see the bodies. Colin, Lavender, Remus, Tonks, Fred. She could feel them, even though everything had been put back together and wiped clean, the school was soaked in their blood.

As they walked into the Great Hall, now a dining room once again, she couldn't help but see where the bodies had laid. She reached into her robes to touch her wand, feeling the way her magic pulled itself toward it, and allowed it to sooth her slightly. Her eyes scanned the room quickly and found 5 doors, 3 of which she knew exactly where they lead. If need be she could be out of the school in under 2 minutes.

"I can't believe they let him come back." Ginny's voice interrupted her paranoid thoughts.

Hermione looked toward the other girl then followed her line of sight, eyes landing on Draco Malfoy, seated at the Slytherin table looking impossibly bored. He had dark circles under his eyes and his hair appeared wind blown, as she watched, he ran his hand through it, furthering the effect. He appeared paler than before, like he hadn't seen sunshine in months, but Hermione hadn't seen him since the final battle so maybe she just wasn't used to how light his skin actually was anymore.

"He had to. Part of his probation." Harry muttered as they sat at the Gryffindor table.

Harry had gone to bat for the Malfoys after the war, and had been the only reason Draco and Narcissa escaped Azkaban. Lucius didn't get so lucky, there was no denying what he had done, but since Narcissa wasn't marked and had lied to Voldemort about Harry being dead, they had nothing to charge her with. Draco was just a product of his environment, had no choice on taking the mark, and Harry had told the Wizengamot of his hesitation that night on the Astronomy Tower and how he hadn't identified Harry when they had been captured.

"Bloody wanker, should be in Azkaban." Ron muttered.

"He doesn't deserve that, Ron." Hermione said, her eyes still glued to the blonde.

"He's marked. Anyone that holds that mark should be locked up." Ron snapped.

"Drop it." Harry said, trying to stop the fight that was brewing.

Ron and Hermione had been bickering about the leniency that had been shown during the trials for weeks. She had agreed with the decision to put the younger ones on probation, even if they were marked. They were kids, just like her, Harry, and Ron were. They deserved a chance. Ron disagreed, vocally. He had even fought with Harry on his decision to testify for the Malfoys.

Hermione just huffed while Ron rolled his eyes. Her fingers found her left arm, unconsciously, and she began pressing into the scars that lay under the sleeve of her robe. McGonagall rose at the podium and welcomed them, with a wave of her wand the first years entered and the sorting began. Hermione couldn't seem to focus on it though, instead her eyes kept being drawn back to Malfoy.

He was staring blankly down at the table, his arms folded in front of him. The younger Slytherins looked toward him fearfully, but the few that returned for their 7th year acted like he wasn't even there. Just Blaise Zabini, Theodore Nott, and Pansy Parkinson acknowledged him. It made sense though, they were on probation as well, only Nott actually holding a mark but Zabini and Parkinson had played roles in the war as well. They were whispering to each other and glancing at Malfoy, almost looking worried.

It took Hermione a few minutes to realize Malfoys fingers were moving, that he was dragging his right thumb nail back and forth across the fabric of his left sleeve. His eyebrows furrowed for a moment before his eyes snapped up and locked into hers. Hermione sucked in a breath and knew she should look away, but she couldn't. She could see it in his eyes, etched into every line of his face. He hadn't been able to move on either. He still wore the war, just as he had once wore a death eater mask.

Food appeared on the tables and Hermione was jostled slightly as Ron reached to fill his plate. She jumped, gripping her wand, as her eyes scanned the hall again, 5 doors, could be out of the school in 2 minutes. She took a deep breath, trying to settle her racing heart, as she quickly filled her plate despite not having an appetite. Her gaze flitted back over to Malfoy, only to find his seat empty.

The first day of classes was surreal, Hermione felt like she was in a dream and the feeling intensified when they were waiting to enter potions. Hermione leaned against the wall, feeling the cold dungeon stones cool her back through her robe while Harry and Ron talked beside her. She allowed her eyes to fall shut for a moment but when the hall of students fell completely silent, her eyes flew open, immediately on guard. She scanned the area but couldn't see what had caused the tension. Glancing at the student in front of her she followed his glare straight to Malfoy.

Malfoy was now leaning one shoulder against the wall, watching his wand as he twirled it between his fingers. He looked bored, unaware that the rest of the students had tensed at his appearance. His eyes followed a crack in the ceiling until he was suddenly looking at Hermione. His steel gaze scanned her, from bushy hair to her black shoes, then he turned away. No scathing remark, no curl of the lip, no expression at all.

The door finally opened and they all rushed inside. Hermione didn't actually hear a word Slughorn said during the lesson. Her eyes were trained on the fire warming her cauldron, wondering if she touched it, would it simply burn her? Or would it wake her up? Maybe still in that tent in the Forest of Dean? Because this had to be a dream. How could she be sitting in a classroom after being instrumental in bringing down one of the darkest wizards of their time? How could Harry and Ron be beside her making jokes after watching so many people they loved die? How could Draco Malfoy look right at her and not say something rude or antagonizing?

That night Hermione excused herself early, assuring her friends she was just tired, but as she lay in her bed she tried to figure out how they were all so ok. None of them wanted to talk about the war, they just wanted to move on, they had grieved, found their peace, they didn't need to be reminded. She had read all the books, books about dealing with death and trauma and even delved into some about the human psyche, but she just couldn't seem to let it all go. Maybe this was just who she was now. No longer the happy curious young witch who had entered Hogwarts when she was eleven but a haunted, lost soul who couldn't find her footing in a new world.

Chapter 2

The days dissolved around her as they all melted back into life at Hogwarts. A week later and Hermione felt like she was floating through it all. Occasionally, if she closed her eyes, she could pretend, pretend that the war hadn't happened, pretend that she was fine, pretend that everything was how it used to be. But then she would open her eyes and everyone would be happy and relaxed but she was still just there. She could smile and chat and study all she wanted but she knew it was all fake, an act so her friends wouldn't worry, and she hated herself for it.

During breakfast she watched Malfoy out of the corner of her eye. If he was only holding court at the Slytherin table like he always used to, she could pretend, but instead he sat beside Nott, Zabini and Parkinson, lost in his thoughts, ignoring everyone. He was a constant reminder that it had all been real. The new Malfoy, the one who caused tension in every room he walked in, the one people glared at and whispered about, constantly reminded her that she wasn't the only one forever changed.

Hermione drifted through her day, chatting with her friends and laughing when she was supposed to. She raised her hand in class and answered the professors questions but she barely paid attention to the lessons, she already knew most of it anyway. As she made her way to transfiguration she watched as Malfoy was shoved into the wall. His jaw muscle twitched as his dark eyes turned to the group that had run into him and Hermione clutched her wand. Malfoy just turned however, instead of retaliating, and Hermione watched him go with her wand in her hand.

Hermione made her way through the Entrance Hall that night, heading back to the common room from the library, when a loud bang echoed through the space. In one swift move, she had her wand drawn and leveled on a poor third year who had dropped his book. Hermione's heart felt like it was going to burst from her chest as the boy cringed away from her.

"Sorry." She breathed out before turning and bolting out the front door.

She didn't know where she was going, she couldn't stop the images that were flooding her mind, couldn't stop seeing their faces, hearing the screams. Finally it all became too much and she fell to her knees, finding herself beside The Black Lake. She cradled her head in her hands as the air rushed from her lungs. She wanted to scream but knew she couldn't. She couldn't let all that come back because if she did it would eat her alive.

"Are you ok?" A soft voice broke the still air and her head whipped up.

Draco Malfoy stood before her, hands shoved in the pockets of his black pants, half his blonde hair hidden by the hood of his robe. His face was expressionless as he watched her and for a moment it occurred to her that she should be embarrassed. Instead she took a shaky breath and turned to look out across the water.

"No." She murmured, not knowing why she told him the truth but knowing he would see right through a lie. "I don't think I am."

He fell beside her, knees bent up and arms resting over them. He heaved out a sigh, his breath floating in the air for a moment before disappearing. She watched him from the corner of her eye, waiting. Waiting for the insults, for the teasing, for him to call her a mudblood, for him to act like Malfoy. He had ignored them this whole week, she didn't think she had actually seen him speak to anyone, and now he was sitting beside her, staring across the lake.

"What are you doing?" She asked him as he continued to ignore her, secretly hoping to get a rise out of him and he would act like he used to.

"I came out here for a reason. I'm not going to let the Gryffindor princess's breakdown prevent me from the only part of my day I can tolerate." He told her blandly, his eyes never leaving the water.

She just breathed out a soft 'oh' as she followed his gaze. The sound of the water seemed to ease her pounding heart, and for once her mind quieted. She allowed her mind to drown in the soft waves of the lake, finding the softness of it all nice instead of unnerving like she usually did when things were too quiet. It was supposed to be quiet here, the sound of the water was supposed to be soft, the air was meant to be still. The wind brushed over her and the trees rustled gently behind her. The sound of something metallic drew her attention back to Malfoy, only to find him unscrewing a flask. He took a quick draw from it before silently offering it to her. She eyed it until his head turned and looked at her.

"It's not poison." He muttered, his gray eyes cold.

She took the flask and tilted a small amount into her mouth. Fire whiskey burned down her throat and she tried to fight the cough that it brought on. She took a shaky breath before taking another swig, then passed it back to him. She could feel it burning through her, warming her blood and fighting the chill that the wind brought. She had never drank much, never liked the idea of her inhibitions being lowered, but she had to admit that she enjoyed the way it seemed to dull her thoughts and warm her body, almost like touching fire.

Hermione wasn't sure how long they sat there, in silence, passing the flask back and forth. Regardless before she was ready for it, the stillness around them was broken as a figure crested the hill beside them.

"Draco." Nott called out and Malfoys eyes snapped to him. "It's almost 10."

Malfoy nodded and stood, brushing his pants off and taking a few steps forward. He paused before looking back at her. His eyebrows twitched up as the corner of his mouth flexed for a moment.

"You coming?" He asked.

Hermione stood and followed the two Death Eaters back into the castle. No words were spoken as they parted ways in The Entrance Hall and Hermione idly wondered if Nott would question Malfoy about finding them together. Would Nott care, given who she was and who they were? Did Malfoy care that he had been caught with her? Not caught, they weren't really doing anything, but that he had been seen being civil to her? Was he back in the Slytherin Common room at this very moment telling them all about how she had been on the edge of a

breakdown? Was he scrubbing his flask to get rid of her dirty germs? Did he even care about that anymore?

The portrait swung open for her after she gave the password and she was suddenly struck by the Gryffindor Common for the first time in years. Peering into it now she saw how warm and inviting it was, a fire lighting the room, enhancing the gold and red décor. The laughter that leaked out and surrounded her as the portrait swung shut behind her should have comforted her but instead it made her feel cold. Parvati sat with a group of girls around the fire and Hermione rushed past so they wouldn't invite her. She didn't feel like putting the mask on tonight. She smiled at Ginny, who was in their dorm changing into her pajamas before falling into her bed and closing her curtains.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

This is so short I might post chapter 4 later too.

Also I'm obsessed with music and will be posting a playlist that goes along with the story at the end but if you are interested I'll add a song to each chapter to set the mood.
:)

"You got in late last night." Ginny teased as they got ready the next morning.

"I was out by the lake." Hermione said, pulling her sweater over her head.

"With who?" Ginny asked, her eyes lighting up.

"No one."

She ignored the disappointed look on Ginny's face. Hermione knew Ginny was worried about her but the red head wouldn't broach the subject because she knew what was wrong and there was nothing she could do to help. Hermione had to find her own way past the war, just as the others had. Rehashing the past wasn't needed anymore.

"How's Harry?" Hermione asked to cover the awkward moment.

A smile decorated Ginny's face as she gushed about the boy. Hermione knew they were it, that that was love, and she was so happy Harry had been able to find it. She knew that was what brought him through the war and how he seemed to be so unaffected on the other side of it. She had once entertained the thought that her and Ron had it too, but a disastrous go at it over the summer and they had settled on the fact that they were better off friends. They had done nothing but bicker, he was too emotional, too much for her to handle at a time when she was still numb from everything that had happened.

Her thoughts drifted out to the lake as they made their way down to the common room, to the silent moments she shared with Malfoy, and as the school day erupted around her she couldn't shake the longing to be back in that stillness. She wanted to be able to listen to the waves and have her mind slow down. To be alone but not alone, to not have to pretend.

Malfoy had caught her attention. He was so different than he had been, quiet, subdued. She rarely saw him outside of class or meals and assumed he spent his time in the Slytherin Common Room. She didn't blame him, some of the younger kids acted like he was Tom Riddle reborn and the older years had been anything but welcoming. The only people he interacted with were Blaise Zabini and Theodore Nott, occasionally Pansy Parkinson as well, but otherwise he was like a ghost. She actually found herself missing the days when she could release her frustrations out on him after he provoked them.

She watched his mouth twitch at something Zabini said during breakfast a few days later. It occurred to her that she hadn't seen him smile in years. His eyes wandered down the Slytherin table, resting on a blonde girl that sat with Pansy, as he muttered something back to Zabini, shaking his head. Nott leaned in and said something and she could have sworn it looked like his mouth formed the name Granger before Malfoy's eyes were suddenly on her. His stormy eyes held her gaze for a moment before he twitched his eyebrows up briefly and she turned away. She tried to immerse herself into the conversation Harry, Ron, and Ginny were having about quidditch but couldn't stop wondering what was being said about her in the snake pit.

Hermione was helping Ginny finish up an essay before dinner that evening when Nott approached their table. The girls looked up at him, both tense. He gestured to the empty half of the table.

"Do you mind? Everywhere else is full." He muttered.

Hermione's eyes wandered the library quickly and realized he was right, students sat at every table. Silently she met Ginny's eyes, who shrugged and grabbed her books to make room. Nott sat and pulled out his essay and a book and began working without another word. The back of Hermione's neck tingled though and when she glanced back she saw a table of Hufflepuffs watching them. They broke out in whispers as she turned back, jumping when she saw Nott's eyes on her.

"How have you been?" Nott asked and Ginny raised an eyebrow at him.

"Fine." Hermione snapped, eyes falling back to her book, hoping he wasn't going to say anything about finding her with Malfoy at the lake.

"And you, Weasley? You and Wonder Boy are still going strong?" Nott asked.

"Yes." Ginny said curtly.

"Shame." He said with a shrug. "You could have done wonders for my image." Ginny met Hermione's gaze with wide eyes as Nott turned back to her. "What about you, princess? You care to help rehabilitate the local Death Eater?"

Hermione stared at him stunned for a heart beat before she laughed. An actual full on laugh burst from her mouth, and suddenly she couldn't stop. Nott chuckled as she tried to regain her composure and even Ginny breathed out a laugh over Hermione's reaction. With a few deep breaths Hermione managed to get herself back under control, but her head felt lighter. She couldn't remember the last time she had genuinely laughed.

"Thank Merlin. I thought you were going to slap me for a second there." Nott said, his eyes dancing.

"Don't provoke Granger, Theo." Came a cold voice from behind them. "She's got a decent right hook."

Hermione felt Ginny tense again as Malfoy fell into the seat beside Nott. His face was stone but his eyes seemed to shine as he looked at her. The first spark of life she had seen in them since they returned to school. The image of her punching him back in third year actually brought a smile to her face and she was surprised to see the corner of his mouth lift slightly as well.

"Careful, Malfoy, some might say that was a compliment." She said, turning back to her book.

"I'm only trying to save my friend's nose. In case you've forgotten, you broke mine." Malfoy drawled out.

"That was in third year right?" Nott asked.

"I wish someone had taken a picture." Ginny muttered. "I always miss the fun stuff."

"We could always recreate it for you." Hermione said, not understanding what decided to come over her as she leaned toward Malfoy. "Go ahead, Draco, say something to tempt me."

Malfoys eyes darkened as he met hers and for a moment she saw the old him, the him that wouldn't let her get the last word. His eyes scanned her face, lingering for a breath on her lips before they met her eyes again. Then he scoffed and leaned back in his chair, a smirk on his lips.

"Always so eager to turn to violence. I thought we were the bad guys?" He said, lightly, before glancing at Nott. "Pansy's looking for you. Seemed pretty pissed about a certain situation from last night."

"What did she do?" Nott asked quickly.

"Nothing yet but I warned you she was clingy." When Ginny snorted, Malfoys eyes fell on her. "Got something to say, Weaslette?"

"As if the entire school doesn't see how 'clingy' Parkinson is." Ginny scoffed. "If Nott didn't realize that then it's no wonder your lot lost."

There was a tense moment as Hermione watched the two boys exchange looks. She didn't know how they were going to react to the mention of the war and was worried it would break whatever had come over them to sit there civilly.

"She has a point." Malfoy muttered, surprising her, and making Nott laugh.

Nott shoved his stuff back into his bag as they both stood.

"It's been lovely, ladies, but if you'll excuse us. It's our turn to prevent a murder." He said with a small bow.

Malfoy nodded at them as they left and Hermione and Ginny exchanged confused looks, wondering how it was possible that they just had a perfectly decent conversation with the two Slytherins.

"What situation do you think Pansy's worked up about?" Ginny asked, always one for gossip.

"I really couldn't tell you. I didn't even know she had moved on from Malfoy." Hermione replied.

"Sometimes I wish we had someone in Slytherin. They always have the best drama." Ginny mumbled, wistfully.

"Don't you think we've had enough drama?" Hermione asked, not even able to entertain the idea of trying to keep up with the school gossip.

"Yeah but that was like, real, life or death, drama. It would be nice to just have regular teenage drama for once." Ginny said and Hermione nodded, surprised that she actually agreed with her.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Speak of the Devil by Sum 41

"Are you fucking done?" Malfoys voice caught her ears as they entered the Great Hall on Friday.

She had never actually heard him sound like that, he had always been mean to her but the tone of his voice just now set her completely on edge, making the hair on her arms stand up and the back of her neck tingle. Hermione looked over and saw him glaring darkly up at a boy in Ravenclaw robes, standing before him. She had no idea what had come over the boy but she was sure he really belonged in Gryffindor because if Malfoy had been looking at her like that she would have run. Malfoy's eyes looked like the sky right before a tornado touched ground and you could almost feel his magic crackling around him. As she watched, the boy leaned across the table so his face was inches away from him.

"What kind of pathetic Death Eater are you?" The boy growled out and Malfoy flew to his feet.

Before she could even blink, Zabini and Nott had Malfoy by a shoulder each as Malfoy glared murder at the kid. At some point he had drawn his wand, which he gripped with white knuckles. Nott glanced at it, clearly trying to figure out a way to get it from him.

"He's not worth it, Draco." Zabini said, trying to push Malfoy back into his seat.

"That's not what your mother was saying." The boy smirked.

Zabini and Nott were thrown to the side and Malfoy had his wand jabbed into the boy's throat. The kid finally looked scared and seemed to realize he had gone too far as Malfoy's wand indented his neck. Malfoys free hand balled into a fist at his side as a muscle on his jaw ticked.

"Say something about my mother again, and I'll show you exactly what kind of Death Eater I am." He growled out, jabbing his wand in a little harder.

Hermione didn't realize she had pulled her wand until Harry nudged her. Her grip on it tightened as she took a couple deep breaths. Her heart was racing at the scene before her and she had no idea what to do without setting Malfoy off more. She glanced at Harry and he shook his head at her.

"Mr Malfoy." McGonagall's clear voice rang out and Malfoy immediately let his wand drop. "What is going on here?"

"Nothing." He snapped, before turning and storming from the hall, Zabini and Nott following behind.

McGonagall hesitated for a moment, clearly debating going after him before turning to the Ravenclaw boy. He shrank slightly under her sharp gaze. Hermione was worried the boy would try to twist the situation so that it appeared Malfoy had attacked without cause but McGonagall didn't even give him a chance to speak.

"We don't tolerate prejudice of any form in these halls, Mr Nickerson. You would do well to remember that the next time you decide to provoke someone." She said coolly before brushing past him.

Things settled quickly as they all took their seats and filled their plates. Ginny seemed to be lost in thought and was being too quiet. Hermione eyed her, whenever Ginny was quiet it meant she was up to something. Ron was grumbling about how Malfoy was unstable and finally it made Ginny break her silence.

"Will you stop!" She snapped. "How, exactly, would you have reacted if someone had said that about our mother?"

"We don't know what Nickerson was saying before we walked in. Honestly I think Malfoy showed more control than another person would have." Hermione added.

Ron pouted for the rest of breakfast and as they all gathered their stuff to head to their first class, Hermione replayed the morning. She was trying to figure out why she had felt the need to draw her wand. She knew she pulled it after Malfoy had pulled his, but she hadn't been scared of Malfoy. She had been focused on Nickerson, she had drawn her wand to stop Malfoy from doing something stupid, but not to protect Nickerson, she actually would have liked to hex him herself for being so careless, but to keep Malfoy from being sent to Azkaban over something as stupid as being bullied.

"Don't tell Harry I said this, but Malfoy was kind of hot this morning." Ginny whispered, breaking through her thoughts. Hermione looked at her with wide eyes, "Oh, come on. The way he jumped up like that and brushed Nott and Zabini to the side?"

"You're terrible, Ginevra." Hermione giggled as they found their seats.

As if the situation from that morning was shining a light on it, Hermione noticed how many of the older years showed open hatred for Malfoy and Nott. They were shoved and run into in the halls, far too much for it to be accidental. At one point she saw Malfoy start to go after someone but Nott grabbed him, whispering to him and Malfoy backed down.

After dinner that night she was supposed to help Ron with his transfiguration homework but Ron explained he had the opportunity to meet with some girl from Hufflepuff and Hermione let him leave without arguing. He had the weekend to catch up on his work and he deserved some fun. With Harry preoccupied with Ginny and no one else she particularly wanted to talk to, Hermione found herself wandering out to the Black Lake again. As she crested the hill and found a figure slumped in the dying light, but she wasn't surprised. A part of her had known she would find him there.

Malfoy glanced at her quickly as she sat beside him but when she turned to meet his sliver gaze he had already moved it back to the water. She studied him for a moment, allowing herself to look past their shared history and see what Ginny had been saying that morning. He was attractive, she could always admit that, but she would have never called him hot. She tried to picture seeing him for the first time, knowing nothing about him and she saw it. His sharp jawline and high cheekbones, bright eyes that could be a cold steel gray or a light sky blue.

He pulled his flask out and dropped it on her lap and she silently opened it, while letting the sounds of the water and wind quiet her mind. She was so tired of thinking, tired of constantly worrying about who did what and how others were going to react, tired of constantly being on edge, like she was waiting for something to happen. After a couple sips, once the fire whiskey rushed through her enough that the chill in the air no longer bothered her, she sighed.

"You shouldn't have done that." Malfoy whispered as she handed the flask back to him.

"Done what?" She asked, a little taken aback that he was actually talking to her.

"Pulled your wand this morning. I wasn't going to hurt him." Malfoy mumbled, and Hermione couldn't help but wonder why he was telling her.

"I didn't think you even noticed. And I didn't pull my wand to help Nickerson." She said simply and Malfoy looked over at her.

After studying her face for a moment he just nodded and they both turned their attention back to the lake. She couldn't help but notice how Malfoy kept rubbing against his left arm, whether he was rubbing it against his knee or with his right hand. She wondered if he even realized he was doing it or if he was trying to subconsciously wipe the dark mark away, or maybe the mark was acting up and irritating him. She didn't know what became of them now that Voldemort was dead. She almost wanted to ask but didn't want to break the peace they had found.

"Draco!" A booming voice broke their silence after a few minutes.

Zabini and Nott appeared, falling beside the pair. Hermione's hand touched her wand through her pocket, just to make sure it was there. Zabini eyed her up for a moment before raising his eyebrow at Malfoy.

"We're not interrupting, are we?" He asked.

"Would you leave if I said yes?" Malfoy growled out.

"Nope." Zabini replied, making a popping noise at the end. "Pansy's worried."

"No, she's not." Malfoy said, glaring at Nott.

"Ok. We're worried, mate. Burying yourself away isn't going to help." Nott replied.

"But now that we see you've been having company out here.." Zabini continued, wagging his eyebrows.

"Shove off, Zabini. It's the only quiet place in this castle." Hermione snapped.

"Or at least it used to be." Malfoy muttered, taking a pull from his flask.

"Is Gryffindor too loud for the princess?" Zabini teased.

"You know that princess could decimate you without breaking a sweat, Blaise." Nott chuckled.

"The brightest witch of our age." Malfoy drawled out.

"A glowing ember in the fight against the dark." Nott continued.

"A testimony to the fact that blood does not dictate magical ability." Zabini added.

"Shut up." Hermione snapped before they could quote anymore of what The Prophet had written about her.

She stood up and began brushing off her pants, with the intention of storming back to the castle but Malfoy reached out and tugged the hem of her robe.

"We're just teasing, Granger. Sit down." He mumbled.

Hermione glanced at the three boys, gripping her wand in her pocket. Comforted by the way her magic pulled toward it and, weighing her options, she then sat back down with a huff. They were in the open, the woods a few feet away. She could drop one of them then lose the other two in the trees if they tried anything. She eyed up the Slytherin boys, mentally going over what The Prophet had said about each of them and finding the stuff she could use without being too crass.

"I'm not the only one The Prophet has talked about." She said, looking at Malfoy. "How about how you were being trained as Voldemort's successor?" Then to Nott. "Or how you were raising his ranks, fast, on the way to becoming his best general?" Then to Zabini. "Or how most of their missions would have failed without Zabini's brilliant strategy?"

"Oh, so the witch came to play." Zabini said, pulling out a flask of his own and drinking.

"How many drinks do you owe, Granger?" Nott asked, grabbing the flask from Blaise and taking a pull of his own.

"I'd say none." Malfoy said as he sipped from his own flask.

"What?" She asked, glancing between the boys, not following where the conversation had turned.

"It's a game we play when things get too quiet. We toss around the headlines, then drink if it's a lie." Nott explained before turning to Zabini. "What do you say, Blaise? I heard you

murdered your mother's most recent husband."

"That woman needs no help from me." Zabini muttered, taking a shot. "What about you, Draco? I heard you're following in dear Aunt Bella's footsteps."

Malfoy shook his head and took a drink before turning to Hermione.

"Well, princess, I heard you and Weasley are to be wed this summer."

Hermione snatched the flask from his hand and took a pull, shivering slightly as the fire whiskey warmed her blood.

"Well, Nott, I heard that you tried to take out three aurors at your trial." She said once the itch in her throat subsided.

"It was only one and he deserved it." Nott said, taking a pull from the flask. "Draco. I heard the reason Potter defended you at your trial was because you two are secretly lovers."

Malfoy let out a fake gag as he grabbed his flask from Hermione. She couldn't stop the giggle that came out though and her hand flew to her mouth to cover it. The giggle turned into a full laugh at the incredulous look in Malfoy's eyes as he took her in.

"What, Granger? You don't think me and Potter make a good couple?" he asked.

"Harry was so pissed they wrote that. We almost thought it was Skeeter, but she wouldn't dare." Hermione said, running her fingertips across the grass.

"Whatever happened to Skeeter? That crazy bitch would have loved to cover our trials." Nott asked.

"I trapped her in a jar at the end of fourth year after I found out she was an animagus. Let her out when we got to London but I told her if she ever published anything again I would report her for being unregistered." Hermione explained, twisting a piece of grass between her fingers.

When the boys didn't respond Hermione looked up to find Malfoy watching her with a ghost of a smile on his face and Zabini and Nott sharing a look.

"You're kind of scary." Zabini muttered and Hermione reached out for Malfoy's flask.

"You're not drinking to that. You are bloody scary." he said, holding the flask just out of her reach.

Hermione laughed again, something registering in her dulled mind that the only time she had laughed in the past few months had been in the presence of these boys. She shrugged the thought off, blaming the fire whiskey. Isn't that what you were supposed to do when you made stupid decisions? Blame the drink?

"Well, Granger, speaking of scary. I heard you broke into Gringotts and rode a dragon out." Zabini said, with a smirk.

"That wasn't in the paper." She said.

"Not reaching for the flask though, are you?" He shot back. "Everyone at the manor got punished for it."

Malfoy took a drag from the flask as Hermione looked toward him.

"That was the truth, I just needed a drink." He grumbled, not meeting her eyes.

Her heart began to race as she was suddenly reminded of who she was sitting with. She had never really considered that Draco had been at the manor and what Voldemort may have done to them after their escape. Her mind raced around for something to change the subject.

"I heard you were supposed to marry Parkinson." She blurted out a rumor that had floated around during fourth year.

"Well, I can't drink to that." he said, choking out a laugh. "We were supposed to. Things change, thank Merlin."

"I thought you and Pansy were a thing." Hermione said.

"So did she." he growled out. "About as much of a thing as you and Weasley seem to be."

Hermione could feel her cheeks starting to burn. Her fingers found her scar over her sleeve and she began tracing out the word she knew lay under the fabric. She didn't want to talk about her and Ron, or Malfoy Manor. As he watched her, Hermione could almost swear she saw something in his eyes soften.

"I also heard you shagged your way through half of London after the war." Malfoy said, with a small smirk.

"That wasn't printed in anything reputable." she snapped, grabbing the flask from him.

She tilted the flask to her mouth and took two heavy swallows before a warm hand closed around hers and the flask was pulled away. She opened her eyes to find Malfoy had leaned over to her and, still holding her hand that held the flask, a small smile settled on his lips.

"Easy, Granger." he said, his voice soft. "I'm just teasing."

He sat back, the flask now in his hands and Hermione willed her cheeks to stop burning. She remembered when the trashy magazine had printed that, how mad Ron had been. It had been the beginning of the end for them, even though he knew it was lies.

"Well, it's not true. I've never even.." she started before snapping her mouth shut, realizing what she had just said.

"It's almost 10." Malfoy said, ignoring what she had said. "We should get inside."

He brushed off his pants as he stood and held his hand out to her. She briefly wondered why he was doing it, not just offering to help her up but brushing over her accidental confession as

well. As she placed her hand in his, she decided it didn't matter. When he pulled her up, her feet swayed a little under her as the influence of the fire whiskey settled into her legs.

"You ok?" He breathed out, tightening his hold on her hand for a moment.

Finding her bearings she nodded and they followed Zabini and Nott into the castle, Hermione hyper aware of the fact that her hand was still in his. He didn't say anything as their fingers pressed together, didn't even glance her way. Nott said something, but Hermione was too focused on the feeling of Malfoy's hand in hers to listen. It must have been funny though because Malfoy chuckled, his grip tightening for a moment. The doors opened and the light from the Entrance Hall washed over them and Malfoy dropped her hand.

"Good night." He muttered with a quick nod.

Zabini and Nott nodded to her as well as the three of them turned toward the dungeons.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

This is short so I'll be posting chapter 6 later too.
also this fic wont let me sleep so I have the rest of the story plotted out and it will be around 25-30 chapters.
its almost fully written out, it's pretty much written itself at this point, I've never had a story flow this easily.

Things started changing slowly, but later Hermione would mark that night as the beginning. Zabini began acknowledging her with a small nod whenever their paths crossed and Nott began sitting with Hermione whenever they were in the library at the same time, even if the rest of the tables weren't full. A few nights a week she ended up out at the lake with Malfoy. It was never planned and they rarely spoke and he didn't touch her again, they just shared his flask and sat in the stillness of it all. Occasionally he would join her and Nott in the library and he even smiled at her once, though Hermione knew he didn't mean to.

It was the second week of October when McGonagall announced that instead of the usual Halloween feast, they would be holding a ball instead. Ginny immediately perked up, excited at the prospect of actually getting to let their hair down. Harry watched her happily, happy as long as Ginny was, but Ron groaned. Hermione chuckled as memories of The Yule Ball flooded her mind.

"Oh don't tell me you're happy about it too." Ron grumbled.

"It could be fun." She mused. "It's not going to be as formal as The Yule Ball was."

"Yeah, no Viktor either." Ron teased, causing Hermione to actually laugh.

"You should ask Samantha." She told him, referring to the Hufflepuff girl he had been taken with lately. "Before someone else does."

"Then who are you going with?" Ginny asked, not bothering to hide her disappointment. Hermione knew Ginny had always hoped her and Ron would end up together. "Nott?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Just because we study together that doesn't mean anything." Hermione said, rolling her eyes.

"Krum used to haunt the library just to spend time with you too." Harry teased.

"She's not going with a Death Eater." Ron snapped.

"Well let's ask him." Ginny said, her eyes wandering over Hermione's head. "Oi! Nott!"

Hermione's head whipped around and she caught the surprised look that flashed across his face as Ginny caught him and Malfoy just before they walked out. Malfoys eyes landed on her and he subtly quirked his eyebrow. Hermione just rolled her eyes as the two boys slowly approached.

"Ginevra, I will murder you." She whispered just before Nott and Malfoy fell into the bench beside her.

"You called Weasley?" Nott said, resting his elbow on the table.

"Ginny, don't." Hermione warned.

"I was just wondering who you were thinking about asking to The Ball." Ginny said, innocently.

Malfoy suddenly let out a bark-like laugh and Hermione's eyes found his, lit up for a change. His eyes were dancing between Ginny and Nott before they settled on Hermione. No one ever said Malfoy was stupid, he had caught on quickly.

"Yeah, Theo. Who do you want to go to The Ball with?" Malfoy drawled out.

"Um, well, I was thinking about asking Pansy." Nott muttered, suddenly looking uncomfortable.

"Oh." Ginny breathed out, deflating slightly.

"Sorry to disappoint, but I thought Golden Boy had a claim on you." Nott said, clearly trying to cover his embarrassment.

"She's not asking for herself." Harry assured him.

Malfoy let out another laugh, clearly trying to contain it. Hermione glared at him, willing her cheeks to stop burning. His eyes met hers, bright and shining and Hermione was suddenly struck by the sight. Once upon a time she hated that look, it meant something scathing was about to come out of his mouth, but she was able to appreciate how his whole face softened now. The hard lines of his cheeks rounded slightly as the corners of his mouth turned up. His eyes sparkled, more blue then the steel gray they usually were, as they looked into hers.

"Damn, Granger, a couple study sessions and you're ready to swoon for the Death Eater?" He said, his tone light.

"I need a drink." She muttered under her breath.

"Who are you taking then, ferret?" Ron snapped.

Ron was glaring at Malfoy, holding no trust in Malfoy being able to be civil. Hermione looked between the two, nervous now that the first shot had been thrown out.

"Something strong and fiery, if I even go." Malfoy said. "Don't fret, weasel, I'm sure someone will feel sorry enough for you to say yes."

Ron had just opened his mouth to retort when Ginny slammed her hand on the table.

"We are not doing this." She snapped and the boys all bowed their heads like they had just been scolded by their mothers. "You have all demonstrated the ability to remain civil, so we will remain civil. The Wizarding World is watching us, like it or not, and we're setting the precedent."

"That doesn't mean we have to be friends with them." Ron snapped before storming out of the hall.

"Sorry." Harry mumbled before following Ron.

"You just had to call him a weasel." Ginny sighed and Malfoy smirked.

"He started it." He said.

"I'll catch up." Hermione said, as Ginny stood.

Hermione began gathering her book and the essay she had been reviewing back into her bag as Ginny went off to find Ron and Harry.

"Granger, you don't actually want me to ask you to the ball right? Cause I don't want to offend." Nott began but Hermione interrupted.

"Gods, no. No offense, of course, but I know about you and Pansy." She said, swinging her bag over her shoulder. "Now, if you had asked me back in fourth year, my answer may have been different."

He looked up at her with wide eyes before Malfoy nudged his shoulder.

"She's joking, twit." He grumbled, swinging his legs off the bench and standing as well. "You're joking, right?"

Hermione just shrugged at him and turned away.

"Granger." Malfoy called after her but she didn't stop.

"See you later." She said, going to find her friends.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

This is super long, the scene got away from me a little bit but I love it.
:)

Panic Room by Au/Ra

Later that night, as Hermione slowly made her way out to the lake, she was struck by the thought that Malfoy had always been there, everytime she came out. She wondered if he came out there every night or if their need for peace just seemed to sync up. As she crested the hill, she stopped short. It wasn't just Malfoy sitting beside the lake. Zabini, Nott, and Parkinson all sat with him, an open bottle of fire whiskey resting before them.

"There she is." Nott called out as Hermione froze.

Malfoy watched her hesitantly, as she debated running back to the castle. No one had known she was coming out here, if they decided to do something stupid, she was sure they could overpower her. She was suddenly reminded of the fact that Malfoy and Nott were both marked and she was a muggle born and she couldn't help but feel stupid for trusting them, even slightly. Malfoy jumped to his feet as her wand slid into her hand.

"Hey." He said quickly, catching her wrist. "You said you needed a drink."

Her eyes stayed over his shoulder, on the three other Slytherins. She flinched slightly as Malfoys long fingers squeezed her wrist.

"Blaise and Pansy don't even have their wands." Malfoy said, softly. "We're not going to hurt you."

Her eyes snapped up to his at those words. Every foul thing he had ever said to her raced through her mind at that moment but the softness of his voice seemed to ease her rapid heart beat.

"We're all on parole, our wands are monitored. It'd be suicide to hurt you." Pansy scoffed behind them. "Now stop acting like the twat I assume you are."

Hermione pulled away from Malfoy and fought every instinct she had as she stowed her wand. Malfoy watched her as she fell onto the grass and grabbed the bottle, taking two long sips before sighing. He slowly sat beside her and snagged the bottle from her.

"What if someone comes out?" Hermione asked.

"We're all of age. Not much they can do." Zabini told her.

"Unless you're more worried about your friends finding you in our company than a professor." Pansy snapped.

"My friends have seen me in their company." Hermione snapped back.

"Yeah, during school hours when you have to tolerate us." Pansy said, rolling her eyes and leaning into Nott.

"Be nice, Pans." Nott muttered.

"Yeah, stop being the bitch we all assume you are." Malfoy said and Pansy leveled him with a glare.

"Want to start a fire, Granger?" Pansy asked, nodding toward the pile of wood stacked beside them. "Draco or Theo could but the aurors would probably think they're lighting the school on fire."

Malfoy snorted at that as he pulled his wand. With a few flicks a small fire burned in front of them.

"They're just watching for offensive magic. Plus you probably don't want Granger pulling her wand in front of you again, Pansy." Malfoy muttered.

"I didn't know your wands were being monitored." Hermione said softly and Malfoy turned to look at her.

"Just for anything dangerous." He said.

"Like what you considered doing to Nickerson?" She asked.

"He wasn't worth it." He mumbled, the fire causing shadows to dance across his face.

Hermione relaxed slightly as the Slytherins began talking. She wasn't sure how to act, especially with Pansy glaring at her every few minutes, but it was nice to be able to get lost in the dancing flames and not have anyone expecting you to act a certain way. She watched as Nott tickled Parkinson and Pansy giggled like a schoolgirl, as Zabini teased Malfoy and Draco threw grass at him, as the boys argued over quidditch and Pansy glared at her some more and she realized that they weren't that different from Harry and Ron. Not really, they had just been dealt different cards.

"What about you, princess?" Zabini asked her and suddenly all eyes were on her.

"What?" She asked, just noticing that she had lost track of the conversation.

"Any boys in this school worthy of your attentions?" Nott asked, "Or do you just go after the famous blokes?"

"No. I just.. I never really had time to think about any of that." She muttered, her fingers finding the scar beneath her sleeve.

"Gods, you sound like Draco." Pansy groaned. "I keep telling him Astoria is interested but he just won't make a move."

"Astoria is insufferable, just like you." Malfoy growled out.

Hermione glanced at him, sprawled across the grass, blonde hair falling into his icy eyes. It was the most relaxed she had ever seen him.

"Let's play a game." Zabini said, grabbing the bottle. "Never have I ever?"

"You guys play that too?" Hermione asked, surprised.

"You've played?" Malfoys asked back.

"Yeah, I used to sneak off and play at my parents cabin with my cousins during summer breaks."

"Wow, Granger actually broke the rules." Pansy muttered, with fake shock.

"Granger has broken every rule this school has." Malfoy said with a small laugh.

"And a couple actual laws." Nott added.

"You're not wrong." Hermione mumbled.

"I'll start." Zabini said. "Never have I ever.. slept with someone at this fire."

Malfoy, Nott, and Pansy all passed the bottle to each other.

"Never have I ever kissed a red head." Nott said and Hermione sighed as she reached for the bottle, Zabini reaching for it after her.

"Never have I ever saved the wizarding world." Pansy said sarcastically.

They all waited but Hermione didn't reach for the bottle.

"That was Harry." She muttered before Malfoy shoved the bottle at her.

"Give yourself some credit." He said and she couldn't fight the small smile on her face.

"Never have I ever.." she started, her mind searching for something. "Been inside the Slytherin Common room."

All four drank.

"Never have I ever seen a movie." Malfoy said, and Hermione and Nott drank.

"Never have I ever.." Zabini said, glancing around, "rode a dragon."

Hermione shook her head as she drank and was surprised when Pansy reached for the bottle.

"What? Draco counts." Pansy said, with no shame, making Malfoy choke.

Hermione burst out laughing and everyone followed suit. Hermione sighed as her laughter subsided, and she found herself feeling warm. She knew it was mostly the whiskey, possibly the fire. She shrugged her robe off and pushed her sleeves up, relishing the contrast of the cool night air against her skin.

"So you two were actually together?" Hermione asked, fueled by the drink.

"No." Malfoy snapped as Pansy nodded.

"We were engaged, Draco dear." Pansy taunted him.

"Your mother wanted us engaged, I just needed someone to shag." Draco snapped back.

"That's harsh." Hermione mumbled.

"It's the truth, don't let her fool you. She knew what it was." Malfoy said, his eyes scanning down her face.

"Still, you were never really nice to her. I'd hope if I was forced to marry, they'd at least pretend to be nice." Hermione said.

"Oh, don't fret. Draco was nice in other ways. Let's just say, he's a very generous lover." Pansy said, winking at Malfoy.

"Shut up, Parkinson." Malfoy snapped. "What would your new suitor think of you, speaking so unlady like."

Hermione could tell he was teasing, that despite the way his words sounded he was joking. When had she started being able to tell he was joking? The skin under his eye twitched slightly when he was joking, like his face wanted to smile. Why did she know that?

"Oh, dear! I shall be shamed! Can't risk any little bastards running about." Pansy said dramatically.

"The only bastard here is Draco." Nott said with a smile.

"Please." Draco scoffed. "My father couldn't deny me if he wanted to. Now Blaise on the other hand.."

"Can you be a bastard if you don't try to claim a line?" Blaise asked with an easy grin.

"Technically." Hermione muttered and the four Slytherins looked to her, almost like they had forgotten she was there.

"Of course you would know." Pansy scoffed, finishing off the bottle and pulling a fresh one from her bag.

"We have bastards in the muggle world as well. Although it is easier to trace a line with magic." She said, holding her hand out and taking the bottle from Pansy.

She took a drink before passing it to Draco. He took it but pulled her arm over to him as well. She watched as his eyes traced the word carved into her skin for a second before he let go. Hermione wondered what his thoughts on it were, considering she had first heard the word tumble from his mouth, but didn't want to talk about it.

"Any bastard Weasleys popping up soon, Granger." Pansy asked, either ignoring or not noticing Draco's attention to her arm.

"Not from me." She mumbled.

"You two really aren't a thing?" Pansy pressed.

"We were, but it didn't work." Hermione said, grabbing the bottle off Draco.

"Fuck, how much do I owe you?" Pansy asked Draco.

"20 galleons." He said, smiling.

"You made a bet?" Hermione asked, swatting Draco's arm. "And you bet against us?"

"Weasley could never handle you." Draco murmured.

"No one can." She said softly and was horrified as her eyes began to burn.

"Don't say that." Draco replied, just as soft. "One day you'll find someone who can handle your insufferable need to always be right."

"Merlin, Draco. Your father really didn't manage to beat that out of you?" Pansy asked, grabbing the bottle back.

"What?" Hermione asked, blinking until her vision cleared.

"Shut up, Pansy." Draco snapped, not joking anymore.

"You didn't know? Of course you wouldn't. Why do you think he was extra foul to you and ignored every other mudblood in this place?" Pansy said, slurring slightly.

"Pansy, I swear I will avada you." Draco growled out.

"Draco here," Pansy said, acting like Draco wasn't speaking. "Had a huge crush on you back in third year."

"I promise you, it ended after you punched me in the fucking face." Draco said quickly.

Hermione studied him for a moment before letting her eyes drift over the others. She could tell from their faces that Pansy spoke the truth and suddenly she found it hilarious. Draco's

eyes widened as Hermione began to laugh, the force of it making the ground away slightly beneath her. After a few minutes, with her stomach aching, she found her balance again.

"God, I can't remember the last time I laughed like that." She said, wiping at the tears that had gathered at the corners of her eyes.

Blaise was watching her with an easy smile, Pansy and Nott were whispering to each other and Draco.. Draco was watching her with nervous eyes.

"You don't drink much do you?" He asked.

"No. I don't." She replied lightly.

Malfoy chuckled slightly and Pansy smiled over at her.

"You can break into the ministry multiple times but can't handle your liquor?" She quipped.

"Shut it, Pansy. I remember the first time you got smashed." Draco teased and Blaise and Theo started laughing.

"Ugh, that was so not funny. My mother still makes comments about how I threw up in the ballroom."

"That's not all you did." Theo said.

"Yeah, took me and 3 others down while we were waltzing." Blaise grumbled.

"I've kind of always wanted to waltz." Hermione said softly, breaking through the Slytherins conversation.

"Then let's waltz." Draco said, pushing himself up.

"I don't dance." She said with a nervous chuckle.

"Oh, it's easy. If I can do it, you can." He scoffed before turning to Pansy. "Watch."

He bowed to Pansy, offering his hand. She laughed as she took it and Draco pulled her up. As Draco led her in a waltz around the fire, Hermione was memorized by their smooth movements. He spun Pansy quickly, Theo grabbing her hand and taking over. Draco walked over to stand in front of Hermione again.

"You just have to let me lead." he said, bowing and holding his hand out. "Trust me."

'Trust me.' The words echoed through her mind, she was barely able to comprehend that it was Draco Malfoy saying them to her. She thought of the boy who had offered his hand to Harry on their first day here, who had been the first to call her a mudblood, who she had called a foul, evil, loathsome little cockroach, who had taunted her at The Quidditch World Cup, who had been a part of The Inquisitorial Squad, who had opened the door and allowed Death Eaters into the school, who had stood looking sick while his aunt tortured her. Looking up at him now, she realized he wasn't that boy anymore, the man before her hardly even

resembled him. He may have been talking about dancing but as Hermione took his hand she knew she did trust him, far more than she probably should.

His hand gripped her waist as he guided her into a slow waltz. She let herself relax and allowed him to pull her through the steps. His hand slid around to rest on the small of her back as he sped up.

“One, two, three.” he breathed into her ear in time with his feet. “One, two, three.”

She felt his grip tighten right before he dipped her back, her hair fanning out around her face. Theo had dipped Pansy at the same time and the two girls were face to face as they laughed. Draco pulled her back up and her hand ended up resting on his chest, feeling his heartbeat through his shirt. The smile slowly faded from his face as he looked down on her, his eyes resting on her lips. His tongue flicked out to wet his own before his eyes returned to hers. His hand reached up and brushed her throat as it rested along her jaw, his thumb reaching out to trace along her bottom lip.

“Draco can't remember my birthday but the waltz? That's important.” Pansy teased.

Draco's gaze lingered for a breath on Hermione and she heard Pansy let out a soft 'oh' as she noticed the pair. Draco stepped back, turning to glare at Pansy but she was watching him with wide eyes.

"What?" He snapped.

"Nothing." Pansy mumbled, "Nothing at all."

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Happy Easter!

Hermione woke up the next day, with vague memories of the night before. She remembered the Slytherins talking about bastards, but everything after that was hazy. Malfoy wouldn't meet her eye. She remembered him getting mad about something, something about her bothering him. She remembered laughing, had she provoked him? Something about third year, her punching him. Had they danced? Was that a dream? There was also the kiss. She was absolutely certain that had been a dream, her and Malfoy had been in her dorm and there was no way he would have been able to get in there unnoticed. He had kissed her, weaved his hand in her hair, pushed her onto her bed. Hermione shook her head to clear the thoughts away.

Nott still joined her in the library and he made no mention of anything happening that night, Zabini still nodded at her and even Pansy acknowledged her here and there. Hermione couldn't figure out what she had done to offend Malfoy. As the days went on, she watched him draw completely into himself. Now that she had seen him relaxed, seen that old spark that used to light him up, she noticed how missing it was. He was getting paler again, dark circles starting to decorate beneath his eyes and he would lose himself in his thoughts, chewing at his lips during meals. He was starting to remind her of their sixth year and she wasn't sure if it was appropriate to be worried. He also wasn't at the lake anymore, and Hermione hated that she missed him sitting there with her.

"Is Malfoy.. Ok?" she finally asked Nott while they were studying in the library after Malfoy had successfully avoided her for a week.

"Why wouldn't he be?" Theo asked back, lazily flipping a few pages in his book.

Before Hermione could answer, however, Pansy came charging up to their table, throwing a copy of Witch Weekly down in front of them. Hermione glanced at it before looking up at Pansy, waiting for her to explain.

"Page 4." she snapped.

Theo reached out and flipped to the page and Hermione was surprised to see a picture of them bent together at a table reading a book. The headline across the top of the page read "Golden Girl Going Dark!" She didn't even need to read it to know that it was speculating on her and Notts relationship. Ginny was right, the world was watching them. She wondered how they had gotten the picture, McGonagall refused to allow the press on the grounds, but that didn't matter. She sighed as she shoved her stuff in her bag.

"I have no interest in Theo, Pansy." She said quickly, throwing her bag over her shoulder.
"But I have to go."

She had no idea how her friends would react to the article and she wanted to be the one to tell them. They knew she was friendly with them, knew she studied with Nott, but that didn't mean they thought it was acceptable. Ginny seemed ok with it, Harry tolerated it, but Ron had been very open over his distrust about the situation, telling her to never let her guard down around them and that she couldn't trust them at all. As she cleared the library doors she heard raised voices further up the hall. She picked out Ron's voice and broke into a run. As she rounded the corner she saw Malfoy and Ron, face to face.

"Theo's with Pansy, Weaslebe. He has no use for your little princess." Malfoy snapped, his eyes flitting over to her for a brief moment.

"You lot would do anything to clear your names." Ron yelled back.

"Our names were cleared at our trials. We don't need Granger for that."

"Needed Harry though, didn't you?" Ron mocked him.

"Yeah and if you believe the same fucking witch who wrote that article, me and Potter are fucking behind closed doors too." Malfoy fired back.

"Ron!" Hermione interrupted as Ron drew his wand.

A quick glance showed Malfoy had done the same. Hermione stood between them, her hands on Ron's chest, trying to get him to look at her instead of Malfoy. That spark was back in Draco and she knew it could only spell trouble when mixed with Ron's current mood.

"Get your boyfriend, Granger." He spat as Hermione tried to push Ron back.

"That's it then." Ron said, his eyes lighting up suddenly. "You're pissed because they got her matched with the wrong Death Eater."

"Excuse me?! Like I would ever touch a M.." he snapped, catching himself at the last second. His quicksilver eyes darting down to her arm before snapping back up to meet hers. "I'd never touch Granger."

Hermione tried to push away the hurt that flashed through her at hearing him say that. It probably would have hurt less if he had just called her a mudblood, but he had made it personal. She didn't have time to dissect the feelings that were shoving themselves to the forefront of her mind because Ron raised his wand, Malfoys grip on his own tightening.

"Ron, put it down." She snapped at him.

"Did you hear what he said?" Ron snapped at her. "He almost called you a.."

"Almost, but he stopped himself." Hermione interrupted. "Now it's your turn. Walk away."

Ron let his wand fall and with one more glare at Malfoy he turned and stormed toward Gryffindor tower. Hermione looked back and saw Malfoy taking a deep breath, his eyes dark as he stowed his wand. He had just opened his mouth, Hermione couldn't even guess what he would say, when she snapped at him.

"Don't talk to me." She said, making his lip curl.

"I haven't been." He growled out, pushing past her toward the library.

Hermione watched him stalk away, unable to comprehend the heaviness that settled in her chest.

Chapter 8

Hermione didn't even want to think about The Halloween Ball but Ginny was so excited she couldn't disappoint her. She let Ginny tame her curls and put a touch of makeup in her face. She even put on the glittering black dress and a deep blue robe that Ginny had picked out for her. She followed Ginny down the stairs to meet the boys in the common room. Harry's eyes lit up when he saw Ginny and Hermione felt a small smile fall into place on her own face. Ron had been in a bad mood since his blowup with Malfoy a few days before but he smiled at her and muttered that he was meeting Samantha down there.

The Great Hall was decorated as it usually was for Halloween except the house tables were gone, replaced with a scattering of smaller tables like when The Yule Ball had been held. As they all took their seats, Hermione couldn't help scanning the room until she spotted his blonde head. He was sitting at a table a few feet away with Zabini, Nott, and Pansy, his arms crossed and brow furrowed. She could tell he didn't want to be there and silently she agreed.

Throughout dinner she talked and smiled with her friends but she didn't like how dim the hall was, the light not reaching the corners, and the music was starting to grate on her nerves. Ginny tried to pull her up to dance but she waved her on, she had never been a fan of dancing and she knew her irritation would only rise with so many people brushing against her. She was running her fingers over the D of her scar when something clinked against the table behind her.

Spinning around she found Malfoys flask sitting beside her cup and she grabbed it to pull it out of sight quickly. She turned and immediately found Malfoy's eyes on her as he tucked his wand away. His eyes widened slightly as she stood and, after a quick glance toward the dance floor, made her way to his table.

"I just thought you were going to drink it, not take it as an invitation." He said as she sat, the muscle under his eye twitching slightly.

"Am I unwanted?" She asked, spiking a cup in front of her with his flask.

"A beautiful witch like you? Never?" Blaise said, smoothly.

"Careful Blaise, you may be the next one accused of luring me to the dark side." She teased.

"Oh, darling, I can tell you can do bad all by yourself, if you wanted to." He murmured.

"Is he drunk?" Hermione whispered, leaning slightly toward Malfoy.

"Very." He said, with a laugh.

Her head spun to look at him as his breath brushed her cheek and she almost jumped when she realized how close he was. His steely eyes were a sparkling blue that seemed to dance in the candle light and his whole demeanor was soft.

"Are you drunk?" She asked him.

"Very." He said again with a full laugh.

"He wouldn't come until he was sloshed." Theo said.

"And 'only my father gets drunk alone'." Pansy said, trying to mimic Draco's haughty tone.

"I believe I said alcoholics." Draco corrected her with a jab of his finger.

"We knew what you meant, dear." Pansy replied.

"Don't be a buzzkill, Parkinson."

"Never, darling."

Hermione breathed out a breathy laugh as she took in the table. She could blame the fire whiskey all she wanted but she had only had a couple sips and she actually felt relaxed. She never imagined she could feel comfortable around them, but it was as if she was sitting with Harry, Ron, and Ginny. The way they spoke and teased was different but underneath it all they were the same. Blaise became very flirty when he was drunk just like Ginny did and Draco became jokey and talkative just like Harry. Theo liked to debate like Hermione and Pansy teased everyone just like Ron. A cold shiver ran down her back as Draco pushed her hair behind her ear.

"What's so funny, Granger?" He breathed out into her ear.

"I was.. um.." She stumbled around trying to find the words when Draco pulled his hand back.

"Right, you don't like being touched without warning. Sorry." He said softly.

"What?"

"Are you drunk?" He asked, smiling at her flustered state.

Pansy's laugh broke through their quiet conversation and they turned their attention back to the table. Theo had apparently said something funny because both Pansy and Blaise were cracking up. Draco leaned back in his chair with an easy smile on his face and Hermione took a long sip of her drink, trying to make her mind blame the whiskey on how flushed she felt.

"Your friend is coming over." Pansy said, her eyes wandering over Hermione's shoulder.

Hermione looked back and saw Ginny making her way toward her, thankfully alone. Before she could stop her Ginny snagged her cup and took a quick sip before coughing.

"What's in this?" She asked Hermione, her eyes wide.

"Firewhiskey." Draco said, clinking his flask on the table. "Want some?"

Ginny studied him for a moment, seeming to come to the same conclusion about his sobriety that Hermione had before she smiled wide.

"Yes." She said, grabbing the flask before Draco could take it back.

"Make sure you bring that back." He called as Ginny rushed back to the dance floor with it. "It's a family heirloom."

"Please, like you're going to pass that flask on to anyone. It'll go to the grave with you." Pansy said, rolling her eyes.

"He'd have to find someone to put up with him long enough to produce an heir before he even has to consider it." Theo added.

"Mother will ensure it after a while. I'm the last viable Malfoy." Draco said.

"You're one of the last Blacks too." Hermione said before she could stop herself.

"Technically." He mumbled before turning to her, his eyes curious. "How do you know that?"

Sirius, Tonks, Remus, and finally baby Teddy flashed through her mind while she tried to find the words to answer his question.

"I've done some research on the family lines." She said, simply.

Draco seemed to read it on her face, however, that she knew because of the war. Whether he understood the details or not he knew they had stumbled into darker territory, territory she didn't want to be in.

"So when are you joining those family lines?" He asked her. "I heard you and Theo are a scandalous night away from marriage."

She laughed in relief as her and Theo clinked their cups together and drank. She understood what Theo meant now, when he had said they played this game when it got too quiet. The absurdity of the press far outweighed the things they had all actually gone through.

"Well, Theo's apparently getting a lot of action because I heard Pansy is playing with both him and Draco." Blaise said.

Pansy rolled her eyes and took a drink.

"I heard that Draco is courting Astroia Greengrass." Pansy said.

"God, the gossip rags are really desperate without our social events aren't they?" Draco muttered before tilting his cup into his mouth. "I heard Weaslette is only with Potter for his money." He said, his eyes wandering to the side.

"What?" Ginny's voice asked as she fell into the seat beside Hermione.

"Take a drink Ginny." Hermione said, "It's a game, you throw a rumor at someone and they drink if it's a lie."

"In that case." Ginny mumbled, sipping off Dracos flask before handing it back to him. "Does that thing ever empty?"

"Nope." He said, opening it.

"Really?" Hermione asked as he took a drink. "How?"

"Magic, Granger." Draco said like he was talking to a child.

"Can I see it? Even something enchanted to be bigger than it appears will still empty eventually. It's supposed to be impossible to be able to make an endless supply of something." Hermione said, unable to contain her curiosity.

"There's the insufferable know it all we all know." He drawled out. "You can examine it tomorrow, it's services are needed tonight."

"Well then I need a drink." She said pointedly.

"You have one in front of you." He shot back.

Hermione reached out and drained her cup as fast as she could.

"Now I don't." She said, setting down her empty cup.

Draco met her eyes and held them as he leaned forward. She ignored the way her stomach flipped as she looked into them, ignored how they shined and made her want to drown in them as he tilted the flask into her cup.

"Now you do." He said, enunciating every word slowly.

"What's going on?" Harry's voice asked and Hermione turned to see him leaning on Ginny's chair.

"Malfoys flirting with Hermione." Ginny said, as if it was an everyday occurrence.

"If I was flirting with Granger her knickers would already be on my bedroom floor." Draco said with a smirk.

"He is good at it." Pansy said.

"Yes, yes, Dracos a sex god. You're giving me a complex here." Theo muttered.

"You're better." Pansy whispered to him and he smiled at her.

"Malfoy really gave you that flask?" Harry asked Ginny.

"I didn't give her shit, she stole it." Draco mumbled.

Harry's eyes ran over Draco for a moment before he looked to Hermione. Hermione laughed at the confusion on his face, he had never been able to hide things well.

"He's drunk." She said.

"5 points from Gryffindor, Miss Granger. I believe I said I was very drunk." Draco said, pointing at her.

Hermione laughed at him and a smile lit up his face. Draco's eyes lingered on Hermione's face, flitting down briefly to study her lips, before he seemed to catch himself. He's eyes slid away from her and she thought he was looking at Harry until his whole posture changed. He tensed up and his face was all hard lines again.

"What are you guys.." came Ron's voice before it trailed off. "Oh."

Hermione looked up and saw Ron's face fall as he took in the table. His eyes landed on Draco and he scowled. Hermione caught sight of Samantha, a timid girl with long brown hair, twisting her hands just behind him.

"Well, now it's a fucking party." Draco muttered and Hermione kicked his leg under the table.

He glared at her for a second before surprising everyone and laughing.

"This is ridiculous. Let's go for a walk." He said pushing away from the table, "That way when Weasley attacks there won't be any collateral damage. Everyone knows these halls have seen enough of that."

Draco sauntered away, pulling his wand and twirling it between his fingers as he went. The rest of the table sat frozen for a moment until Ron hurried after him. Before he had taken less than 5 steps the entire table jumped up and rushed to follow. Hermione knew where Draco was going before they even left the hall.

"Weasley wouldn't actually try to duel him, would he?" Pansy asked her as they cleared the castle doors. Hermione just shook her head, unsure of how to answer. "Draco will take him down, Granger. We've been taking dueling lessons since we were children, he could beat Weasley in his sleep but.."

"He'll break the rules of his parole by using offensive magic outside of class. I know." Hermione snapped.

They crested the hill just after Ron to find Draco sitting beside the water, still twirling his wand.

"Put your wand away." Hermione snapped at Ron as she brushed past him, sitting beside Draco.

"I'm not going to fight him." Draco breathed out to her. "I just couldn't be in that hall anymore."

He rubbed his arm against his leg, hard. Hermione reached out and grabbed his hand, shoving his sleeve up, revealing his dark mark to her for the first time. The skin around it was red and irritated and when she reached out to touch it he yanked his arm away.

"We've all been marked by the war, Draco." She said gently, pulling his gaze from his mark to her. "Not just you."

She pushed her own sleeve up, revealing the word mudblood etched into her arm. He studied it for a long moment, his whole body tense, a muscle along his jaw dancing as he clenched his teeth together. Slowly he reached out and let his fingers run over it, feeling every letter.

"Well, here's to the war." He said, pulling the bickering crowds attention as he pulled his flask out once again.

Harry broke away from the crowd and fell beside Hermione. He eyed Dracos mark for a moment before the boy offered him the flask. Harry took it and tilted it toward him briefly.

"Cheers." He said, taking a long drink from it.

Chapter 9

Hermione's eyes opened the next day and immediately slammed back shut. The morning light was blinding to her hungover eyes. She groaned and rolled over, freezing as she felt a warm body beside her. Her mind flew through the memories from the night before but everything was mixed up and blurry. She knew some of the things had to be a dream but now there was a person in her bed and she was afraid to see who it was. She remembered being out at the lake, everything settled down and they all drank and shared stories. Ron pouted but after a couple pulls of Malfoys flask he loosened up. She remembered Malfoy running his fingers over her scar, him teasing and joking with her. Him kissing her? No that was a dream, it had to be. He had pushed her onto the bed, the bed that now held her and someone else though.

"Dare I say, last night was fun." Came Ginny's muffled voice beside her and Hermione's eyes flew open, facing red hair instead of blonde.

Hermione sighed in relief as Ginny shifted to look at her.

"Yeah, it actually was." Hermione agreed softly.

"Who knew the Slytherins could be a good time when they weren't trying to kill you?" Ginny laughed out.

Hermione laughed too as she put her memories in order. All of them stumbling back to the dorms, her and Ginny laid down to talk and they must have drifted off. Malfoy had been a dream, him kissing her, touching her, running his fingers down her spine and up her thigh. Pushing her onto the bed and crawling on top of her. Hermione ran her hand down her face, trying to shake the image. Why did she keep having these dreams? Pansy was a bad influence. That had to be it, Pansy's remarks and teasing about her time with Malfoy were just seeping into her subconscious.

"Should we go see if the boys are alive?" Ginny asked.

"In a couple minutes, I don't think I can stand right now." Hermione grumbled.

By the time they all made their way down to The Great Hall to get food it was closer to lunchtime than breakfast. The Hall had been restored to its usual look at some point during the night and they all took their seats and tried to find something that wouldn't turn their stomachs. Hermione gave up and rested her head on the table, the light still hurting her eyes.

"Well, you lot look chipper." She heard Blaises voice say far too loudly.

Something glass was placed loudly on the table beside her head and Hermione turned slightly to see what it was. Her back straightened quickly when she saw Malfoy sitting beside her, a smirk on his face.

"You Slytherins are demons." Ron grumbled. "How can you be fine right now?"

"Mummy never taught you how to make a hangover cure?" Blaise asked, sitting across from her.

"Drink it. It'll make you feel better." Malfoy said to her softly, nudging the vial he had set down beside her.

Without question she snatched the bottle and emptied it, her face scrunching up at the sour taste. Draco laughed at her as a shiver ran down her spine and suddenly her head felt 10 pounds lighter. It no longer hurt to look at his blinding hair in the bright sun and even her memories seemed more in focus. Blaise handed the others vials of their own and everyone followed Hermione's lead, even Ron.

"I had always heard rumors of Gryffindors parties but I never believed you lot could actually be fun." Blaise said, coolly and Hermione threw a roll at him.

He met her with shocked eyes as it bounced lightly off his chest. Draco laughed first, then almost like they were waiting for permission the rest of them joined. Hermione glanced around the table, no one was as comfortable with the Slytherins presence as she was but they weren't exactly uneasy either. She knew they would never be completely at ease with each other, too much had happened between all of them but hopefully once they left Hogwarts there wouldn't be such a hard line drawn across the houses.

"Rude." Blaise said to her before turning to glance at Harry and Ron. "So, Me and Draco were thinking of taking our brooms out today, before it snows and all. Fancy a pick up game? I can grab Theo so Weaslette won't be left out."

"Yes!" Ginny said immediately, her eyes lighting up.

All the 7th years had opted out of quidditch and games had been rather dull watching the younger years. As Harry nodded and Ron shrugged, Hermione rested her hand on the bench, accidentally brushing her pinky against Dracos. She pulled away slightly, focusing on the boys discussing their pick up game.

"So, who's your seeker? Going to admit your girlfriend's better than you?" Draco asked, his tone casual but on the bench his fingers brushed against hers again.

Hermione's stomach erupted in butterflies and her heart seemed to flutter for a moment. She didn't move her hand and couldn't look at Draco.

"I'll be seeker. Ginny's better suited to chaser, as you'll soon see. Eager to lose to me again?" Harry replied and Hermione let out a breathy chuckle.

Ginny glanced at her from across the table, raising an eyebrow.

"What?" Ginny asked her.

"It's just a little surreal." Hermione said as Draco's fingers brushed hers again, out of sight to the others. "That we're casually talking about a pick up game."

"We should have all gotten drunk together a few years ago. Things may have played out differently." Draco said, his tone joking but when Hermione looked at him his eyes were dark.

As she watched him, his finger hooked around her pinky and he swallowed. His eyes were watching her like she was a cornered animal, afraid she would skamper away if he moved too fast.

"Might have been able to save you a broken bone or two." Ron teased, oblivious to Hermione's pounding heart.

Hermione turned to look at him as she laughed, sliding her hand closer to Draco. His hand covered hers now and he began toying with her fingers, running his over each of hers individually as if he was trying to memorize the way they felt.

"Two?" Blaise asked, "Pretty sure it was far more than two."

Blaise glanced at Draco and he let out a dry laugh, his fingers slowly brushing up Hermione's hand. Hermione tried to smile, but was more focused on keeping her breathing even. Draco found her wrist, circling around and running a long finger up the vein on her inner arm.

"We should tally that up sometime." Draco said, his thumb resting for a few beats on her throbbing pulse point.

"After the game." Harry said, "We might have more to add."

Draco smirked leaning forward, resting his other arm on the table, therefore moving closer to Hermione. His hand moved back to her fingers, brushing her thigh slightly. Only he seemed to notice her breath hitch slightly at the touch.

"Scared Potter?" He asked.

Draco's hand covered hers again, his thumb brushing against her thigh. Her leg leaned into the touch instinctively and she noticed Draco's breathing had changed, like he was breathing manually instead of on reflex.

"You wish." Harry said, echoing his words from second year just as Draco had.

"Blaise you should go get Theo." Draco said, glancing at him. "I'll meet you out there, as long as Granger can refrain from breaking my nose, that is."

His eyes met hers, dark and questioning. 'Draco, here, had a huge crush on you in third year.' Pansy's voice echoed through her mind. 'I promise you it ended when you broke my fucking nose.' That had been why he had avoided her, she suddenly realized, because she had gotten too close. She was just as hesitant about him as he was about her, how could she ever actually trust him? She didn't know why that memory had decided to clear up now, as Draco's hand slid from hers onto her thigh. Something just below her stomach jolted as his thumb rubbed a gentle circle against her jeans.

"Alright." Blaise said, standing and pointing at her with fake sternness. "You, behave while I'm gone."

Hermione grinned at him, shifting in her seat slightly, inadvertently causing Draco's hand to slide up an inch. His hand froze for a breath before he resumed his lazy circles. As Ron excused himself too, with instructions to grab all of them warmer clothes, Hermione found Draco's hand with her fingers and he stopped his movements. He reached out to grab an apple with his free hand, the conversation dying as Harry and Ginny finished their food.

She glanced at him, but he was staring up at the ceiling as if he was studying the weather. Hermione mimicked his previous attentions to her fingers as he bit into the apple. She could hear Harry and Ginny talking, but their attentions were fully on each other. When Hermione hit Draco's wrist his eyes met hers. She pushed against his inner arm and he licked his lips. She felt his hand tense slightly against her thigh as she trailed her fingers slightly up his inner arm and back down. Hermione turned her eyes down as she pulled a book out of her bag with her free hand. She knew she wasn't going to be able to focus on the words but she couldn't just sit there staring at him, something had changed in the way he looked at her and it made her heartbeat stutter.

His hand shifted slightly, moving toward her inner thigh. He pushed his fingers into her thigh gently as his thumb started circling again. She glanced over at Harry and Ginny, releasing a shaky breath as she was assured their attentions were completely on each other. Hermione knew she shouldn't be playing chicken with Draco Malfoy of all people but she didn't want him to stop. Shifting subtly to the left, her leg now pressed against his, the tops of his fingers now rested against the edge of the bench between her legs as they pressed against her inner thigh, his lazy circles making it feel as though electricity was shooting through her, his leg pressed deliberately against hers.

"Stop me." He breathed out, turning his eyes toward the front of the hall.

Her fingers wrapped around his wrist, his racing pulse beating against them the only sign that he was affected by what was going on. Instead of pulling his hand away, she made him push down slightly harder. She rested her chin on her free hand, eyes on her book, as Draco squeezed her thigh. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Ginny glance at them but all Ginny saw was Hermione reading a book and Draco eating an apple, bored.

Draco's hand moved up slightly and Hermione wondered if she would stop him if he tried to actually touch her. She released his wrist and rested her hand in his thigh, feeling it tense beneath her. Draco's grip on her tightened as she slowly drew a line from his knee up toward his hip. His eyes fluttered shut for a moment as she spread her fingers across the fabric of his pants. His hold on her tightened the further up she got until he released her thigh to grab her wrist.

"Fuck." He breathed out.

Hermione laced their fingers together as he turned to look at her.

"You lose." She said, her voice barely a whisper.

He smiled as his eyes met hers, a rare real smile. His thumb brushed her knuckle as he pulled his bottom lip between his teeth. Then he nodded, looking her up and down.

"We'll see."

Chapter 10

The boys and Ginny played until night fell around them, Pansy and Hermione huddled up in the stands. Hermione watched as both Harry and Draco seemed to take a collective breath as they pushed off the ground for the first time, soaring around the stands. Draco winked at Pansy and Hermione as he flew by and Pansy flipped him off. After Harry caught the snitch the first time, Draco reached out and nudged his shoulder. Harry laughed as they circled each other before diving and racing up the lawn. Blaise and Ginny fought for control of the quaffle, Blaise trying his best to keep it away from Ginny because Theo hadn't managed to block her from scoring once. Ron swerved over and just managed to block Blaise from scoring as Harry released the snitch again.

Hermione and Pansy stood as Harry and Draco dove at the same time. Hermione's eyes scanned the ground but she couldn't see what the boys did. She knew neither could be feinting since they both had sped off at the same time.

"Let's go, Draco!" Pansy screamed, as Hermione clutched the railing.

Both boys pulled up just before they hit the ground, the snitch in Draco's hand. He shot straight back up, throwing the snitch at Hermione. She flinched back but the golden ball veered off before it touched her. Draco laughed as he fell away from the stands, him and Harry back to searching for it.

Finally it was too dark for any of them to see properly and Hermione and Pansy made their way down to meet the players where they had all gathered on the field. Blaise and Ron shook hands and Ginny teased Theo about possibly borrowing Harry's glasses next time so he could actually see the quaffle. The feeling that she was dreaming fell over Hermione again as she watched Harry and Draco lift the chest of balls back into its spot.

Theo threw his arm around Pansy and called out a quick goodbye as they left the stadium. Blaise and Draco whispered to each other for a moment before Blaise left as well. Draco nodded at them all and Hermione gave him a small smile as they left. She wondered if he was going to go out to the lake before heading inside but when she glanced back he was already gone.

They were halfway back to the castle when Hermione realized she had left her bag. She told the others to go ahead as she jogged back to the stadium. Just before she entered, someone grabbed her and had her pinned against the wall. Her wand had flown out as the person turned her and now jabbed into Draco's jaw. His face was covered in the shadows but Hermione could see a smile decorating his lips. He seemed completely un-phased by her wand at his throat. His hands rested on either side of her head and his body was a hair from being pressed against her. His eyes looked down at her, the same thing lurking in them that had been there this morning, making her unable to calm her rapid heart.

"Do it." He breathed out, leaning into her wand, his voice torn between being playful and serious.

Hermione, truly, didn't know how it happened. If she was ever asked, aside from completely denying the whole situation, she would swear he leaned in first. One moment she held Draco at wand point then suddenly his lips were on hers, her wand on the ground just behind him, discarded so she could lace her fingers through his already wind blown hair. His arms circled her waist as he pushed his body flush against hers.

Hermione's mind was screaming at her that she should stop him as he pushed his tongue through her lips. Instead she opened her mouth to him, focusing on the feeling of it sliding against her own. Her fingers curled into his hair, tugging a bit on the strands and he pulled back, studying her face for a moment. He must have found what he was looking for in her gaze because a breath later his lips were on hers again.

He pulled one of her legs up to wrap around his waist and pushed in closer, her back digging into the rough wood of the wall behind them. His hand gripped her thigh hard and Hermione couldn't help but think that she preferred this rough touch to the gentle teasing he had done that morning. Hermione gasped as his lips left her mouth, only to close on the skin of her neck. His hips pushed into hers and she let out a quiet moan as electricity shot through her when she felt his hardness press into her through their clothes.

The noise seemed to spark something in Draco as his attentions got rougher. He pushed her sweater away from her shoulder and bit down on the skin there. His hands hitched her sweater up so he could run them across her bare stomach. Hermione gasped as his fingers ran across her hip bones and she began to shake slightly when he started toying with the button on her jeans.

She desperately wanted him to touch her, but at the same time wanted to push his hands away. As if sensing her conflicting emotions, Draco abandoned the waist of her pants and slid his hand around her stomach to wrap across her back. His lips returned to hers, gentler than before and he let her leg fall from his waist. His hand came up to cup her cheek instead, his thumb softly stroking her cheek. He pulled back but Hermione leaned after him. After a couple lingering pecks, Draco's hands fell away from her.

"What's got you wandering around in the dark, Granger?" He asked softly, tucking some of her hair behind her ear.

"I.. um.. I forgot my bag." Hermione stuttered out, trying to regain her balance.

Draco bent down and picked up her wand, turning it over in his hands. Hermione tensed up and his eyes flew to her. He twirled her wand between his fingers before holding it out to her.

"Have a good night, Granger." He said once it was back in her hand.

"You said you would never touch me." She said as he turned away.

"7 years and you've learned nothing." He said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I lie, darling. All the time."

His face held a flash of sadness before it melted into a blank slate. He started to leave again but Hermione stopped him.

"Can you wait?" She asked. "I don't like the dark."

"Yeah." He said with a low chuckle. "I know you don't."

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I have posted a companion story to this, From the Desk of Draco Malfoy. It gives you some insight into the thought process of him and why he's such an ass sometimes. So check it out, but be warned, Draco's mind is not a happy place and he's an angsty little shit. He's extremely depressed and holds a lot of self loathing.

Hermione wasn't sure how it happened, but she found herself enjoying life again. The quidditch games became a regular thing, every few days they headed out to the pitch to blow off steam. No one stopped them, quite the opposite actually as more people began to show up. At first it was just other 7th years, Ron's new girlfriend Samantha, Padma and Parvati, Neville and Luna all joined Pansy and Hermione in the stands. Millicent Bulstrood from Slytherin and Seamus joined the players so they began releasing a bludger, making the games more nerve wracking as the pair swatted at the ferocious ball.

By the time Sunday rolled around again, however, small groups began filling the stands. Some timid first years and second years, but mostly a handful of kids from 3rd year and up from each house. Hermione was actually a little surprised to see McGonagall take a seat in an empty box. Hermione watched the players whispering to each other on the field, clearly unsettled by the unexpected audience. She saw Harry and Draco both glance up at McGonagall, wondering if she was going to stop them. McGonagall just smiled down on them and they seemed to take that as permission as they all pushed off into the air.

Draco breezed by their booth, followed closely by Harry. Draco's behavior towards her hadn't changed, he seemed to be pretending the night at the stadium hadn't happened. She hadn't been alone with him since, not having time to come out to the lake. Her, Pansy, and Ginny had begun eating lunch together, laughing over whatever The Prophet or Witch Weekly had decided to publish about them. Draco had joined them a couple times, not saying much, just sitting and listening. He had come to the library a few times with Theo as well, but he never gave any inclination that anything had happened between them.

Seamus released the bludger and snitch before kicking off and tossing the quaffle into the air, Ginny snatching it before Blaise could. Millicent hit a bludger at Ginny, making her drop the quaffle as she dodged it. Blaise sped up the field to Ron, Seamus too preoccupied with hitting the bludger at Draco, who was speeding off with a look of concentration on his face.

"Fuck!" He yelled as he pulled up at the last second, the bludger narrowly missing him.

Hermione laughed as Draco rolled before flipping off Seamus.

"Right back at ya, mate." Seamus called as he sped past Draco.

Draco paused in the air just in front of their box. He pulled his sweater off and tossed it at her, his eyes meeting hers briefly. He smiled before turning away and flying off, making Hermione's stomach erupt with butterflies. She had to resist the urge to burrow her face into his sweater, his scent drifting up to her off of it. Hermione dropped it on the bench beside her, catching Pansy's eye. The other girl raised her eyebrow at her.

"What?" Hermione asked her.

"Nothing." Pansy said, turning her attention back to the game. "Nothing at all."

After playing three rounds, Harry catching the snitch first, then Draco and a third to break the tie, the Gryffindor's were the winners. Draco swung himself from his broom into their box, Hermione handing him his sweater. As he pulled it over his head, Hermione couldn't pull her eyes away from him. The rest had already filed out to meet the others on the field.

"What?" Draco asked, running his hand through his hair.

"Are we ever going to talk about it or are we just pretending it never happened?" She asked him, needing to get on the same page as him.

"What's there to talk about?" He asked, his body tensing as though she was about to hex him.

"How you actually feel.." she started, but he cut her off.

"A quick snog doesn't mean I have feelings for you, Granger." He said coldly. "We've all had a rough year, yeah? What can I say? I'm human, and you're a warm body."

"So, I was just someone to shag?" She snapped, hating herself as her eyes burned.

"Like I'd ever actually shag you." He snapped.

"What?" She asked, surprised at the venom in his tone.

"I thought you were smart. Just because I can play at civility that doesn't mean I'm going to fall in love with you. I haven't changed, Granger. I'm still the Malfoy who called you a mudblood." He continued, his eyes lingering on her arm for a moment. "The same one who stood by while his aunt carved it into your arm. Just because I can tolerate you being around, that doesn't mean my feelings go any deeper than that."

"You're a pig, Malfoy." Hermione cried, pushing past him.

"I've been told." He said softly, staring at the floor as she rushed out.

Hermione leaned against the wall, taking a few deep breaths and wiping her eyes. She could hear her friends just on the other side and she couldn't let them see her like this. She couldn't let the peace they had all found break. She had known better than to trust Malfoy, the rational part of her brain scolded her. Hermione sighed and wiped at her face again before turning and

making her way out the door, a smile on her lips. She met the rest in the middle of the field, blending into them easily.

"Where's Draco?" Pansy asked, glancing back toward the door.

Hermione's eyes wandered up toward their box, Draco sitting on the ledge staring up into the heavens.

"He's been in a weird mood." Theo mumbled.

"His whole life has been a weird mood." Pansy joked.

"Should we leave him or are we afraid he'll jump?" Blaise asked, something in his tone telling her he wasn't completely joking.

"He'll be fine." Pansy said, "Now, I think a certain Gryffindor is making eyes at you."

Blaise looked over and caught Parvati's eye, Parvati turning away quickly, a blush coloring her cheeks. He grinned wolfishly before bowing to them slightly.

"Excuse me." He said, drifting over to the girl.

"Did Draco say anything to you?" Pansy asked her and Hermione forced a smile onto her face.

"No." She said. "Not a word."

Chapter 12

Draco began avoiding Hermione again, avoiding almost everyone actually. He still showed up at their games but he left immediately after and she never saw him speak to anyone anymore. He sat beside Blaise, Pansy, and Theo at meals barely reacting to anything they said. That is, until one day when Hermione walked into breakfast and she stopped short at seeing Malfoy leaning into a pretty blonde girl, his finger tracing patterns on her arm. Pansy was glaring at Astoria but she jumped up when she saw Hermione. Hermione tried to shake off the hurt that flashed through her as she took her seat with Harry, Ron, and Ginny. Pansy threw a copy of Witch Weekly down in front of Hermione as she fell onto the bench next to her.

"Have you seen this?" Pansy asked as Hermione began flipping through the magazine. "Page 6."

Hermione laughed as she saw the headline. 'Harry Potter Continues to Defeat the Dark!' A picture of Harry and Draco racing for the snitch accompanied the article.

"Gods, they're desperate." Hermione scoffed.

"Turn the page." Pansy insisted.

Hermione flipped the page and the smile fell off her face. A picture of Draco hovering in front of her at the game danced on the page. The picture had been taken from a low angle, but Hermione could see the smile light up his face every few seconds. 'Death Eater has His Sights Set on Golden Girl.' the caption read.

"Has Malfoy seen this?" Ron asked, skimming the article over her shoulder.

"Yeah, last night. Then this morning he decided to fake an interest in Astoria." Pansy replied, glaring over at the girl.

"Doesn't seem fake to me." Hermione muttered, watching as Draco tucked Astoria's hair behind her ear.

"Trust me, you heard him. He can't stand Astoria." Pansy said as Draco and Astoria stood from their table.

"He also lies." Hermione said bitterly as the pair brushed past them.

Draco paused, glancing down at the opened magazine on the table. His face was hard, unreadable, as his eyes drifted to Hermione. She looked up into the cold steel, his eyebrows twitching up before he turned away. Draco threw his arm across Astoria's shoulders as they left the hall.

"Perfect little pureblood princess for the perfect little pureblood prince." Ron commented without malice as he turned back to his food.

Hermione pushed the magazine away from her and Ginny reached out to grab it. Harry rolled his eyes, he never bothered with what the press wrote about him. If he did he would probably go crazy since he was such a hot topic these days. Hermione pushed the food around her plate, having lost her appetite, and was thankful when it was time for class. At least during lessons she had something to distract her.

With the school day finally over, Hermione fully intended to hide away in her dorm so she didn't have to see Astoria draping herself over Malfoy any more. It had lasted all day, Astoria's giggling, Malfoy murmuring to her, playing with her hair and holding her hand. Hermione wanted to gag. She had just dropped her bag when Ginny burst in.

"What's going on with you and Draco?" Ginny asked, without preamble.

"What?" Hermione asked, trying her best to act as if the question was absurd.

"I read that article, Hermione." Ginny pushed.

"Since when do you believe Witch Weekly?"

"Since it had photo proof." Ginny said, tossing the magazine on Hermione's bed.

Hermione looked down at the photo of her and Malfoy again. She watched his face light up with a smile while she clutched his sweater again and again until Ginny cleared her throat and snapped her out of it.

"He's smiling, Gin. The boy is allowed to smile." Hermione said, slamming the magazine shut.

"I've seen that smile on boys before. I know what that smile means." Ginny said. "and I'm not saying it's a bad thing but you were comfortable with those Slytherins far before we were."

"What of it?"

"When did Draco say he didn't like Astoria?" Ginny asked, referring to Pansy's comment this morning. "Because I don't remember them ever mentioning her."

"Before Halloween." Hermione mumbled, picking at her bedspread.

"When you two were in the library together?" Ginny asked and Hermione knew she already knew the answer.

"No." Hermione said, "While we were out by the lake."

"Hermione Granger. You've been holding out on me." Ginny accused and Hermione sighed.

The whole situation came spilling out of Hermione. She explained how overwhelmed she had been when they first returned, how she had found solace beside the water, with him sitting silently beside her. About Blaise and Theo finding them together and teaching her their game. The night of the fire and how they had danced. She left out the dreams that had been haunting her and the hesitant touches in the Great Hall, those feeling too intimate to share.

"And he kissed me." She finished, Ginny watching her carefully.

"When?" She asked.

"After the first quidditch game, when I forgot my bag."

"And what? He just woke up today and decided to throw himself at Astoria Greengrass?"

"Not exactly." Hermione told Ginny about what he had said to her when she tried to clarify the situation.

"Oh my god." Ginny breathed out. "He loves you."

"Shut up." Hermione scoffed.

"Ok, maybe not. But he definitely has feelings for you."

"Ginny, he made it perfectly clear he doesn't."

"What did I do when I was trying to stop liking Harry?" Ginny asked her.

"Dated half your year, and some of ours." Hermione answered before giving Ginny a stern look. "No, that's not what he's doing."

"You heard Pansy. He can't stand Astoria."

"You didn't hear him, Gin. He just tolerates me."

"You know, it's a decent night for November." Ginny muttered, looking out the window. "It'd be a nice night for a walk by the lake."

Hermione didn't know why she let Ginny talk her into going out to the lake. The air was cold, December only a few days away and she could smell snow on the wind. She wouldn't be surprised if they woke tomorrow to a dusting across the grounds. Draco probably wouldn't even be out here, Hermione thought as she made her way up the hill. She crested the hill and came face to face with the empty bank of the lake. Hermione sighed as she sat down and cast a warming charm on herself. She was just considering going back inside, when Draco fell onto the grass next to her.

"I didn't think you would be out here." she said softly.

"I've always been a disappointment, why stop now." he mumbled, offering her the flask.

"I'm not disappointed that you're here." she told him, as she reached out and accepted it. "And I doubt anyone thinks that anyway."

"You should talk to my father." Draco said, a dry laugh coming from the back of his throat. "He'll gladly give you a detailed list of everything I've done wrong since the day I was born."

“And where is he? Rotting in Azkaban, so I wouldn't really take his opinion to heart.”

“He’s still my father.”

“Of course! Draco, I didn’t mean.. I just meant that.. Well, that you could learn from his mistakes. Not repeat history.”

“Can I?” he asked, twitching his sleeve so the bottom of his dark mark peaked at her.

“Yes, if you choose to. At this rate though, you’re going to end up just like him and that's kind of sad.” Hermione said as she stared at his mark, a spot of red on his white sleeve catching her eye. “Is that blood?” She asked, reaching out for his arm, making Draco lean away from her.

“I just scrapped it on my cauldron earlier.” he mumbled, shaking his sleeve back down.

She watched him rub his arm against his leg for a moment as he looked out across the water.

"What are we doing, Granger?" He asked, his voice quiet. "Going to class, preparing for our N.E.W.Ts, pretending like none of it happened."

"This school is brimming with reminders that it happened." She whispered. "We're just trying to move on and frankly, you’re not doing a very good job at that."

"None of it matters, though."

"Of course it matters. We didn't die so now we have to live. We're all going to have lives when we leave here, futures."

"You will. No one's going to look twice at me while I have this thing on my arm."

Hermione's eyes were drawn to his hand, his fingers winding blades of grass around them. She reached out and laced her fingers through his to steady the nervous movements, that's what they were. She had watched him enough to know that he would always fidget with his fingers when he was nervous. He didn't pull away, just looked down at their hands and Hermione wondered if he was thinking of Astoria and how he had held her hand hours ago. His thumb brushed against her knuckles as his eyes found hers.

“Draco, you have a second chance, the opportunity to show the world who you are and who you could be. Don’t fuck it up just because you think you don’t deserve it.”

“You sound like Theo.”

“Theos right.” she snapped at him. “I know self sabotage when I see it. You can’t push everyone away forever. Eventually, you’ll just be alone.”

"Maybe I should be alone." He said. "You, of all people, should hate me."

"I know, and I used to, but I realized awhile ago that you weren't that boy anymore." She said, leaning into his side. "When we danced."

He sighed as her head fell onto his shoulder. She still didn't know what it meant, didn't know how he felt, but he seemed to need her the same way she needed him. It probably wasn't healthy, definitely wasn't ideal, but for now, that didn't matter. Neither of them could cope being alone in the stillness of the aftermath of a war none of them had wanted to be a part of, so they were still with each other.

Chapter 13

The next day when Hermione entered The Great Hall, she hesitated for a moment before going to the Slytherin table. As she sat across from Draco he raised an eyebrow at her, Astoria glaring at her next to him. Blaise and Theo greeted her as if this was a normal thing and Pansy tossed her an apple.

"I think you're at the wrong table." Astoria said.

"What do you think, Draco?" She asked, meeting his surprised eyes. "Am I at the wrong table?"

Draco's eyes narrowed slightly for a moment before he laughed.

"Probably should have been sorted here, to be honest." He said, turning back to his food.

Hermione tried not to smile, she really did, but the smile on Pansy's face told her she failed. Ginny and Parvati joined her, Blaise and Parvati spent the entire meal flirting and Ginny and Pansy caught each other up on the school gossip. Theo and Hermione talked about their defense lesson coming up today, and how stupid they thought the professor was to put a boggart in front of them.

"Yes, but it could also help. Better to face it in a room of people who can help you than unexpectedly when you're alone." Hermione said, trying to keep a positive attitude about it.

"I mean, honestly, what's the worst that could happen?" Astoria asked, not quite understanding the implications of making a bunch of war torn children face their greatest fears.

"The Dark Lord could appear." Draco said, toying with his fork. "I've opted out."

"So did I." Blaise and Pansy said at the same time.

"Ron did too." Ginny added.

Draco nodded at them as he stood, Astoria jumping up to walk with him. Draco shoved his hands in his pocket as they left the Great Hall, instead of grabbing Astoria like he had the day before. Hermione couldn't stop the small smile as they joined Ron and Harry to head to their first class.

"What was that about?" Ron asked, wondering why she had chosen to sit with the Slytherins.

"They always come to our table." Hermione said, shrugging. "We should be willing to go to them once in a while."

"Mhm." Ginny hummed out.

"What?" Harry asked her.

“Nothing.” Ginny said, glancing at Hermione. “She’s right. Sometimes we have to go to them.”

When Hermione entered Defense, her stomach was already in knots. The tension was thick in the air as she sat next to Ron. Ron was bouncing his leg as he tried to talk Harry out of facing the boggart. Harry shrugged him off as he stared forward at the wiggling trunk. A flash of blonde caught her eye as Draco, Theo, Blaise and Pansy entered. Theo drifted over to them, leaving his friends who weren’t facing the boggart in the back. Ron went back to join the ones who decided to sit out, looking pale. Even McGonagall was there, in case things got too out of hand. This wasn’t a class of school children whose biggest fears were spiders and vampires, they had come face to face with worse things.

The professor gathered the class around her and again explained that no one had to face it, it was purely optional and they could back out at any time. Then Seamus stepped forward and Hermione began chewing her lip. She could feel Draco's eyes on her, and when she turned he didn’t look away. He looked worried. She wondered what he was avoiding by not facing the boggart, but couldn't judge him too harshly for not wanting to face it. The crowd jostled as Hermione got pushed forward. She really wasn’t sure what was going to appear as the boggart focused on her, but when Bellatrix Lestrange stood before her, she realized it would never have been anything else. Bellatrix let out a mad cackle as she regarded Hermione, a knife glinting in her hand. She held it up, smiling and slowly wiping the blood from it as Hermione's mind raced, trying to make this something funny.

“Did you think he cared for you, mudblood?” Bellatrix cooed at her, “That it wasn’t just a game, to see if he could?”

Hermione raised her wand just as the knife in Bellatrix's hand turned into one of her own. Hermione's hand was shaking as she leveled her wand at Bellatrix but the boggart was quicker.

“Avada Kedavra!” Bellatrix cried before Hermione could even start her spell.

Hermione gasped as she was suddenly pulled back, stumbling and landing on the ground as Draco took her place. The green light of the fake spell lit him up momentarily as Bellatrix melted into Lucius. Draco glared up at his father as he began circling him, looking him up and down, shaking his head. Every time his cane clinked against the stone, Draco twitched.

“Pathetic!” Lucius spat. “Have I taught you nothing, Draco? You're going to be the end of us. Just when I thought you couldn’t be a bigger disappointment.”

As Lucius stopped in front of Draco his form shivered and melted and Lord Voldemort stood before them. He held out his hand, his long fingers ushering to Draco to come forward.

“Give me your hand, Draco.” Voldemort hissed out.

“Riddikulus.” Draco snapped, his wand swinging out.

Voldemort was thrown back, exploding into a cloud of black dust and Draco spun on his heel, blasting the door open with a wave of his wand before storming through it.

“That’s enough for today.” McGonagall said coolly, “You’re dismissed.”

Pansy, Blaise, and Theo didn’t hesitate as they ran out of the room after Draco. Hermione grabbed his bag for him and followed them. It was her fault, he had known he shouldn’t be in front of the boggart but he had pushed her out of the way when she panicked. Why? She shook her head and wondered how he felt when he saw her boggart, saw his aunt standing before them. Briefly she wondered if he had heard what the boggart had said, maybe that’s what had spurred him into action? She didn’t know.

She had lost sight of the Slytherins but she knew where Draco would go. She took a deep breath of the cold air as she walked out the castle doors. She crested the hill by the lake and found the other three sitting, watching as Draco fired spell after spell at the nearest tree. His eyes fell on her as she dropped his bag and he shook his head slightly.

“Expelliarmus.” he said, turning his wand on her and snagging her wand from the air. “Constant vigilance, Miss Granger. You’re getting sloppy.”

“Feel better?” she asked, snatching her wand from him and falling next to Theo.

“No.” Draco said, flopping down beside them.

“You knew that you would see Voldemort.” Hermione said, “That’s why you opted out?”

“What else could it have been?” Malfoy muttered.

“Your father..” she started.

“That wasn’t my father.” he snapped, cutting her off. “That was just..”

“You’re afraid you’re letting the Malfoy line down, we know.” Pansy interrupted him.

Draco sighed and laid back on the grass.

“The Malfoy line is cursed.” he grumbled.

“No it’s not.” Pansy said, laying next to him, “That was just a story.”

“We’re destined to be undone by a fool falling for the unattainable. It drove some of us mad.” he whispered.

“Who are you scared you’ve fallen for?” Pansy whispered back to him.

He turned his head and looked at her, Hermione seeing how close the two actually were in that moment. The Slytherins kept their relationships very private, even after spending so much time around them, Hermione found it hard to tell how they all actually felt about each other. Draco scrunched his nose at Pansy as she smiled at him. Pansy reached out and flicked his nose, giving him a stern look.

“Wrinkles, dear.” she scolded him.

“It’s just a story.” he mumbled, turning to look back up at the sky.

“I’ve never heard of a Malfoy curse.” Hermione said, softly.

“Well, if Granger hasn’t heard of it, it can’t be real.” Draco teased.

“After Sirius died, I had to look into The Blacks family magic, to make sure Grimmauld was safe. The Malfoys are closely tied to them, Wulfredas’ notes would have mentioned it.” Hermione explained, realizing it didn’t make her chest hurt to talk about anymore. “It’s probably just a story passed down to scare the boys into keeping the bloodline pure.”

“Yeah, like how your father used to tell us that if we ever thought about a muggle girl, our dicks would shrivel.” Blaise said, Draco and Theo laughing.

“Or if I’m deflowered before my wedding night, my husband would know and my children would be cursed.” Pansy added.

“Sorry, Theo. She’ll never produce a proper heir.” Draco teased him.

“My heirs will be far more proper than anything you manage to produce.” Theo shot back, Hermione feeling Pansy’s eyes on her, but when she looked the girl was looking at Draco.

“I’m not having heirs. I’m taking a vow of celibacy for the remainder of my days.” Draco said, crossing his arms behind his head.

“Oh, please, Draco. You’re worse than a dog.” Pansy said, swatting his chest.

“Some may say, I’m a pig.” Draco said, his eyes on Hermione as her cheeks flushed.

“They’re not wrong.” she snapped, then gasped as Draco reached out and pulled her to lay beside him.

“I know.” he murmured, his face an inch away from hers.

Hermione pulled her bottom lip between her teeth as she watched his lips. His tongue darted out to wet them and she fought against the urge to pull him into her, to feel his lips against hers again. Theo cleared his throat and Draco and Hermione looked away from each other just as Harry, Ginny, Ron, and Samantha came into view.

“So is Malfoy off to Azkaban?” Ron joked, dropping his bag.

“What? You want to duel before the aurors come to take me away?” Draco asked, sitting up.

Hermione and Pansy pushed themselves up too, Ginny sitting next to Hermione and giving her a wide eyed look. Hermione furrowed her eyebrows and Ginny's eyes danced between Draco and Hermione. Hermione rolled her eyes and shrugged.

“You know, you’re not as good at that as we are.” Pansy whispered, leaning around Draco's back.

Hermione glanced around but the boys were passing Draco's flask around, talking about boggarts, Samantha looking a little uncomfortable sitting next to Ron.

"They're not paying attention." Pansy scoffed, "But I was and I know exactly what you were trying to say and Weasleys right."

"Keeping secrets, girls?" Blaise asked and Pansy rolled her eyes.

"Everyone is." She muttered, nudging Draco and looking toward the hill as Astoria appeared.

"Fuck." Draco breathed out.

Pansy reached out and swatted his shoulder and he turned and glared at her, the two stared at each other for a few moments before Draco turned and smiled at Astoria. She sat down, cautiously, eyeing the Gryffindors.

"You're right. You are better at that than us." Ginny whispered to Pansy, making her snort.

"Fancy a drink, Astoria?" Draco asked, holding his flask out.

"I don't think Narcissa would like that." Astoria muttered.

"I don't think Narcissa is here." Draco said, his tone casual but the look in his eyes showed how annoyed he was.

"I don't think that's all Narcissa wouldn't like." Astoria said, looking pointedly at Hermione.

"Careful, Astoria." Draco said, his whole demeanor going rigid. "That sounded like a threat."

"More so an observation." Astoria replied, unaffected by the death glare Draco was boring into her.

"You want to hear an observation?" Draco growled out, leaning forward. "How about how everyone at this school is fully aware of how desperate you want to be tied to the Malfoy line. How everyone at this school saw us together yesterday, saw you hanging off every move I made. How we both disappeared for a few hours last night. Did I forget to place a silencing spell around my bed? She was awfully loud, wasn't she Theo?"

"The quiet ones are always the loudest." Theo said, coolly.

"That never happened. I was in the library." Astoria said, her eyes wide.

"With who?" Draco asked, a smirk spreading across his lips.

"You wouldn't." She snapped at him.

"Sell another one of my pictures and find out, Astoria." Draco replied.

Astoria pushed herself up and ran from the lake, Draco falling back to rest on his elbows.

"I changed my mind." Draco said, turning to Pansy. "She's not like you. She's worse."

"That was mean." Hermione said, looking after where the other girl had disappeared. "You really care that much about your mother finding out you're friendly with us?"

"My mother already knows I'm friendly with you." Draco said. "Astoria's trying to play a game she's not ready for. She needed to learn a lesson."

"What lesson? Don't fuck with Malfoy or he will ruin you?" Ron asked.

"No. Don't make threats unless you know the whole situation." Draco said, with a shrug. "But there is that too."

Draco had an easy smile on his face as he looked at Hermione.

"Don't look at me like that. Astoria doesn't deserve your sympathy." He mumbled.

"Oh, and you do?" Hermione snapped at him.

"No, but you keep giving it to me." Draco scoffed. "I'm a fucking asshole, I know. I didn't mean it, and I shouldn't have done it and I'm sorry, ok? Just stop looking at me like that."

Hermione looked around quickly, thrown off at the turn in the conversation and Draco's apology. She never thought she would hear those words come out of his mouth. Everyone looked a little confused, thinking he was still talking about Astoria, except Pansy and Ginny. Pansy was watching Draco suspiciously and Ginny was staring at Hermione with wide eyes.

"How did you know she was the one who sold that picture?" She asked, changing the subject.

"We weren't sure, but I saw a letter addressed to the reporter in her bag." Pansy explained.

"So I decided to cozy up to her to see if she would actually admit to it." Draco finished.

"So you knew it was an act yesterday?" Hermione asked Pansy.

"I told you he was faking it." Pansy said.

"Why? Were you jealous?" Draco teased.

"In your dreams, Malfoy." Hermione snapped.

"Every night, Granger." Draco purred out, before rubbing his hand down his face and groaning. "I need to stop drinking."

"You're drunk!" Hermione exclaimed, his easy attitude, openness with Pansy, and the playful way he had disarmed her all starting to make sense.

"Yeah, he chugged out of that damn flask for a minute straight after defense." Blaise said.

"We were waiting for it to fully hit him." Theo muttered, tossing Draco's flask at his feet.

"Fuck all of you." Draco grumbled, nudging the flask with his foot and peaking at Hermione from the corner of his eye. "Especially you."

He flicked his eyebrows at Hermione and Ginny couldn't hold it in anymore, she burst out laughing. Everyone looked at her, surprised.

"Sorry." She said, her cheeks matching her hair.

"Fuck The Great Hall too. Sometimes it turns my stomach to be in there." Draco continued as though there was no interruption. "Topsy!"

A house elf appeared before them with a low bow.

"Master called?" It squeaked.

"Can you get me food?" He asked before waving at everyone else. "Them too, I guess."

The elf disappeared with a crack and Draco laid back in the grass. His eyes closed for a minute before flying open to look at Hermione again.

"You don't like house elves do you?" He asked. "What was it you started in 4th year? Stew?"

"Spew." Harry supplied, laughing.

"S.P.E.W." Hermione huffed, crossing her arms.

"Oh, don't get all bothered. I'll apologize tomorrow so you can pretend it's genuine." Draco said, reaching out and playing with the hem of her robe.

She could feel Harry and Ron watching her as her stomach flipped at Draco's flirting. She couldn't look at them though, not while Draco was staring up at her with bright blue eyes. He held her gaze for a while before he seemed to remember everyone else was there.

"Right." He said, sitting back up and scoffing at her. "You're annoying."

"What?" She asked, surprised at his sudden change in attitude.

"I'm not allowed to be nice to you. Your friends will think I'm flirting." Draco said in a dramatic whisper, glancing at Harry and Ron who were looking at him like he had lost his mind.

"Cause you are." Samantha said, surprising everyone.

"Who the fuck are you?" Draco asked and the whole group started laughing, Samantha blushing slightly.

"Well, if you can't beat them, join them." Harry said, grabbing Draco's flask and unscrewing it.

"But you can beat them, Potter. You're the chosen one." Draco mumbled.

Chapter 14

Topsy appeared with 2 baskets of food. Draco grabbed one and immediately began pulling stuff out.

"Thank you." Hermione said to the elf.

Topsy's wide eyes turned to Hermione, looking her up and down.

"Manners." Draco barked, making the elf jump.

"Of course, miss." The elf bowed before disappearing again.

"Retraining them has been awful." Draco muttered. "Wanna start a fire, Granger? I think I lost my wand."

"I have it, you lousy drunk." Pansy said.

"Your boyfriend loves drunk me." Draco said, scrunching his nose at her again.

"Draco, that's supposed to be a secret!" Theo said in a fake scandalized tone.

"Psh. About as much of a secret as my.." he stopped, glancing at Hermione before laughing. "What is wrong with me?"

"We do not have time for that conversation." Ginny muttered, tilting Draco's flask back.

Draco tried to glare at her but he couldn't muster any animosity into it. Hermione shivered as the cold seeped into all of them. Ron and Harry got a small fire burning as everyone passed around the food and flask.

"Pansy, hex me if I talk again." Draco muttered as he watched the dancing flames.

"Oh, you're in one of those moods." Pansy said cheerfully.

"What moods?" Harry asked.

"Draco has 3 drunk moods. Moody and self-loathing, sarcastic and snippy, or chatty." Blaise explained, counting them out on his fingers.

"Malfoy? Chatty?" Ron asked, raising his eyebrow at Blaise.

"It never ends well." Draco mumbled, grabbing Pansy's wand as she raised it. "Do it and die."

"I was only following instructions." Pansy said, plastering an innocent look on her face.

"Remember the summer after third year?" Theo asked.

"Draco told his father he was pathetic." Pansy laughed.

"Shut up, my head still hurts from his fucking cane." Draco said, shoving Blaise who was laughing.

"How about Easter, fourth year?" Blaise asked and Draco actually laughed.

"That was funny." Draco agreed.

"What happened?" Ginny asked.

"Draco overheard Narcissa and my mother discussing a possible match between us." Pansy told them. "Then during dinner, the boy would not shut up about how he couldn't wait for marriage."

"Mother, wouldn't it be nice to have another woman around the house? Mother, aren't you excited to have grandchildren filling these halls?" Draco mocked.

"As long as they're legitimate, Draco." Theo mimicked Narcissa's voice.

"Oh mother, don't fret. I know the contraceptive charms." Blaise mimicked Draco's haughty tone.

"You did not!" Ginny said, laughing.

"My mother was horrified." Pansy said with a cackle. "I wasn't allowed back to the manor until summer after 5th year."

Hermione took a long swig from the flask at the mention of the manor. Noticing her unease at the topic, Draco leaned closer to her.

"What about you, Granger? What kind of drunk are you?" He asked.

"Hermione doesn't get drunk." Ron said.

"Eh, I heard she likes to waltz." Theo said and Ginny coughed as she swallowed a piece of fruit.

Ginny glanced over at Hermione and Draco's eyes darted between the two.

"I don't know how to waltz." Hermione said, her eyes trained on the fire.

"It's easy." Draco said, softly. "You just have to trust your partner."

"I prefer how they dance in the clubs. Less about the man leading and more about the woman." Samantha said.

"I wish we could go to a club." Ginny said, wistfully.

"After graduation." Harry promised.

"You told Weaslette that we've danced?" Draco breathed into Hermione's ear.

"I told Ginny everything." She whispered back as the others began talking about their plans after graduation.

"Everything?" He asked, his fingers grazing hers.

"Mostly." She said, as his hand slid over hers.

Hermione's heart skipped a beat as Draco's thumb caressed her wrist. His eyes held hers as his finger slid up her sleeve to rub her inner arm. His thumb rested over her pulse point, squeezing slightly and a shiver danced down her spine.

"Cold?" Draco asked.

"Sometimes I wish that was all it was." Hermione whispered back

"Me too." He said. "This was a lot easier when you hated me."

"What was easier?"

"Pretending that I don't want you."

Hermione glanced around but everyone else was absorbed in their own conversations and passing the flask around.

"Don't worry, Granger. They only see what they want to see." He murmured in her ear. "And why would your friends want to see you, getting a chill at a Death Eaters touch?"

"Draco, that's not.." she started.

"I'm bored." Draco called out, getting the entire fire's attention. "Let's play a game."

"Never have I ever.." Blaise said. "Kissed a Weasley."

Harry, Hermione, and Samantha drank from the flask.

"Never have I ever.." Ron continued. "Hooked up with my friend's sister."

Harry laughed as he took a swig from the flask, handing it to Blaise. Pansy held her hand out and Draco furrowed his eyebrows at her.

"I was very drunk, and Daphne is kind of pretty." Pansy said, tilting the flask into her mouth.

"Um.." Samantha said, glancing around the fire, clearly a little intimidated by her company.

"Never have I ever.. Had to hide in the woods for months."

Ron drank, passing it to Harry, who passed it to Hermione. Draco grabbed the flask from Hermione and took a drink as well. Noticing her looking at him he raised his eyebrows.

“I couldn’t show my face until the Ministry fell.” he said, “What? Did you lot think I was holed up in the Manor? No, I was in the fucking wilderness with Snape. Plus, Snape wanted to keep me away from The Dark Lord until he was sure I wouldn’t be killed on sight for fucking up.”

Samantha nervously looked at Ginny and Ginny giggled.

“He’s harmless, I promise.” Ginny reassured her, “Anyway, never have I ever.. Kissed a Malfoy.”

Hermione glared at Ginny but Ginny was too busy watching Pansy take a drink to notice. Everyone laughed when Theo did too, but they grew quiet when Hermione reached for the flask. She knew Draco was watching her with wide eyes as she took a long drink from the flask.

“You kissed him?” Ron asked in disbelief.

“No, it was Lucius. After the Department of Mysteries, things got a little heated.” Hermione said sarcastically, turning to Draco and putting on the light airy voice Pansy used when she was teasing. “Draco, dear, don’t tell mummy. It’ll break whatever’s left of her heart.”

Draco was looking at her with a slightly dazed look, like someone had hit him over the head. Ginny started laughing and Hermione turned to glare at her.

“I didn’t think you would actually drink!” Ginny laughed out.

“That’s the rules, Ginevra!” Hermione squealed out.

“No one would have known!” Ginny argued back.

“Draco would have known, you would have known.” Hermione pointed out.

“I would have known.” Pansy added.

“How the fuck do you know?” Draco asked.

“Draco, dear, you’re not as much of a mystery as you like to think. Plus it only made sense, after the way she looked at that picture in Witch Weekly and how pissed she was about you and Astoria.” Pansy explained.

“I was not pissed.” Hermione huffed.

“Please, you Gryffindor’s wear everything on your faces but can never actually own up to your own feelings.” Pansy scoffed.

“Oh, yeah, we’re the ones who have problems owning up to our feelings. It’s not like Draco went out of his way to avoid Hermione after saying all that bullshit after the Quidditch match.” Ginny snapped.

“So, I’m guessing that was included in the ‘mostly’?” Draco asked Hermione.

“Of course it was. She’s my best friend!” Hermione snapped back.

“What exactly did you tell her about, Granger?” Draco asked.

“I didn’t tell her about The Great Hall, or the dreams!” she said back.

“What happened in The Great Hall?” Harry asked.

“What dreams?” Draco asked at the same time.

Hermione looked between Draco and Harry, her face burning. She buried her face in her hands and took a deep breath, before looking back up. Her eyes inadvertently met Theos across the fire and he smiled at her.

“Remember when we all hated each other?” he said. “That was fun.”

“I just want to hear about Theo and Draco's kiss.” Samantha said, trying to diffuse the tension.

"It was a dare." Draco mumbled, still side eyeing Hermione.

"And Draco was.." Theo started before Hermione jumped in.

"Let me guess. Drunk?" Hermione said, turning to look at Draco. "Are you sure your father's the only alcoholic in the family?"

"I think we've been a bad influence on her." Pansy said with a laugh.

"I've been saying that since first year." Ron mumbled.

Chapter 15

When Hermione woke up, things felt different. For the first time in what had to be years she didn't feel heavy, wasn't weighed down with expectations. They knew. Her friends knew her and Draco were, well, something. She still didn't know what, but definitely more than friendly. Nothing bad had happened, no one was angry. Ron was a little confused and Harry wanted to know how it had happened but they were still there. They hadn't shamed her, or yelled at her, they had simply been curious, at least while they were buzzed from Malfoy's flask. Hermione kicked at Ginny's bed to wake her up as Parvati started digging her clothes out of her trunk. Ginny groaned loudly while rolling over.

"Hermione Granger is the devil." Ginny mumbled, pulling her blanket over her head as Hermione kicked her bed again.

"Ginevra Weasley is late." Hermione said, zipping her skirt and laughing as Ginny threw herself out of bed.

Five minutes later they were rushing down the dormitory stairs, Ginny still buttoning up her shirt. She pulled a tie from her robe pocket and wrapped it around her neck, fumbling a bit. Harry knocked her hands out of the way and did it up for her.

"We almost left without you." Ron said.

"Someone had a lie in." Hermione told them and Ginny rolled her eyes.

"We were up late last night." Ginny tried to argue.

"We were in bed at 11." Hermione said.

"Felt later." Ginny grumbled.

"That's what happens when you start drinking directly after class." Harry said.

"That's what happens when teachers don't listen. Bloody boggarts." Ron said.

As they entered The Great Hall Hermione noticed people turning to look at them. That had happened a lot when they first returned but it had died down since people began getting used to their presence. Hermione wondered what had stirred it back up. When they sat down Hermione looked over and saw Draco sulking at the Slytherin table, Pansy, Theo, and Blaise looking anxious beside him.

"Somethings going on." She said looking over at Harry, Ron, and Ginny.

As she said it a small first year approached her and tapped her shoulder. Hermione smiled at the girl but the smile fell off her face when she asked her question.

"Is it true Draco Malfoy saved you from Bellatrix Lestrange?" She asked.

"What?" Ginny said, loudly, making the girl jump.

"Um.." Hermione hummed out, trying to think of how to answer.

"Move." A quiet voice said.

The girl looked up at Draco, her eyes going wide before she turned and ran back to her friends.

"Learn that from Snape, did you?" Ron asked as Draco sat down.

"Have you heard what people are talking about?" Draco asked, ignoring Ron.

"She asked if you saved me from Bellatrix?" Hermione told him.

"Yeah, people seem to have gotten their wands crossed. Someone talked about the boggart lesson and now the latest gossip is I helped you escape the manor and tried to duel Bella when she.." Draco trailed off, gesturing at her arm.

"Is that really so bad though? It's kind of romantic." Ginny said.

"It's not what happened." Draco snapped.

Not for the first time Hermione wondered how Draco had felt as Bellatrix tortured her. She knew, even then, that he wasn't a willing participant. Remembered how sick he had looked as he looked down on her, bleeding on his drawing room floor. Hermione reached out and placed her hand on his arm, making him flinch. His gray eyes turned to her. He opened his mouth like he was going to say something but closed it as he changed his mind. He pushed his arm into the edge of the table, balling his hand into a fist.

"This is ridiculous." He muttered.

"What do you want? Granger to hop up on the table and tell the real story?" Pansy asked, joining them.

"Cause that would really get people talking." Theo added, sitting down as well.

"It'll die out. Just let them get it out of their systems." Harry told them.

"Potter would know. He is the king of school gossip." Blaise said, sliding onto the bench between Ron and Parvati. "Ain't that right, Heir of Slytherin?"

Ginny suddenly gasped before looking at Hermione with wide eyes.

"What?" Hermione asked, startled.

"Does he know?" Ginny asked and Harry and Ron started laughing.

"Know what?" Draco asked, a nervous edge to his voice.

"Second year we thought you were the heir of Slytherin." Hermione began, trying to hold back her laugh. "And, well, we needed proof.."

"So, We snuck into the Slytherin Common Room during Christmas break." Harry said.

"You said you've never been in the common room." Draco said, glancing at Hermione.

"Yeah, well, I didn't go. The Polyjuice potion went wrong with me but it worked on Harry and Ron." Hermione said a smile creeping across her lips.

"Polyjuice?" Pansy asked.

"Oh, Merlin." Draco groaned. "That's why Crabbe and Goyle were passed out in that closet?"

"You guys managed to brew Polyjuice potion in second year and infiltrate the dungeon?" Blaise asked, sounding impressed.

"Hermione brewed it." Ron said. "But it's not supposed to be used with animal hair."

Harry and Ron started laughing as Hermione rolled her eyes.

"How was I supposed to know Millicent had a cat?" She asked them.

"There was something I was supposed to apologize for today." Draco said, trying to smile as he looked over at her. "I can't seem to remember what it was though, so how about a blanket apology for the last seven years?"

"Oh, so you do remember Mr. 'As for me I hope it's Granger'." Ron asked.

"Yeah, yeah. I was kind of a twat." Draco conceded.

"Kind of?" Theo asked.

"Was?" Pansy added.

"What about you Miss 'Someone grab him.'" Draco snapped.

"I am not going to sit here and listen to you accuse me of things I clearly did!" Pansy said, pushing herself up and flipping her hair as she walked away.

"I can never tell when they're joking or serious." Ron muttered as they gathered their stuff.

Theo left after Pansy and Blaise and Parvati headed to class together. Samantha came up and laced her fingers with Ron's, Harry threw his arm around Ginny's shoulders and Draco raised his eyebrow at Hermione.

"I'm not holding your hand." He said as they left the Great Hall.

"I'm not asking you to." She shot back.

"Just so we're on the same page." He mumbled.

"Draco, I don't think we even have a page." Hermione sighed.

"You, princess, have a whole book."

"Careful, Draco, that almost sounded like a compliment." She said and he smiled at her.

"Potter and Weasley are taking this better than I thought they would."

"What is this?" Hermione asked hesitantly, the last time she had tried to get clarification he had lashed out.

"I don't know." He mumbled, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"Ok." Hermione said simply, knowing he was still on edge from the rumor mill this morning.

"That's it?" He asked, grabbing her arm as she tried to turn into the classroom.

"That's it." She said, nodding and smiling at him.

He furrowed his eyebrows at her, still holding her arm, when he was suddenly shoved to the side, Nickerson shouldering him as he passed them. Draco's wand slid into his hand as he straightened, his eyes going dark and his face emotionless. He glared at Nickerson, who just glanced over at Hermione before walking away.

"Put the wand away, you're making the second years nervous." Hermione said softly, taking his hand.

He glanced across the hall at a group of second year Ravenclaws who were watching him fearfully before looking at Hermione and rolling his eyes. Stowing his wand, he followed her into class.

After a long day of suspicious whispers from the older years and wistful or fearful glances from the younger ones, Hermione was thankful as she settled into the quiet of the library. Just as she was pulling out her notes she heard someone tap on her table. She looked up expecting to find Theo or maybe even Draco but instead Nickerson stood before her.

"What game are you playing, Granger?" Nickerson asked, leaning on the table.

"What?" She asked the 6th year, confused.

"So you're trying to tell me it's a coincidence that you've managed to get yourself linked to both resident Death Eaters since school began?" He asked.

"I think it's none of your business." She snapped.

"And now you're trying to rewrite history. What? Are you embarrassed that your boyfriend stood by and watched while his aunt branded you for slaughter?"

"I don't know where that story came from." Hermione said, taking a deep breath trying to calm her racing heart. "And Draco's not my boyfriend."

"Oh, so you're just the Death Eaters mudblood whore then?" Nickerson growled out.

Hermione gasped when Nickerson's face hit the table. Hermione looked up to see Draco, his hand holding Nickerson down by his neck. She couldn't remember a time where she had ever actually been scared of Malfoy but seeing him now she understood the tension he caused among the other students. She remembered Harry telling her how Draco had hesitated on the tower the night Dumbledore died. The man glaring down at Nickerson wouldn't have hesitated.

"You broke my fucking nose!" Nickerson spat out, blood pooling on the table.

Draco leaned down so his face was inches from Nickerson, his eyes glittering dangerously.

"If I ever hear you say something like that again, that will be the least of your fucking problems." Draco growled out before releasing his neck. "Now get the fuck out of here."

Nickerson straightened up, his hand flying up to wipe the blood flowing freely from his nose.

"They may have forgotten what the Malfoys have done but I haven't." Nickerson said before catching sight of Theo, leaning against a bookcase just behind Draco, watching the situation carefully.

"If I have to tell you to leave again you won't have to remember it for long." Draco replied, his wand sliding into his hand.

Nickerson pushed passed him, Draco watching him until he was out of sight, before he turned and vanished the blood from the table. He folded his arms across his chest as they sat down and Theo began pulling his work from his bag as if nothing had happened. Hermione had just opened her mouth to say something when Draco snapped at her.

"Don't."

"I didn't even say anything!" She said.

"You were going to!" He replied. "I don't need to hear your 'do good' bullshit right now."

"I'm just saying, you could have shown some restraint." She said, flipping through her book.

"I've been showing remarkable restraint the past three months because I deserve to be treated like that." Draco said angrily. "You, though, don't deserve to be talked to like that."

"You've talked to me like that." She reminded him.

"I've never," he started and her eyes flew up to meet his. She raised an eyebrow at him as she watched him think over his words, "called you a whore."

He actually grinned at her and Hermione couldn't help but smile back. She didn't like that he thought he deserved the way Nickerson treated him but she also didn't know what his family may have done to Nickerson's.

"Yeah, Granger, we all know you're as virginal as Mother Theresa." Theo said, "Unless there's something Draco's not sharing."

"I don't share." Draco muttered, digging through his bag.

"There's nothing to share." Hermione snapped, her face burning. "I wasn't aware you were even joining us tonight."

Draco suddenly looked sheepish and Theo chuckled.

"What?" She asked, knowing she was missing something.

"Draco needs help with some homework." Theo said and Draco threw a quill at him.

"Your marks are as good as mine. What could you possibly need help with?" Hermione asked as Draco pulled a book out of his bag.

He set the Muggle Studies book down on the table and Hermione looked to Theo, waiting for the joke.

"I didn't know you were taking Muggle Studies." She said.

"Have too, part of our parole." Theo said.

"Thought it might make us a bit more sympathetic." Draco grumbled.

"Draco's having trouble grasping the whole telephone thing." Theo explained.

"If you're both taking it why don't you help him?" Hermione asked Theo.

"Because he's a twit." Draco said, opening his book.

"You're better at handling him." Theo said.

Hermione sighed, rolling her eyes as she pulled Draco's notes over. He relaxed slightly as Hermione started reorganizing them. He watched her until she snapped at him to turn to chapter 8 in his book, Hermione smiling at the boy as he jumped and began flipping through the pages.

Draco still had no idea how a telephone worked by the time they packed up but his paper was done and Hermione had to give him credit for trying. They were among the last to leave the library despite still having a half hour before curfew.

"I'm going to hold your hand." Draco whispered as they stood from the table. "Don't pull your wand."

She laughed and tried to ignore the butterflies that fluttered to life in her stomach as Draco laced his fingers with hers. Theo's eyes lingered on their hands before he wiggled his eyebrows at them. Draco rolled his eyes, breathing out a laugh, as he pushed Theo toward the door. Theo made his way toward the dungeons, ignoring the fact that Draco didn't follow

him. Instead Draco pulled Hermione into a corner and trapped her against the wall. His hand released hers and he began toying with her fingers, looking down at her lips.

"You know, you don't have to push me against a wall to give me a kiss." She said in a shaky voice.

"But it's so much more fun." He whispered, taking hold of her chin and tilting her face up so he could catch her lips with his.

After a soft lingering peck he pulled back, studying her face.

"Do I make you nervous?" He asked her.

"What makes you say that?"

"This." He whispered as his hand grazed her stomach just beneath her shirt causing a shiver to run down her spine.

Hermione realized she had never really seen him like this as she looked up into his hooded eyes. The last time he was like this with her it was too dark for her to see him properly. His hand came up to graze along her collarbone, causing her breath to hitch.

"And that." He murmured, kissing her again.

"I just," Hermione started, as Draco moved to feather kisses along her jaw. "You just.."

"Hmm?" He hummed out, nipping her earlobe.

She pushed him back so she could sort her thoughts without his mouth distracting her. She took a deep breath and he smiled at her as she tried to figure out what she was trying to say.

"You're a little intimidating." She said finally and his left arm twitched as the smile fell off his face. "No! Not like that. Um.."

"Then how?" He asked, relaxing slightly.

"You're just so sure of yourself." She mumbled.

"Trust me, it's a front." He whispered. "Granger, I'm not going to make you do anything you don't want to."

"I know." She mumbled, playing with his tie.

"Do you?"

"Of course."

"Because I know last time I may have come on a little too.. strong."

"It was a surprise." She said, looking up to see him grinning at her.

"Yeah, well, it was.. *hard*.. to stop." He said, trying to smother his smile and making her cheeks heat up. "I mean, I should have expected that. You've been making my life *hard* since third year."

She pushed him away from her as he started laughing. She scoffed and began walking away.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Come here." He said, grabbing her and pulling her back into him. "It's just a joke." He brushed their lips together, before whispering. "Don't take it so *hard*."

"Oh, you're a child." She said, pushing away from him.

He laughed again and Hermione couldn't help but think how good it looked on him. His eyes light blue and shining. He reached out, his hand brushing her neck as it rested along her jaw, his thumb softly stroking her cheek. He bent down and kissed her, sighing into her mouth.

"In all seriousness, Hermione," he said, her name sounding weird coming from his lips, "just stop me."

His lips pressed against her harder and she opened her mouth to him. He walked her back until she was pressed against the wall again. She wrapped her arms around his neck, pushing herself against him, a low rumble echoing from his chest. His tongue had just slid past her lips, his hand sliding up the back of her shirt to rest against the bare skin on her back, when they heard someone giggle.

Draco turned his head and Hermione buried her face in his chest when she saw a group of second year Hufflepuff girls looking at them with wide eyes. Draco sighed and Hermione looked up. He grinned at her, reaching for his wand but she grabbed his hand.

"Be nice." She whispered.

"I'm not going to hurt them. It'll just scare them off." He whispered back. "I'm terrifying, remember?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and pushed him away. She stepped away from the wall, straightening her shirt.

"It's almost curfew." She said sternly and the girls rushed off, still giggling.

"They wouldn't have been laughing if I did it." Draco said and Hermione swatted his arm. "I'll see you at breakfast?"

"Of course." She said.

He smiled at her, turning to head to the dungeons.

"Draco." She said, stopping him. As he turned to her, she wanted to tell him how good it was to see him like this, to see him happy and joking and relaxed, to see the life seep back into him but as his blue eyes met her she couldn't bring herself to actually say the words. "Good night."

"Good night." He said softly, smiling and nodding at her.

Chapter 16

The rest of the week flew by, Draco pulling her into abandoned classrooms and deserted corridors every chance he had. He sat beside her toying with her fingers under the table as her and Theo tried to complete their homework. He whispered things that made her blush in her ear during lunch while her, Pansy, and Ginny chatted. On Friday after classes were done she fell into an armchair in the Gryffindor common room, sighing.

"You seem happy." Harry said. "It's nice."

"Thanks." She said with a soft chuckle. "I think I am."

"It's a little weird." Ron said, Ginny throwing a ball of parchment at him. "What? It is Malfoy!"

"I know." Hermione conceded. "Trust me, I know."

"Do you trust him?" Harry asked her.

"I think so." She said. "I think he's a little hesitant about it all too. I mean, he's still the same Draco Malfoy, he's just more comfortable with himself now."

"Was Malfoy ever uncomfortable with himself?" Ginny asked.

"I think he just had so much to live up to." She said, glancing at Harry. "He was never able to just live."

"I know the feeling." Harry mumbled.

"Speaking of weird.." Hermione said, fidgeting with her tie. "Draco invited me down to the dungeons tonight."

"Are you going?" Ginny asked, her eyes lighting up.

"Well, he said you all could come too. Blaise specifically told me to bring Parvati actually. They're kind of having a party."

"A party in the snake pit?" Ron asked.

"What's the difference between that and drinking with them out by the lake?" Ginny asked him.

"Escape options." Ron said, making Harry laugh.

"We're going." Ginny said, grabbing Hermione's hand and dragging her up to their dorm.
"See you in an hour."

An hour later they made their way down to the Entrance Hall where Draco said he was going to meet her. Hermione was trying to hide how nervous she actually was, but she could tell she wasn't fooling Ginny. As Draco and Blaise came into sight, Blaise's face brightened when he saw Parvati, Ginny nudged Hermione. Hermione nudged Ginny back and laughed as the girl over exaggerated and stumbled into Harry. Draco fell into step beside her as they entered the dungeons.

"Honestly, I'm surprised they came." He said to her, nodding up to Harry and Ron.

"Ginny didn't give them a choice. She's been dying to get into one of your parties for years." Hermione told him.

"Pressure." He muttered.

The wall slid open as Blaise whispered the password. Draco fell onto a black leather couch, pulling her down next to him. He kissed her quickly, very aware of their audience. Pansy fell onto the couch and smiled at her.

"Granger!" She slurred out excitedly.

"Pansy!" Hermione said, matching her enthusiasm.

"Can't say you haven't been in the dungeons now!" Pansy said, swaying a bit.

"She's drunk." Draco told her. "And going to say something stupid so ignore her."

His arm fell across Hermione's shoulders as Pansy shook her head at him, a soft smile on her face.

"You know what is a great sight, Granger?" Pansy asked.

"Here it comes." Draco mumbled.

"That!" Pansy said, pointing at Draco and he laughed. "Because when Draco is happy, the whole world is better."

"Theo, get your girl." Draco called out, grabbing the bottle of firewhiskey that sat on the table and taking a drink out of it.

"Draco, get yours." Pansy mocked at him.

Draco's eyes met Hermione's as he set the bottle down and reached out to grip her chin. He kissed her again, lingering this time and Hermione smiled against his mouth. Theo pulled Pansy over to sit on his lap in an armchair across from them.

"Not that I'm not thrilled to have you here, but you know this whole thing was just so Blaise could get into Patil's pants right?" Draco murmured, his forehead resting against hers.

"They don't call me the brightest witch of our age for nothing, Draco." she whispered back, "Plus I'm sure the idea of getting into mine played a role too."

“Is that a possibility?” He growled out, his hand tugging the hem of her shirt.

“I.. I don’t know.” she stuttered out as his finger tips grazed her stomach.

“That's better than the flat out no I thought I was going to get.” he whispered, and she could feel his smile as he kissed her again.

“Awe, you two are so sweet sometimes.” Ginny cooed, sipping from the bottle and passing it to Harry.

“Nothing about what I want to do to Granger is sweet.” Draco said, falling away from her.

As his back hit the couch he suddenly tensed up. Hermione turned to look at him as confusion flashed through his eyes. She accepted the bottle from Ginny, knocking her knee against Dracos.

“What's wrong?” she asked him.

“I didn’t mean to say that.” He said under his breath.

“It’s fine, I’m used to you being crass.” she said, taking a drink from the bottle and passing it to Ron.

Draco's eyes followed the bottle before he glared at Pansy, who began to laugh.

“You fucking bitch.” he snapped.

“Anyone want to play truth or dare?” she said, cackling.

“What?” Ron asked as Harry finished the bottle of firewhiskey.

“That wasn't a good idea last time and it's an even worse one now, considering present company.” Draco snapped, glancing at Harry and Ron.

“Oh, Draco dear, what are you scared that you're going to say?” Pansy asked with a grin.

“I don't want her to know that I..” Draco began before slamming his hand over his mouth.

He glared at Pansy over his hand and Theo snorted. The Gryffindors glancing at each other nervously.

“Whats going on?” Ginny asked.

“She spiked the firewhiskey.” Draco growled.

“With?” Hermione asked, already knowing what he was going to say.

“Veritaserum.”

“It's diluted so it's easier to resist than last time and it’s only one drop so it’ll wear off in a half hour.” Pansy explained.

“What happened last time?” Hermione asked, looking at Draco.

“It was a bloody disaster. No one could stop themselves from talking and that's how they found out I was.. Shut the fuck up.” Draco said, cutting himself off. “That’s why you fucking did this, isn’t it? To find out if I’ve..” he trailed off, glancing at Hermione.

“No, but now that you mention it.” Pansy said, fixing Draco with a firm stare. “Have you?”

“No.” he growled out through clenched teeth. “Now stop asking me fucking questions.”

“Are you ok?” Hermione whispered to him as Pansy started the game of truth or dare with Blaise.

“No.” he said, his nostrils flaring as he glared a hole into the floor.

“What's the worst that could happen?” Hermione asked.

“Someone will ask the wrong question and you’ll never look at me again.” he mumbled, closing his eyes, clearly annoyed at his lack of control.

“I know what you’ve done. What worse could there be?” She asked.

Draco blew out a hard breath through his nose, his lips pressed together in a hard line as he fought against the potion so he wouldn’t speak.

“Stop asking me fucking questions.” he growled out.

“Hermione, truth or dare?” Ginny asked her.

“Truth.” Hermione said, trying to prove to Draco that he shouldn't be worried.

“What happened between you and Draco in The Great Hall?”

“We played chicken.” Hermione said, her cheeks burning red.

“We were sitting right there!” Harry said, laughing.

“It’s not like you noticed!” Hermione snapped.

“Who won?” Ron asked.

“Me.” she said smugly.

“How far did it go?” Blaise asked her.

“Oh, to about here.” she said, running her hand up Dracos thigh, making him squirm as he grabbed her wrist. He met her eyes, and raised his eyebrow at her. “Truth or dare, Draco?”

“Truth.” he breathed out.

“Are you going to hurt me?” she asked him quickly.

“Probably but if I can help it nothings ever going to hurt you again.” he spilled out before shaking his head. “Fuck.”

“That's really sweet though.” Parvati cooed.

“It’s not sweet. What I really want to do is throw Granger on my bed, rip off her pants and bury my face between..” Hermione smashed her hand against his mouth, cutting him off. Hermione slowly moved her hand away. “I suggest everyone stops talking to me until this shit wears off, unless you want to know all about Grangers future sex life.”

“Who said I’m even going to have sex with you?” she said, crossing her arms.

“Do you want to?” Draco asked with a smirk.

“Yes.” Hermione answered before she could stop herself.

“That's what those dreams you mentioned are about right?” Draco shot at her again.

“Yes.” she said before slamming her hand over her mouth.

“You’re right, Pansy, this is fun.” Draco said with a soft chuckle.

They abandoned the pretense of truth or dare and just started throwing questions at each other. Pansy pulled out another bottle of firewhiskey as Blaise rambled out how he wanted to shag Parvati and Draco snatched it from her, making sure it was still sealed before cracking it open and taking a long drink from it.

“Weasley, who did you lose your virginity to?” Draco asked Ron.

“No one.” Ron mumbled, grabbing the bottle from Draco. “Who took yours?”

“Pansy but I don’t need a potion to tell you that.” Draco said with a laugh.

Draco started to relax as the questions remained light, everyone avoiding anything that could spark off a problem. Theo spilled about how he had thought he was in love with a French girl before but he realized he didn't know what love even was until he got with Pansy. Harry admitted to thinking of Cho Chang the first time he got himself off. Ginny confessed to doing stuff with Michael Corner in the quidditch locker rooms. None of them fought it too hard, the bottle getting passed around freely.

"Harry, have you ever thought about Hermione in a sexual way?" Ginny asked him, Draco's eyes snapping over to them.

"No, she's like a sister to me." Harry said with a grimace.

"Yeah, mate, your girlfriend's like a sister to me too." Ron said, tilting the bottle into his mouth as everyone laughed.

"Draco, when's the last time you got yourself off?" Blaise shot out.

"Last night." Draco mumbled.

"What did you think about?" Ginny asked with a smirk, Hermione could tell the fire whiskey was starting to settle into them all.

"Shoving Granger against the wall of the quidditch pitch." Draco told them, a grin on his face as he eyed Hermione. "Her blouse ripped open as she quivered against me."

"That's enough!" Hermione snapped.

Draco leaned into her and she felt his breath brush her ear.

"Have you ever gotten a bloke off?" He whispered so the others couldn't hear him.

"No." she breathed out before she could stop herself.

Draco's eyes lit up as he looked down at her, licking his lips.

"I'll show you what to do." He growled, his finger trailing up her thigh.

She pushed his hand away, very aware of everyone looking at her.

"So, Granger, have you ever seen Potter or Weasley naked?" Blaise asked.

"Yes." Hermione said after trying to stop herself.

Draco's eyes narrowed at her as Harry blushed and Ron snorted.

"We were on the run for months, trapped in a tent most of the time. It wasn't intentional." She explained.

"So you've seen them both?" Pansy asked, "Who's bigger?"

"Oh, no! I absolutely do not want to hear this!" Ginny exclaimed, shoving her fingers into her ears.

Draco grabbed Hermione and kissed her hard so she couldn't answer. She gasped and he took advantage of her lips parting to push his tongue against hers. He pulled back and studied her face for a moment, making sure she wasn't going to answer before he glared at Pansy.

"Who's bigger, Pansy? Me or Theo?" He snapped at her.

Pansy's mouth opened before Theo covered it with his hand. He slowly removed his hand and when Pansy stayed quiet he relaxed. Draco rolled his eyes, leaning back into the couch, his fingers playing with the edge of her sleeve.

"Malfoy, do you bleach your hair?" Harry asked and everyone laughed.

"No." Draco scoffed.

"Did you know your dad gave me that journal?" Ginny asked, softly, watching him with wide eyes.

"No," Draco replied just as softly, "not until after and I'm sorry he did."

Ginny grinned up at him, her eyes glassy. Hermione knew the fire whiskey was bringing up memories for her and she was glad that Draco had been sympathetic.

"I think it should be worn off by now." Draco said, glancing at the clock before looking at Theo. "Ask me something."

Theo leaned forward and studied Draco for a moment.

"You want to share what you started doing in 5th year?" Theo said.

"Oh, ok, yeah. Fuck you too, mate." Draco snapped

"You couldn't have asked something nicer?" Pansy asked.

"Dracos the most guarded one here, he would fight against the veritaserum without realizing it unless you catch him off guard." Theo said, Draco nodding along.

"That's why I asked him." Draco muttered. "You would have been too nice and Blaise, well, is occupied."

They all glanced over to find Blaise and Parvati tangled together. Ginny whistled at them and they all laughed as Blaise flipped them off without breaking his kiss with Parvati. Theo put on some music and Ginny pulled Hermione up to dance, spinning her and making her laugh. Draco watched her, with glowing eyes and the ghost of a smile gracing his lips.

Chapter 17

Hermione tried to stretch the next morning but there was no room to move. Her eyes fluttered open, coming face to face with a green tie. She was sandwiched between the back of the black leather couch and Draco. She shifted so she could look up into his sleeping face. He looked younger in his sleep, his face completely relaxed for once, lips slightly parted, breaths coming soft and slow. She stretched her hand out from where it was tucked against his chest and brushed her fingers against his lips. His eyes flew open, immediately on guard, but he relaxed when he looked down at her. His hand left her waist and cupped her cheek, almost like he was checking if she was real. His eyes fell shut again as his thumb stroked her cheek.

Hermione lifted her head to see over him, catching sight of Harry and Ginny on the other couch and Ron in one of the arm chairs, all asleep. She assumed Pansy, Theo, and Blaise had made their way to their bed, Parvati with Blaise. Catching sight of the clock she saw it was only 4:30, she had only slept a couple hours. When she rested her head back down, Draco was watching her. His thumb brushed over her lips and he ran a finger along her jaw, down her neck, across her collarbones. Her breathing deepened as his hand grazed over her breasts, down to the hem of her shirt. He pushed his hand under her shirt, up her bare stomach only stopping to trace the edge of her bra. She met his dark eyes and he raised his eyebrows. Hermione nodded, answering his unasked question and he pushed his hand under her bra to cup her breast.

She gasped as his thumb circled her nipple and he shushed her. Heat pooled between her legs as he caught her lips, immediately pushing his tongue into her mouth. He shoved his leg between hers and she felt herself throb as his thigh pressed against her. Draco's fingers pinched her nipple lightly and Hermione's hips bucked against his leg. She gasped again at the feeling that shot through her at the friction. Draco grinned down at her as his hand left her breast to slide down and unbutton her pants. He watched her face carefully as he ran his finger just inside her underwear. He leaned down to kiss just by her ear as his hand flattened out against her stomach, his fingers twitching slightly against her skin.

"Stop me." He breathed out against her neck.

Hermione grabbed his wrist, feeling like her heart was about to rip from her chest. He pulled back, his dark grey eyes meeting hers and she took a deep breath before pushing his hand down. His chest rumbled as his fingers met her, pushing gently as he shifted against her. Volts were shooting through her at his tentative touch. He pushed himself up so he could run his hand through her hair as he ran his long finger up her slit. His finger brushed a spot that made her let out a soft moan and push herself harder into his hand. He wound his other hand into the hair at the back of her head and tugged so she was looking up at him. His fingers pushed against that spot again and she couldn't stop the moan that fell from her lips. Draco looked away from her to scan the common room but everyone was still asleep.

"Sh, love, you have to be quiet." He murmured as he bent down and kissed her softly.

The gentle kiss made her stomach flip in contrast with his rough hold on her hair and the small quick circles he had started between her legs. She whimpered against his lips and he smiled. Her stomach tightened up as pressure built up behind where his fingers were working against her. His hand let go of her hair and grabbed her neck, using his thumb to push her head slightly to the side. He nipped her ear lobe as her legs began to shake, his fingers working faster against her.

"That's it, Hermione." He whispered to her. "Just let go."

Her hips pushed down as the pressure between her legs began to overwhelm her. She grabbed his arm, her nails digging into the fabric of his sleeve as she fought to keep her eyes from falling shut. She bit at her lip to stop the noise that was trying to burst from her. His hand flew from her neck to her chin as he yanked her face over to meet his. As his lips crashed onto hers the tension in her groin burst, sending shock waves throughout her body.

His fingers slowed, guiding her through her orgasm as she clutched his shoulder. She opened her eyes and met his, their foreheads pressed against each other. He brushed his nose against hers as he pulled his hand out of her pants, wiping it on his leg. Draco softly pecked her lips as she tried to gain control of her breathing again.

Once her heart rate was normal and her breaths back to their usual rhythm he sat up, pulling her up beside him. She couldn't seem to look at him as she studied her hands instead but she could feel his eyes on her. He reached out and tucked a strand of her hair that had fallen in her face behind her ear.

"Are you ok?" He asked her.

She finally turned to look at him and she could see the hint of worry in his eyes. He was trying to hide it but he was either too hungover or too tired to do it well.

"Bathroom." She muttered, pushing herself up, making her way across the room on shaky legs.

Once the door closed behind her she leaned against it and tried to shake the fog that clouded her brain. She felt like her mind should be racing with thoughts but she just really wanted to go back to sleep, with his arms around her again. She turned the sink on and splashed some cold water on her face before looking up at herself in the mirror. Draco Malfoy had just given her her first orgasm and she didn't regret it. At that moment she was ready to just let him do it again and again until the day she died. After a deep breath she began cleaning herself up the best she could.

Hermione shoved her pants up when someone softly tapped at the door. She pulled it open a crack to see Draco leaning against the door frame, now in a pair of loose black sweatpants and a plain white long sleeved shirt. He held up some bunched up clothes in his hand and tried to smile.

"I, uh, thought you might be more comfortable with something clean on." He said, sounding unsure.

She took the bundle from him, a pair of boxers falling to the floor between them. She stared down at them and the whole situation suddenly seemed ridiculous. Draco pushed her in so he could close the door behind him as she started laughing.

"You're going to wake the whole house." He said, unable to fight the slight smile that spread at her laughter.

"Are those your underwear?" She asked him, trying to contain her laughter.

"Do you really think I'd give you someone else's? I thought yours might be a little.. wet." He said, watching her like she had lost her mind.

She looked up at him and started laughing again. Concern was splashed openly across his face as he watched her.

"Are you still drunk?" He asked, worry lacing his tone.

"No. I'm sorry. I'm fine. I just.." she said, trying to find the words. "You don't think this is a little absurd?"

"Which part?" He asked, his face suddenly blank, eyes guarded.

"That you, of all people, just gave me a fucking orgasm, using the arm that bares the fucking dark mark might I add, and you're being incredibly sweet right now and I'm acting like a fucking lunatic because all I can think about is letting you do it again." She spat out, picking at the sweatpants in her hand instead of actually looking at him.

"Wait until the first mouth to call you a mudblood makes you cum, then we'll call it absurd." He said lightly and Hermione's head shot up.

She breathed out a small chuckle and shook out the pants, full on laughing when she saw the Slytherin crest on the hip. Draco grabbed her and pulled her into him, the pants falling to the floor as he kissed her before smiling down at her.

"People change." He mumbled before looking pointedly at the pants. "So should you."

He pushed away from her, leaving her to get herself together. She changed quickly, exhaustion settling over her as she adjusted Draco's boxers in his sweatpants. Shoving her panties into her jeans pocket and folding them neatly she took a deep breath and pushed the bathroom door open. Draco's eyes scanned her from head to toe before he smiled. Taking her in, wearing his green t-shirt and the gray sweatpants with the Slytherin crest.

"You look good in green." He whispered, grabbing her hand.

He pulled her down, trapping her between the back of the couch and his body again. She rested her forehead against his chest and took a deep breath, his mahogany and mint scent engulfing her. Her eyes fell shut as Draco played with her hair, the sound of his heartbeat soothed away any second thoughts she had. Just as she drifted off again, he placed a soft kiss on top of her head.

Chapter 18

The sounds of the others stirring woke her up a few hours later. She sighed, burying her face into Draco's chest. She could tell he was awake, his breathing was too controlled and his grip on the back of her shirt was tight. The air around them lit up and Draco spun around, glaring at Pansy who held a camera.

"Never thought I'd see the day Draco actually spent the night with a conquest. I had to document it." She said simply, tossing him a vial.

He sat up, Hermione pulling herself up beside him. Draco rolled the hangover cure between his hands as Pansy handed one to Hermione. She felt fine but she uncorked it and drank it to avoid meeting Draco's eye. Draco tossed his vial to Ginny as she sat up from the other couch, Harry groaning and feeling around on the floor for his glasses. Ron was staring at her and it was only then that she remembered she was wearing Draco's clothes.

"What the hell are you wearing?" Ron asked.

"Looks good on her, doesn't it." Draco said, leaning back with a smirk.

"Can you two hold off on the house rivalry until I've had some coffee?" Ginny asked, tiredly.

"Wow, he actually branded you." Blaise said, his eyes running down her.

"What?" Hermione asked, her hand flying up to her neck.

"He's talking about your clothes, Granger." Draco said with a soft chuckle.

"Right." She mumbled, feeling her cheeks burn.

Draco pulled her against his side, rubbing a lazy circle against her shoulder.

"Relax, people will think we did something." He whispered to her.

She looked up at him, meeting his eye for the first time and smiled. She let her head fall against his shoulder.

"Can I go back to bed?" Hermione groaned.

"Of course, let's go." Draco said, nudging her.

"My own bed. Alone." She said and he pouted at her.

"You're no fun." He grumbled.

The Gryffindor's gathered their stuff and said their goodbyes. Blaise and Draco lingering with Parvati and Hermione before they made their way back to their own common room. She knew Ginny was watching her but Hermione refused to look at her. She watched the ground

as they walked through the halls, her mind on Draco. The morning replayed through her mind, Draco's soft voice and gentle touch, how concerned he had been afterwards, the fact that he had thought to give her a change of clothes. The way his eyes glowed when he was watching her the night before, after the fire whiskey settled in and his guard fell away. 'If I can help it nothing's ever going to hurt you again'. Her stomach flipped as she remembered how he had kissed the top of her head while holding her against him. She loved..

She stopped in her tracks, her heart skipping a beat. No. She couldn't do that. Under no circumstances could she allow herself to even entertain that thought. Yes, he was handsome, smart, snarky. He could keep up with her, in wit and grades. He pushed every single button she had and she actually enjoyed it. She could like him but she absolutely could not love him.

"Hermione, are you ok?" Ginny asked.

"I just thought I forgot something." She muttered as she started walking again.

Draco was good with people, his emotions sometimes took control and his guard dropped but he could sweet talk anyone. He knew how to turn on his charm, flash his smile, and shove the proper emotion into his eyes and get whatever he wanted, his hand down Hermione's pants included. He had been trained from birth to charm people, how could she believe anything he said? Hermione shook her head to clear the thoughts from her mind.

She fell onto her bed, closing her curtains, not wanting to talk things over with Ginny yet. He wasn't manipulating her, he couldn't be. Really, what had he gotten out of what happened this morning? She didn't touch him, he didn't actually see any part of her body. 'You would have done wonders for my image.' Theo's voice echoed through her mind. Was that it? Was he just using her to get his status back?

Hermione closed her eyes, thinking about the things Draco had said while under the Veritaserum. 'I don't want her to know that I..'. He had cut himself off. What was he going to say? What didn't he want her to know? 'Someone will ask the wrong question and you'll never look at me again'. What was the wrong question? What would he have said if someone had asked him why he was with her? Why hadn't she clarified their relationship when he couldn't lie to her? She still didn't know what they were, didn't know how he felt. Hermione rolled over and pulled the blanket over her head. She stayed there most of the day. Until Ginny ripped her curtains back and climbed in with her.

"Damn, did you and Malfoy sleep at all?" Ginny asked with a giggle.

"Like you slept well on that couch?" Hermione grumbled.

"What happened?" Ginny asked her, suddenly serious.

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"Of course not, Gin. Is that what you think? That he's going to hurt me?"

"No! I didn't mean it like that." Ginny said quickly.

"But you're all just waiting for it to happen?" Hermione snapped.

"No, Hermione! The last time you stayed in bed all day like this was after the Battle of Hogwarts. I was just worried." Ginny insisted.

"I'm just tired. It was a long night."

"So.. something happened? Why are you wearing all Draco's clothes?"

"He thought I'd be more comfortable in them after..." Hermione told her, a small smile lighting up her face.

"You had sex?!" Ginny interrupted.

"No! He just.. with his hand.." Hermione mumbled, awkwardly.

"And you finished?" Ginny pressed.

"Well, I am wearing his boxers."

"No way! Let me see!" Ginny said, tugging the waistband of her pants.

"No!" Hermione laughed, trying to wiggle away from Ginny.

Ginny yanked the side of Hermione's pants enough to see the plaid pattern of Draco's boxers.

"Oh." She said, sounding disappointed. "Harry has those."

"What did you expect, Gin? Snakes and dark marks?" Hermione asked, rolling her eyes.

"Maybe," Ginny said, pushing herself out of the bed, "or at least, like, silk."

Hermione followed Ginny and pulled out some of her own clothes. She hesitated, taking a deep breath, pulling Draco's scent off the shirt where it still lingered, before changing out of his clothes.

"Finally!" Ron said as the two girls appeared in the common room.

"Oh, shut up." Hermione mumbled.

An hour later they all sat in The Great Hall as dinner appeared before them. Hermione had just taken her first bite when Draco sat on the bench next to her. She grinned at him as he grabbed a roll and started picking at it.

"Hi!" Ginny said brightly, across from them, a big smile on her face.

"Hi?" Draco replied, his eyebrows furrowed as he glanced between Ginny and Hermione.

"What?"

"I'm disappointed." Ginny whispered to him.

"Been talking to my father, have you?" Draco shot back.

"I always thought you would wear silk boxers." Ginny whispered.

"Ginny!" Hermione exclaimed and Draco smirked.

"I'm not letting a girl walk off with my expensive ones." He scoffed.

Ginny laughed and returned her attention to Harry and Ron. Draco looked back to Hermione, grabbing her hand and toying with her fingers.

"You've been M.I.A all day." He said.

"I was thinking." She explained.

"Shit." He muttered, under his breath.

"What?"

"I should have waited."

"What?" She asked him, trying to follow where his mind had jumped.

"You were drunk. I should have waited until I was positive you were sober. I kind of thought I was dreaming at first and then things got out of hand." He said quickly.

"Actually I think they were in your hand." Hermione mumbled.

"Just because that happened, that doesn't mean I expect anything now. I don't expect anything more, I don't expect you to do anything back, I don't expect it to happen again. You can still stop me whenever you want." He continued without hearing her.

"Draco, I wasn't drunk. That's not what I was thinking about, I mean I was but.." she reassured him before glancing up the table, not wanting to have this conversation around other people. "Can we talk? Alone?"

"Yeah." He said, all emotion melting off his face until it was carved out of stone again.

He dropped her hand as Hermione excused herself and she followed him out of the hall. He breezed through the halls and she followed in his wake. They ended up on the 5th floor when Draco finally stopped and spun around to face her.

"What?" He snapped.

"What is this?" She asked back, knowing she had to just get it out.

"I told you, Granger, I don't know." He said, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"That's not good enough anymore." She snapped back at him.

"What do you want, Granger?" He yelled, "You want to be my girlfriend? You want to walk around on the arm of a Death Eater? You want me to parade our relationship around this school so more people like Nickerson can come at you?"

"I'm fairly well versed in how to defend myself, Draco! I'm used to people being cruel! You've seen to that!" She yelled back.

"Exactly! Don't you see how this looks?" He yelled, jabbing a finger at her.

"That's the whole reason we're having this conversation." She said, quietly. "Because of how it looks."

"What do you want me to say?" He asked her, deflating, his tone tinged with desperation. He dragged his hand through his hair. "I don't know what you want me to say."

"Say you're not using me to improve your image." She whispered, trying to get her eyes to stop burning.

"If I say it, will you even believe it?" He asked her.

She looked up at him, not able to identify the emotion boring into her from his eyes, as she wondered the same thing. Would it be enough to hear him say it? She realized she had been quite too long when he closed his eyes and they were hard steel when they reopened. He nodded slightly as his eyes scanned her up and down. Suddenly she was desperate for his eyes to soften again. She needed him to look at her with a spark in his eye again, needed him to touch her, needed him to whisper crass things in her ear, needed him to smile as she rambled about classwork, needed him.

"I'd believe you." She whispered.

"I'm not using you, Hermione. I don't give a fuck what your name is, I don't give a fuck what you did during the war, I don't care about what the papers write about you. I just care about you." He whispered back, the emotion she couldn't identify leaking back into his eyes. "Please."

She didn't care if he was manipulating her, if he was lying, if he was trying to raise his status by being connected to her. She threw her arms around his neck and he pulled her flush against him, his left hand clutching the back of her robe. As his lips pressed against hers, she didn't care if what he said was true, just that he had said it.

Hermione didn't know how she had become this person, she had always thought the other girls were flighty, to lose themselves in a guy, but she had allowed Draco to push her against the wall in the 5th floor corridor and slide his hand down her pants. He gave her time to stop him, told her to stop him, but she had desperately wanted him to do it. Anyone could have come by, but they didn't and the bliss she felt under his hand almost made her think it was worth it. Even in another world, where Draco was simply a haughty muggle boy and they didn't have a messy shared history, she never imagined she would need another person like she did with him now. Maybe without the war she wouldn't, but the person she was now did.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Be warned, I'm going to break your heart tomorrow.

So here's a second chapter today.

<3

The days started to melt away as the ground outside froze up and snow blanketed the grounds. December settled in around them and Hermione settled into herself. She decided it was useless fighting it, she would just ignore the thoughts about love and the way her heart jumped every time she saw Draco. She chose to embrace the feeling but not admit to it. She decided she was just going to have fun, live a little, and if it all blew up in her face later, that was later's problem.

Draco was sweet, she never thought she would call him that, but he was in his own way. They weren't like Harry and Ginny, constantly holding hands or smiling at each other, from outward appearances it just seemed like they were friendly. Someone had to be watching them closely to see it. To see his hand, toying with her fingers under the table at lunch or resting on her thigh in the library. To see the spark in his eye when she laughed, or the softness of the glares she gave him after he whispered in her ear. To see them both disappear during dinner, returning a half hour later trying to hide smiles as they met their friends and parted ways.

Draco's novelty seemed to have worn off with the younger years, they no longer skittered away from him like he was about to pull his wand and shout Avada Kadavra, or watched him fearfully from across the hall. Most of the older years had seemed to have gotten bored of keeping the animosity alive with Theo and Draco, realizing it was purely one sided since the boys never reacted. Only Nickerson and a handful of others still bothered to give them problems but even that seemed to have lessened as the golden trio took the Slytherins in.

It was the second week of December when Draco slid onto the bench next to Hermione during breakfast. Ginny glanced over at him and he just grinned at her. Draco and the rest of the Slytherins usually ate breakfast at their own table and Draco rarely joined Hermione at the Gryffindor table for meals on his own. She had never asked but she assumed it was a safety in numbers thing. Anytime Draco sat with them the other Slytherins quickly followed. Glancing at the Slytherin table she saw Blaise, Pansy, and Theo in their usual seats.

"What?" Hermione asked Draco as he grabbed a muffin.

"What?" He asked back, casually.

"Um, nothing." She muttered, turning back to Harry and Ron.

She didn't want to make him feel like he wasn't welcome. He seemed to be in a good mood, had been actually for a while now. He was starting to act like his old self more, just without the malice that used to accompany him. He was walking the halls with his head up again, joking and laughing with his friends. He still made fun of Harry and Ron but it was different than before, more teasing than mean, and he always laughed it off when they shot back at him. She also realized that the tint of fire whiskey that had accompanied their first few kisses had been missing the last few days.

"Mum wanted to have the whole family together but dad talked her into taking a quiet holiday, just the two of them." Ron was saying, talking about the Christmas break. "They haven't had time alone in a while."

They were all staying, the Slytherins not by choice but because they were ordered to stay until graduation.

"They had 7 children, clearly they had time to be alone." Draco muttered.

Hermione elbowed him as Ron and Ginny laughed.

"A half hour every night is easy to find." Ginny said, raising her eyebrows at him.

"Touche." Draco said, his fingers finding Hermione's hand under the table.

Harry, Ron, and Ginny continued talking but Hermione lost track of the conversation as Draco's hand slid onto her thigh. He shifted closer to her and she felt his breath on her ear just before he spoke.

"You know I was thinking, you've been in the common room but you've never seen the Slytherin dorms." Draco whispered to her.

"So?" She asked, her stomach doing somersaults as his knuckles brushed her thigh.

"I think you'd like them." He growled in her ear. "They'd be empty, if we skip potions. Things could get a little absurd."

Hermione's head snapped to him as his hand strayed to her inner thigh. He smiled at her, running his hand up. He flicked his eyebrows up at her as he pushed between her legs quickly. She shoved his hand away, making him laugh.

"Ok." She said quickly.

"What?" He asked, his eyes wide.

"A little absurdity now and then is good." She said.

His eyes lit up as he licked his lips. She rarely got to catch him off guard but she loved the way he looked when she surprised him. No, she liked it, not loved. This wasn't love. A bit of egg bounced off his hair and he turned to glare at Ginny.

"Were you born in a barn?" Malfoy snapped. "What am I saying? You're a Weasley, of course you were."

"Save the dirty talk for the bedroom, Malfoy." Ginny said and for a horrifying moment Hermione thought she had overheard him. "Every time you whisper in her ear, she turns redder than my hair."

"I apologize if I've offended your delicate sensibilities." Draco said, smiling at her and making Ginny laugh.

Before she would have thought he was being condescending but after spending so much time around him and his friends she knew that's just how they teased. They always seemed so formal, so uptight, but once you actually listened they really were the crudest people Hermione had met, always talking and joking about sex, parties, and other things that did not match the formality of their tones. She knew it was something they had picked up from their parents, a way to talk openly in public without the public paying too much attention and now they had introduced it to the Gryffindors.

"I accept your apology, good sir, but my statement stands." Ginny replied airily, winking at him.

Draco rolled his eyes and turned his attention back to Hermione.

"Are you done?" He asked, glancing at her plate. "I wanted you to reread my potions essay before class."

"Let's go." She said, pushing her plate away.

Draco's hand locked into Hermione's and he practically dragged her through the dungeons. After muttering the password he pulled her through the wall into the common room. A few younger years were loitering and their heads snapped up at Draco. He glared at them as though daring them to say something and they all lowered their eyes. He pulled her through an archway and she followed him up a stone stairwell. He pushed a black door open and pulled her into the 7th year boys dorm.

"Draco!" She giggled as he closed the door and pushed her against it.

"Hm?" He breathed out, his mouth latching onto her neck.

"What's got you all riled up?" She asked, breathlessly as his hands ran up her thigh to the edge of her skirt.

"You." He breathed into her ear, his hand pushing under her skirt, gripping her butt.

She gasped as his head dipped kissing along her collar bones.

"Draco."

He took a step back, taking a deep breath and rolling his neck.

"I'm coming on a bit strong again, aren't I?" He asked, his eyes light blue and dancing.

"You did promise to show me the dorm." She said. "How are you supposed to do that when you're too busy trying to mark my neck?"

"I don't leave marks." He mumbled, falling into the second bed from the door. He rubbed his left arm against his side. "They get you in trouble."

"What kind of marks are we talking about?" She asked, sitting on the bed next to him.

He looked up at and grinned, grabbing her and pushing her under him.

"The good kind get you in trouble too, Granger." He whispered, pecking her lips. "A mark means you're laying a claim." His lips moved to her jaw. "Everyone will know someone has had you." His lips pushed against her throat. "That you belong to someone." His mouth opened just below her collarbone and he sucked hard, Hermione's heart pounding as she tried to keep her breathing even.

He pulled back and wiped the moisture away that he had left on her skin. The right side of his mouth twitching up as he ran his thumb over the slowly darkening mark he had left. He looked up, his dark grey eyes finding hers. His hand found the zipper on the side of her skirt and he slowly pulled it down. His eyes never left hers as he pushed her skirt from her hips, following it down until he tossed it off the side of his bed. His hands ran up her legs as he leaned back over her, pushing himself in between her legs and pulling one up to hook around his waist. His grip on her thigh was hard and his hips pushed into hers. When his lips met hers though, the kiss was soft, gentle. He was always contradicting with his touch, she never knew what to expect.

Hermione reached between them, unbuttoning his shirt so she could run her hands across his chest. Her arms wrapped around his back, pulling his hips harder into hers. He groaned softly as she felt him press into her through their clothes. He pushed away from her again, pushing her shirt up so he could kiss down her stomach, the unfamiliar feeling, almost like being tickled, made Hermione's back arch slightly. He hesitated when he reached her underwear, looking up at her as he hooked his fingers under the waist. Hermione's breathing sped up as he waited, her hand gripping the blanket under them. She finally nodded and Draco slowly pulled her panties down. Once they were off he stopped before tossing them to join her skirt, a devilish smile spreading across his lips.

"Remember Halloween?" He asked, finally dropping them to the floor. "Maybe I'm psychic."

Hermione let out a breathy chuckle as her thighs pressed together, suddenly feeling self conscious at being so exposed to him. He glanced at her as one of his fingers wound the loose end of his opened shirt around itself.

"The things I thought about doing to you that night." He whispered, his eyes scanning from her face to her half opened shirt and down her exposed bottom. "I never considered myself lucky but I'd be the luckiest man alive if even half of it came true."

Hermione was afraid to talk, to snap him out of whatever had come over him. He danced a finger up her leg, bending down to kiss her knee, his thumb grazing a scar from childhood that decorated the opposite one. He gently pushed her legs apart as he leaned on the bed, his hand running up her inner thigh.

"Hermione, I.." he started but cut himself off when he met her eyes.

"What?" She asked, wanting him to finish that sentence.

"Relax." He whispered, his hand sliding around her leg. "You're beautiful."

Before his words could even sink in, Draco hooked her leg over his shoulder and he pressed his mouth against her. She let out a soft 'oh' as her legs fell apart for him. His tongue darted out, making Hermione's back arch and her hand to fly down to grab his hair. He pulled her other leg over his shoulder as he leaned in, the warm pressure from his tongue pushing against the perfect spot harder. She looked down, finding his gray eyes studying her face as his tongue worked against her. As he sped up she pulled his hair slightly and he groaned against her, the vibration rippling through her body.

"Draco." She moaned out, making him hum between her legs.

She jumped slightly when she felt his finger run across her, just under where his mouth was. His other hand rested on her stomach, the warmth emanating from it calming her. He slowly circled her entrance but she could tell he was hesitant, having never actually entered her in anyway before. He pulled back, presumably to ask if he could but she pushed his mouth back to her. Taking that as permission he slowly slid one finger into her and Hermione's head fell back.

"Oh, fuck." She moaned out, pushing her hips down as the tension in her belly began to build.

Draco's tongue pulsed against her as he found a slow steady rhythm, moving his finger in and out of her gently. Hermione's toes curled against his back, one hand holding his hair and the other gripping his blanket. Her thighs tensed around his head as the tension finally broke and she called out his name as her whole body shook.

Draco pulled away from her, wiping his mouth on his sleeve as he did. Hermione's legs felt like jelly as he lowered them onto his bed. Her breaths were still erratic as Draco climbed on top of her. He kissed her gently and she opened her mouth to him. His tongue slid into her mouth, her stomach flipping as she thought of what it had just done. He fell to his side and began tracing patterns on her stomach.

"I never want to hear you say my name any other way again." He said softly.

"Absurd." She said, still feeling a little dazed.

Draco chuckled before he shifted a little, his hand moving to adjust the waistband of his pants. Hermione's eyes fluttered down, seeing the bulge in his pants. She swallowed as she reached out, running her fingers across his hip bones that were peeking out from his opened shirt.

"I'm fine, Granger." He reassured her. "I'll take care of it."

"I want to see." She breathed out.

"What?" He asked, his eyes going wide.

"You said you'd show me how." She told him, unbuttoning his pants. "Show me."

Draco let her undo his pants, lifting his hips slightly so she could push them down just enough so he would be exposed if it weren't for his boxers. He searched her face like he was waiting for her to take her words back. He appeared calm, his heaving chest gave him away though. She reached out and ran her finger along the hard outline of him in his boxers and he let out a low breath as his dick twitched under her finger.

"Show me, Draco." She murmured and he pushed himself up.

Resting on his knees beside her, his eyes wandering down her body, he hooked his thumb into the waist of his boxers. His chest heaved and his adams apple bobbed as he pushed them down, his erection pushing free from the fabric. Her breath caught in her throat as he gripped himself. He slowly moved his hand, his eyes falling shut for a moment. He pulled in a hard breath as he found his rhythm, opening his eyes as he released it. She could see his stomach muscles tensing as his hand moved along his length. His eyes lingered where her shirt was unbuttoned and she reached up, pulling it open farther. A low moan rumbled out of him as his hand started to move faster. He leaned over her, kissing her before pulling back, his eyes drifting between her lips and her chest. She was watching his hand, torn between taking its place or just watching him, she had never actually seen a man in this state before.

"Look at me." Draco gasped out and her eyes flew up to his, making him gasp. "Shit."

His hand pumped faster as he stared at her face, his breaths coming out hard and erratic. He moaned again as she watched him pull his bottom lip between his teeth. He reached out and grabbed her waist, his eyes never leaving hers. His hand movements lost their rhythm as he went faster, a low growl coming from his chest.

"Fuck, Hermione." He gasped out as he squeezed his eyes shut.

Hermione gasped as he spilt out on her stomach, his hips jerking forward and his body tensing up. His eyes flew open, running over her face for a second before he crashed his lips on hers. He grazed her throat as he slid his hand along her jaw, his thumb brushing against her cheek. His breathing was shaky and he had a slight tremor in his touch but his kiss was assertive, hard. His forehead rested against her, his eyes closed as he took a couple deep breaths.

"Sorry, hold on." He muttered, pushing away from her and grabbing a white undershirt from his trunk.

He pulled her over to the edge of the bed by her legs, making her laugh. He quickly swiped the shirt between her legs, his gaze lingering for a moment before he moved to her stomach. He tossed the shirt in a hamper across his bed, snagging her underwear and skirt from the

floor. She stepped into them as he buttoned his shirt and tried to find his tie. Rolling his eyes when he saw it across the room, he moved to Hermione instead, knocking her hands out of the way as she tried to button her shirt. His eyes lingered on the hickey he had left by her collarbone before his fingers pushed the buttons in place then he pulled her back into his bed. They laid there, teasing and joking until a knock came on the dorm door.

"Is everyone decent?" Blaise's voice called from the other side.

"No." Draco called back and Blaise pushed the door open anyway.

"What if I was naked?" Hermione asked him.

"Free show." Blaise shrugged, opening the trunk in front of the bed beside Dracos.

"Free ass kicking." Draco snapped.

"Yeah, yeah. We know she's yours, Draco." Blaise said, smiling at them before leaving with a pair of sweatpants thrown over his shoulder.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Sorry.

Hermione had finally lost that feeling that everything was going to be ripped out from under her when, with a simple letter, everything crashed down. It was a week before Christmas and Hermione had just sat down to breakfast, the owl post swooping in above her. Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione saw Draco rush from the hall. She looked to see Pansy and Theo exchanging confused looks before Draco's voice echoed through the hall.

"Fuck!" He roared out and Hermione, Pansy, Theo, and Blaise all jumped up and rushed to the doors as the entire hall fell silent.

Hermione cleared them first, finding Draco on his knees in the Entrance Hall, clutching a letter. She fell to her knees beside him and he flinched when she rested her hand on his arm.

"He's dead." He mumbled, handing her the letter. "The bastard can actually die."

Hermione skimmed the letter just enough to see it was an official correspondence from Azkaban Prison announcing the death of Lucius Malfoy the night before. She handed it over to Theo before reaching out to cup Draco's face. He flinched away from her then ran his hands over his face.

"I'm sorry." He mumbled. "I think I'm going to be sick."

He jumped up and pushed between Theo and Blaise into the bathroom. Hermione stared after him. She had handled Draco Malfoy in a lot of different moods. Drunk, happy, angry, self-loathing, volatile, but had no idea what to do in his grief. She looked to Pansy as the other girl sank down beside her.

"He's not going to want you to touch him." Pansy said, quietly. "But you have to. He will spiral. Right now, he just needs to be reminded that he has people beside him."

"Should I be worried?" Came McGonagall's voice, having followed them out of the hall.

"Professor?" Blaise asked, not understanding.

"We all know Mr. Malfoy had a complicated relationship with his father. Should I inform anyone? Is he a danger to anyone, even himself, right now?" McGonagall asked.

"No." Theo said firmly.

"In any case, I think it's wise if one of you gets his wand away from him until he's had time to process. For his sake as much as ours." She said and as if on queue, a loud bang echoed from the bathroom.

Hermione stood, Blaise catching her arm. She looked back at him and shook her head.

"I'll hex you if you don't let me go in there." She told him and he let her go.

Hermione pushed the door open just as another sink blew up. She flinched away from the rubble, slowly approaching Draco. His lip curled as he dropped his wand to his side and watched her. His eyes were bloodshot and red rimmed as he stared at her. She took a couple hesitant steps toward him but he backed away, shaking his head.

"Draco, it's ok. You have people that can help you through this, let me help." She said softly.

"No. No, Granger. You don't even know what this means. What I've done." He said, with a humorless laugh.

"I know everything you've done." Hermione told him. "I know you."

"No, Hermione!" Draco yelled. "You don't know me. You only know the parts I let you know. You don't know that I never stopped looking up to that man. You don't know everything he's actually done."

"Draco, it's ok."

"No it's not!" He yelled and Hermione could feel the tension in the air grow tight. Draco's emotions were taking control of his magic. "He did all of it for my mother. Yeah, he believed in it but he wouldn't have held half the amount of power he did if it wasn't for her. She was supposed to take the mark, her family expected her to, but they had just found out she was pregnant and he refused to allow it. He didn't want her to be like Bella, cold and unfeeling and this way she had plausible deniability, just in case. So she would be safe to raise me if something happened to him. He didn't want the Blacks near me, didn't want me to be like them. Gods, I was so fucking awful to him."

Draco squeezed his eyes shut and a burst of magic rolled off him, pushing Hermione toward the door and causing her to fall. His eyes snapped to her, concern and sorrow filling them before it all suddenly drained out, a blank slate taking its place.

"You have no idea who I really am, Granger." He said softly.

"Draco." Hermione tried again, pushing herself up off the floor.

"No! He was right. You've done nothing but make me weak. He was right, this has been nothing but a fucking disaster. He was fucking right."

"Right about what?"

"That you would never understand! Your type would never understand. The Malfoy name will always mean something and we cannot tarnish it." Draco yelled, methodically repeating

the words his father had told him over and over growing up. "We cannot taint the blood line because you will never understand the responsibility placed on the 28. This is all my fault." Draco crumpled, wrapping his arms around his knees.

"It's not, Draco."

"It is. I told him about you. I wrote to him and I told him about you and now he's dead. He told me I was ruining it, I was a disgrace!" Draco took a deep breath. Hermione reached out for him but he flinched away from her. "Don't touch me you fucking mudblood."

Hermione flinched back, for the first time scared that he might actually hurt her. The rage and hurt burning in his eyes broke her heart and terrified her at the same time. She wasn't even sure he was fully seeing her, but she was seeing him again, the same foul little boy who had spat that word at her in the quidditch pitch glared up at her now.

"Draco." Theo's voice echoed around the room.

"I told you the bloodline was cursed." Draco growled out. "I killed him, because of you."

A soft hand wrapped around Hermione's wrist and Pansy pulled her away from Draco.

"I fucking hate you." Draco spat out as Pansy pushed her toward the door.

"Draco, that's not going to bring him back." Theo said softly, kneeling beside his friend.

"Never look at me again, you dirty little mudblood!" Draco yelled, pushing himself up, Theo trying to grab his robes. "You should have tried harder, maybe then I might have actually liked you. As it was though, I barely had to do anything. You were that desperate for someone to see you."

"Hermione, he doesn't mean it." Pansy said as Theo caught Draco by the arms.

"Shut the fuck up, Parkinson." Draco spit out, his cold eyes looking into Hermione's. "It wasn't even that hard to get you to fall for me and let me just say you've done wonders for my image."

Hermione turned and pushed her way out of the room.

"He doesn't mean it." Pansy repeated. "He just.."

"Just leave me alone." Hermione snapped, running from the Entrance Hall.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

If you paid attention to the tags and the warning at the start of this story you should have seen this coming but..

TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE ATTEMPT.

Hermione woke up the next day with Draco's words still echoing through her. A part of her knew Pansy was right, that he didn't mean them, but a small voice in her head was saying I told you so. She had thought his affections had silenced that voice but it had always been there, waiting for him to pull the rug out from under her.

Her friends had found her in her bed at the end of the day and she told them that Draco's father had died. They assumed she had spent the day with him and she didn't bother correcting them. She wasn't ready for them to know. Wasn't ready for the truce with the Slytherins to break and to hear that they had been waiting for it too.

Hermione and Ginny got ready for the day in silence, Ginny not knowing what to say. It was kind of bittersweet to Ginny, Lucius' death, so she was afraid she would say the wrong thing. Hermione had just entered the Great Hall behind Harry, Ron and Ginny when someone grabbed her arm.

"Granger." Pansy said in a frantic whisper.

Hermione turned around to see what the other girl wanted. Pansy was as pale as Draco, bags under her eyes showed she hadn't slept but it was the tears in her eyes that alarmed Hermione. Something worse must have happened for her to let those tears show in public.

"It's Draco." Pansy said and Hermione thought her heart stopped.

Hermione rushed into the Hospital Wing behind Pansy. They found Theo hunched over in a chair and Blaise leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. Hermione's hands began to shake as she took in their bloodstained robes. Hermione could barely look at them without seeing Colin Creevey and Lavender Brown, bloody and dead in their uniforms, in her mind's eye. A curtain slid open and all four of them jumped as Madam Pomfrey waved them forward.

"I've stopped the bleeding. You can see him while I gather up his potions. He may be a little out of it from the blood loss though." She explained before brushing past them into the back office.

"What happened?" Hermione snapped as they gathered around Draco's bed, Draco as white as his sheets, you could see his veins in his closed eyelids.

"I don't know. An accident.." Theo started but was interrupted by Draco's soft chuckle.

"Accident." He breathed out.

"Draco." Hermione whispered and he started laughing.

"You think it was a fucking accident?" He snapped, turning to Hermione. "You shouldn't even be here."

"Draco, shut up." Blaise snapped.

"You knew I wouldn't fucking want her here." Draco growled out, then he began laughing again. "Merlin, I'm useless. I can't do shit properly, can I? Couldn't kill Dumbledore, can't kill myself."

"Draco." Hermione whispered again.

"At any rate, it probably looks better now." He mumbled, raising his bandaged left arm.

As he began picking at the edge of the bandage, Hermione reached out and laced their fingers together. His cold grey eyes moved from his left arm to stare down at their twined fingers, something igniting in them. His fingers closed around hers and he held onto her hand like he would disappear if she let go.

"You should hate me." He breathed out.

"Draco, I don't.." she started but he interrupted her.

"I do." He pulled his hand from and took a deep breath, swallowing hard.

"Mate." Theo said softly.

"Shut the fuck up, Theo." Draco snapped. "You should hate yourself too."

She was surprised to see Theo's eyes get glassy as he took in his best friend.

"You all were going to just brush this off as an accident. It's an accident that I'm still fucking here." Draco snapped, laughing again as looked down at his arm. "I'm such a fucking coward."

"Mr. Malfoy." Madam Pomfrey announced, handing Draco a bottle of blood replenishing potion. After Draco drank it Hermione could see his mind clearing up, all emotion disappeared from his face and his color turned a bit healthier. "Now, do you want to tell me what happened?"

"I couldn't look at it anymore." He said so softly Hermione could barely hear him.

Madam Pomfrey ushered them out and as soon as the door to the hospital wing closed behind them Hermione rounded on Theo. Her hand flew out as she smacked his arm then suddenly she couldn't stop. He caught her wrists as she slapped his chest and Hermione sagged against him, horrified to find herself sobbing as he wrapped his arms around her.

"Why didn't you stop him?" She cried.

"I didn't know." Theo murmured. "I didn't know it was that bad."

"But you knew."

"I thought he was getting better. He seemed better.. with you."

When they were allowed back into the ward, Draco was asleep. Madam Pomfrey had given him a small dose of Dreamless Sleep Potion so he could recover some strength. Hermione sank into the chair beside his bed, studying his peaceful face. The others had told her about his cutting. That he had started nicking his arm in 5 year and would draw thin lines down it in 6th year with a slicing spell. They hadn't been aware that he had returned to the habit this year but Hermione couldn't remember the last time she had actually seen his arms, and remembered the spot of blood she had seen on his sleeve. One by one, they drifted away from the hospital wing but Hermione didn't move, she didn't want him to be alone when he woke up.

"Miss Granger, you should get back to your dorm. It's late." Madam Pomfrey said softly.

"Can I stay?" Hermione asked, her eyes not leaving Draco.

"Of course." Madam Pomfrey said and Hermione listened as her heels clicked out of the ward.

Hermione dozed off at some point, her dreams were haunted by his laugh, his smile, and his words.

"Granger." She heard him whisper and she hummed at his voice. "Granger."

Her eyes flew open as she heard him call her louder and realized it wasn't a dream. She found him sitting up and watching her. She glanced around, the sky outside was purple with early morning dawn, it must have been about 5. She sat up and they just stared at each other in silence.

"Draco, did you try to kill yourself or just remove your mark?" She asked him, breaking the silence.

"Does it matter?" He asked hoarsely.

"Of course it matters." She whispered, moving to sit on the foot of his bed.

"No it doesn't because I'm already dead. I died before 6th year." He mumbled. "I haven't been able to feel anything since then."

Hermione reached out and cupped his cheek. He instinctively leaned into her hand, his eyes falling shut.

"You feel that." She whispered before pulling herself onto his lap.

She didn't really know what she was doing but Theo's words were floating through her mind, 'He seemed better.. with you.' Draco's hands rested on her hips, his fingers digging into her skin as they bunched her shirt up. Hermione rested her forehead against his as her hand slid around his neck to tangle into his hair. His eyes fluttered shut and she felt his breathing change, deepen.

"Do you feel this?" She asked, brushing their lips together.

"Hermione." He sighed against her lips.

But she didn't want to hear his excuses, she didn't want to hear about how she was supposed to hate him and how they shouldn't be doing this, about what other people would think or say. She yanked his head so their lips crashed together. He froze for a second as his breath hitched then he seemed to melt into her. His mouth opened and deepened the kiss as it turned softer. He ran his hand up her side and gripped her neck, his thumb stroking her jaw. He tilted her head back and pushed his tongue past her lips. His other hand pulled her into him by her waist and she sighed as she felt his heart beat against his ribs.

Draco wrapped his arm around her back and flipped them, pushing her into the mattress and hovering above her. He braced himself on one arm resting by her head as his other hand pulled her hips up to meet his. Hermione's mind was racing but she couldn't focus on any single thought as Draco's lips strayed from her mouth. His hand left her hip and pushed her head to the side so he could feather kisses along her jaw. Hermione's hands found the bottom of his shirt and pushed under it, making his hips push into her slightly. She sighed as he sucked on her skin, pulling it slightly between his teeth.

Hermione's skin felt like it was on fire as Draco tangled his fingers into the hair at the base of her neck. He tugged her head back, exposing her throat and he bent down placing open mouthed kisses down to her collarbone before coming back up to catch her lips again. She moaned into his mouth as her hands slid over the smooth plane of his stomach, stopping when she reached his pants. He pulled back slightly to look down at her as she toyed with his waistband. Just as she slid her hands beneath it he fell to the side and groaned slightly.

"We can't do this." He said, breathlessly.

"Draco." She said, reaching for his face.

"No." He snapped, swatting her hand away. "You're not losing your fucking virginity in a hospital bed. You deserve for that moment to be more than a pity fuck."

"Draco that's not what this was." Hermione said, trying to stop the blush building on her cheeks.

"Yeah?" He snapped, looking over to her. "I try to kill myself and now you want to throw yourself at me?"

"I just got caught up.." she mumbled.

"Get out." He growled.

"Draco."

"Get out." He yelled and Hermione jumped up and ran from the ward.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

I was up until 3am last night but this story is finished. I'll prob be posting 2 chapters a day until it's all on here.

Sunday passed in a blur. She filled her friends in on what had happened, she lied and said Pomfrey wasn't allowing visitors though. She wanted to give him some space, let him recover and she didn't want to give him a chance to tell her he had meant everything he had screamed at her. She didn't see Blaise, Pansy, or Theo all day. She wondered if they were with him, she hoped they were, he shouldn't be alone.

She barely slept and far too soon it was Monday. They didn't have classes since Christmas was soon, but Hermione wandered down to the common room early anyway. She sat and watched the fire dance in the hearth until Harry sat on the couch beside her.

"Hey." He said gently and Hermione tried to smile at him but it came out more of a wince.

"I don't know what to do, Harry." She whispered, leaning into his side.

"I don't know Malfoy well at all, but I know he cares for you Hermione, everyone can see that. I can't tell you why he did this, he might not even know himself honestly, but he's going to need help now more than ever." He said, placing his arm around her shoulders gently.

"How can I help him when he doesn't want me to?" She said, her voice catching in her throat.

"The same way you always helped me. This is the moment for you to turn back, Hermione. No one will fault you if you do." Harry told her softly.

"I had time to turn back. I don't think I can now." She whispered as the tears finally fell.

Hermione managed to pull herself together by the time the Weasleys appeared. They made their way down to the Great Hall to eat. Hermione didn't have an appetite but she piled food on her plate so Ginny wouldn't worry. Everyone else was finishing up when Pansy sat across from Hermione.

"Have you seen Draco?" Pansy asked, stealing a grape off her plate.

"Has he asked to see me?" Hermione snapped back.

"We'll see you in the common room." Harry said quickly, pulling the Weasleys out of the hall.

"Granger, he's not going to ask for you." Pansy said. "But you should go see him."

Hermione sighed as she pushed her food around her plate. Pansy was right, she should go see him. She knew what he was doing, had known as it happened, but the words he chose to use still hurt. He had echoed what her boggart had taunted to her, he had known how to go right for her heart. She wondered if he regretted it at all but she wouldn't ever truly know until she faced him again.

"Of course we all know you're going to do whatever the hell you want either way." Pansy continued before suddenly jumping up. "Mrs. Malfoy!"

Hermione spun in her seat to see Narcissa approaching them. Pansy bowed her head slightly as the older woman smiled at her.

"Hello, dear." Narcissa said, patting Pansy's shoulder.

"Sit!" Pansy said, her pureblood etiquette training kicking in as she waved at the bench beside Hermione.

Pansy waited until Narcissa was seated before taking her own again. Her eyes darted to Hermione for a breath before she turned back to Narcissa.

"Been to see Draco?" Pansy asked.

"Yes." Narcissa sighed, "My poor boy. The Ministry ordered a healer up from Mungo's. They're meeting with him now. On top of this mess with Lucius and everything having been transferred to Draco. He's not ready."

Hermione could hear the stress in her voice and her heart went out to the woman. Draco was right, she had no idea what being a pureblood truly entailed.

"I'm very sorry for your loss, Mrs. Malfoy." Hermione said and Narcissa turned to her for the first time.

"The fact that you can say that with true sincerity proves you are a good woman." She said with a sad smile. "Thank you, Miss Granger."

"Oh!" Hermione said. "I didn't think you would know me."

"Draco has written about you." Narcissa murmured.

"I'm really not that bad." Hermione mumbled, she could only imagine the things Draco had told his mother about her over the years and Pansy laughed.

"Neither is he." Narcissa assured her.

Narcissa smiled at her and for the first time Hermione saw Draco's resemblance to her. She was horrified when her eyes started to burn but the way the smile softened Narcissa's face reminded her of how Draco's softened when he smiled at her.

"The healers will be done with Draco in about a half hour." Narcissa told her softly.

Hermione nodded and excused herself. She sat in front of the doors of the hospital wing, waiting. Pomfrey had locked them, so no one could overhear Draco's meeting with the healers. Finally after what felt like hours but was really only 20 minutes the doors opened. Hermione watched the healer leave, trailed by two aurors. It hadn't occurred to her that aurors would get involved, she had actually managed to forget he was marked.

With a shaky breath she stepped into the ward, seeing him from where he was propped up on his bed down the hall. He was staring down at a leather bound journal, fiddling with the clasp for it. He hadn't noticed her yet and Hermione realized she had never truly seen him off guard. His unguarded eyes looked lost, his mouth turned down in the corners, everything about him just looked sad.

Chapter 23

Hermione cleared her throat and his entire body tensed, his expression morphing into a look of boredom as he turned and saw her. She saw his adam's apple jump as she walked toward him and the journal had vanished from sight, shoved under his pillow. She sat down in the chair beside his bed as he watched her carefully.

"Hi." She said quietly, unable to find anything else to say.

"Hi." He breathed out, looking down at his hands.

"I met your mother." she said, fiddling with the edge of her sleeve.

"You've met before." he muttered.

"Yes, well, it was a lot nicer than when I was on your drawing room floor." she said and his head snapped toward her.

She watched him with wide eyes, she didn't know why she said that. They never spoke about that, he got tense at the mere suggestion of the topic and there she was, sitting beside his hospital bed, throwing it in his face.

"I should have done something." he breathed out.

"You would have been killed."

"So?" he snapped. "So what, Hermione? Even before whatever we became this year, at least it would have meant something. I stood there and listened to you scream.. I.. I dream about it.."

Hermione threw herself into him as his voice broke, wrapping her arms around his neck. She listened to his hard breaths in her ear until he buried his face in her neck and wrapped his arms around her waist. Her fingers ran through his hair as he melted into her, clutching the back of her robes.

"You did do something, Draco." She whispered to him. "If you had died, I don't know who I would be now. You helped me see the war had changed other people too, and that that was ok. That it was ok not be the same as before." He let out a shaky sigh against her shoulder. "Just because you didn't do anything back then doesn't mean I shouldn't be here with you now."

"I wish I had helped you escape." He breathed.

"You would now. That's all that matters."

Hermione tried to blink the tears from her eyes but it was useless. They fell, blending into Draco's hair. His grip on her robes tightened as he lifted his head, his other hand reaching up

to catch a tear on her cheek. Then he was kissing her and it was ok, she could breathe easy again because he was still there.

The two broke apart when someone cleared their throat. Hermione tried to push herself off the bed when she saw Narcissa watching them but Draco's arm around her waist held her in place. He looked at his mother, his face carved out of stone but she could see the spark of worry in his eyes. Narcissa just smiled at them.

"I'm glad you two worked things out." She said, evenly.

"What? I never told you we were a.. well a.. a thing." Draco stuttered out, glancing between the two women.

"Pansy, dear." Narcissa replied as though it should have been obvious.

"That fucking gossip." Draco muttered under his breath.

"Language, Draco." Narcissa scolded. "Now, I have some paperwork here. If you sign it it'll give me control of the Malfoy estate until you turn 25."

"We can do that?" He asked, letting go of Hermione as he grabbed the papers from his mother.

"You're the Lord of the estate, dear. You can do whatever you want." His mother told him.

"Do you know everything though? Will others listen to you?"

"You may need to make an appearance here and there but I can handle everything else, for now."

"Do you have a quill?" He asked her as his eyes ran over the words in front of him.

Draco signed the papers, reluctantly handing the quill back to his mother. She promised to be back soon as she dismissed herself to owl the paperwork off. Alone again, Draco eyed her.

"Do you have a quill?" He asked her.

"Why didn't you keep your mothers?" She asked him, shaking her head.

"Before I answer that, you're sure you don't have one?" He asked.

"Positive." She assured him and he sighed.

"She knows I'm technically not allowed to have one until I'm discharged. Sharp objects and all." He grumbled, holding up his bandaged arm. "They give me my fucking journal but I'm not allowed a quill."

"I didn't know you kept a journal."

"Always have. It's how mum taught me how to write. We used to.." he trailed off.

"What?" She pressed, curious to hear about his childhood.

"She would sit me down after dinner and tell me to write about my day.. in the drawing room." He mumbled.

"You're allowed to have good memories there."

"You never will though, you'll never set foot there again."

"No, I won't." She answered even though it wasn't a question.

"I would never expect you to. It's weird though. I used to love that house. I had a great childhood in that house. Now the idea of going back there makes me sick." He told her, staring up at the ceiling.

"I'd like to hear about your childhood." She told him.

"I don't want to talk about that." He said, shaking his head.

"You can though, if you ever want to. You can talk to me."

Draco nodded, glancing around the ward, an awkward silence settling over them. He wouldn't meet her eye, he could barely look at her.

"Who found me?" He asked suddenly, his blanket wrapping around his finger.

"Blaise and Theo were the only other ones here when Pansy got me, they had blood on their robes." She told him, watching his finger wind the blanket.

"Have you seen them?" He asked, his eyes finding hers.

"No? Why?"

"I just lost something." He mumbled.

They grew quiet again. Hermione hated the quiet but she didn't even know where to start.

"You should leave." He finally said.

"No." She said simply.

"Just because I'm a fucking mess doesn't negate the shit I said to you." He snapped.

"No, you're right. It fucking doesn't but it also doesn't mean you meant it." she yelled at him. "I'll only leave if you tell me that everything you said the other day was true."

"Granger." He pleaded.

She just stared at him, waiting. He tried to hold her gaze, tried to harden his face, tried to make her look away first but she didn't.

"You know it wasn't." He finally said, frustration seeping into his voice.

"Then why did you say it?" She snapped back.

"Because you needed to hate me." He yelled.

"Why?"

"Because I couldn't do it if you didn't. If you cared about me at all I couldn't.. Leave." he yelled before his voice broke.

"That must be why you're still here then." She said softly. "Now apologize."

"What?" he asked, his eyes wide and panicked.

"Apologize to me, Draco Lucius Malfoy."

"I'm sorry." he told her, his face radiating sincerity before he dropped his eyes to his bedspread. "A part of me thought it was your fault, that he died."

"Why?"

"Father used to tell me there had been a prophecy. That the Malfoy line would be undone by a fool trying to attain the unattainable. I don't know if it's real or if he was just trying to scare me but I had written to him, told him about you. He wrote back, told me I was fulfilling the prophecy, I was the fool and would bring about the end of the Malfoy line. Then he fucking died."

"Draco, this isn't your fault."

"I know. Mum told me what happened. Another prisoner attacked him, the guards let it go on too long." he sighed before holding his hand out to her. "Come here."

She took his hand and let him pull her toward his bed. Sitting on the edge of it, he began toying with her fingers. He opened his mouth like he was going to say something but his bottom lip trembled and he snapped it shut. Hermione found her eyes wandering to his arms, exposed to her for the first time. She could see a couple thin lines snaking out from under the bandage that covered his dark mark. They were faint, only a couple shades lighter than his pale skin, clearly magically healed.

"They told you, didn't they?" He asked and her eyes flew up to his face.

"You healed them? After?" She asked back.

"Yeah, well, can't have blood marking up all my good shirts." He told her, still playing with her hand.

"Draco, did you really want to die?" She asked, her thoughts racing.

"I planned on it." He said, his voice low.

"But did you want to?" She pressed, grabbing his hand and stopping the movements of his fingers against hers.

"I thought I did." He said staring at their clasped hands. "I didn't know when, but I knew I wouldn't make it to graduation. I thought it was what I wanted until right before I passed out."

"What did you want then?" She asked as he squeezed her hand.

His eyes fell shut as he pulled in a deep breath.

"I just wanted to feel alive one more time."

Chapter 24

Hermione was eating breakfast the next morning when an unfamiliar owl dropped a letter in front of her. It was unaddressed and when she opened it she was met with Draco's shaky handwriting.

'To whoever finds this,

I'm sorry for the mess. Make sure they know there was nothing they could have done. That I was always going to end up here. Hopefully I'll be able to be buried without that fucking mark on my left arm. I'm going to do my best to get it off first. If I fail, just bury me in long sleeves, probably going to have to anyway.'

It was Draco's suicide note Hermione realized, her heart stuttering as her eyes flew over the words addressed to his mum, Blaise, Pansy, Theo, and finally her.

'Mum, this wasn't your fault, it wasn't fathers either, not really. Please, just move on. Find your sister. I've been thinking about her a lot lately and I think you two need each other. Potter will help. There was nothing you could have done differently. I love you. You're why I stayed for so long in the first place.

Blaise, look out for my mum. I don't know who the estate passes to but don't let anyone take it from her. You were a good friend, Zabini. You tried.

Pansy, marry Theo. Have your hoard of children. Name one after me.

Theo, mate, don't. Don't blame yourself. I'm good at hiding shit. We both know that. You wouldn't have been able to tell even if you weren't distracted by Pansy. I wouldn't have made it this far without you. I'd be rotting in Azkaban without you. Just know, this was worth it.

Hermione, I love you. You allowed me to feel alive again. We probably wouldn't have worked in the real world but here, for a little while, we did. I'll just be a story you tell but you, you were it for me. I tried to catch you, love, and I'm so sorry for all of it.'

Her eyes darted to the Slytherin table, catching Theo watching her. He held her gaze for a second before his eyes flickered to the letter. He looked away and Hermione knew he sent it. That's what Draco had lost.

'Don't show her that. I just needed it to be out there. Let her move on. Let her hate me.

*Sincerely and for the final time,
Draco Malfoy.'*

"Hermione!" Ron exclaimed as she knocked over a cup in her haste.

Hermione didn't stop though, as she rushed from the room. She ran through the halls, clutching the paper in her hand. When she burst through the doors of the hospital wing Draco

pushed himself up, startled.

"What's wrong?" He asked before his eyes landed on the paper she held. "Oh."

"You're more than just a story, Draco." She snapped, throwing the letter onto his bed.

"You were never supposed to see that. Whoever gave you that is.." he stared, staring down at the page.

"I love you too." She cut him off.

Draco stopped talking, his eyes going wide. The muscle along his jaw twitched as he watched her. His hand balled into a fist around his blanket.

"What?" He breathed out.

"I love you." She told him again.

She fell onto the bed, wrapping her arms around him. He tensed up, still trying to process what she was saying, before he wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in her hair. She could feel his chest heaving against her as he took a couple deep breaths. Finally regaining control of his emotions he fell back against his pillows, pulling Hermione with him. She rested her head in his chest, listening to his steady heart beat as she stared down at his now unbandaged arm, an angry red jagged line cut through his dark mark.

His right hand gripped the back of her sweater, holding her in place like she was going to disappear at any moment. Hermione reached out and traced the edge of his mark until she hit the cut. He twitched under her as she pulled his arm toward her. She kissed the line that had almost taken him from her and he let out a hard breath. Looking up she found his glassy eyes watching her, a pained expression on his face. Pushing up she brushed her lips across his, his eyes closing to hide the emotion he couldn't block out.

"I love you." He breathed out across her lips, a tear leaking out from under his eyelid. "And I'm so sorry."

Hermione caught the stray tear with her thumb, swiping it away as she pressed their lips together again.

"I love you too." She said, resting her forehead against his.

Her and Draco laid together in comfortable silence until Pansy and Ginny showed up after lunch, bringing The Daily Prophet and the newest Witch Weekly. Draco eyed The Prophet, his father's face splashed across the front page.

"Do I even want to read that?" He growled out to Pansy.

"Do you still want to die?" She asked, blunt as ever.

Draco glared at her as Pansy just raised an eyebrow. Their eyes met and Hermione knew there was some kind of communication happening and she knew she would never understand

it. Draco looked away first, rolling his eyes.

"I hate you." He mumbled.

"With that attitude you're never going to have a child named after you." Pansy said, crossing her legs.

Draco smiled. Hermione couldn't take her eyes away from it. It was small, hesitant, but it was there.

"You're such a bitch, Panny." He said, shaking his head.

"Gods, don't call me that." Pansy scolded him lightly.

"A bitch? Cause I hate to break it to you.." Ginny said.

"No. Panny. He used to call me that when we were little. You're going to get me emotional, Drake." Pansy explained.

"Panny?" Hermione teased.

"I couldn't say Pansy." Draco groaned out, the smile growing.

"He had a lisp. Panshee." Pansy laughed.

"You had a lisp?!" Ginny cackled out.

"And a parade of people paid to get it to go away. Father used to.." he stopped, the smile dropping.

"He used to what?" Ginny encouraged him.

Draco studied Ginny, his eyes weary. Ginny smiled at him, watching him expectedly.

"He used to say the money for the teachers was coming straight from my inheritance but that it wasn't my fault. It was those damn Black genes. I had been born with a tongue tie, so he blamed that." Draco told them, his eyes far away. "I grew out of it but I would still force it sometimes. Just to bug him."

Draco eyed the paper again.

"They didn't say anything nice about him, did they?" He asked.

"No." Ginny said. "Why don't you tell us something nice about him?"

"Why would you want to hear that?" Draco snapped at her. "He almost killed you."

"Everyone deserves good things said about them after they die." Ginny said. "Even Lucius."

"He taught me to fly." Draco muttered.

"Remember when you flew through the ballroom? Crashed right into the french doors!" Pansy pushed.

"Mum was so mad." Draco said. "I was scared for father to get home but he fixed it without a fuss. Boys will be boys."

"Remember when you turned his hair pink?" Pansy asked.

"And he couldn't change it back so he just matched his dress robes to it. Called it a fashion statement." Draco breathed out a laugh. "He let me get away with.."

"Murder?" Ginny cut him off, a smile on her face.

"Not until the appropriate age." Draco shot back.

Then he laughed. The three girls quickly joined and suddenly the room felt lighter. Pansy and Ginny stayed until dinner, the four of them trading stories about their childhoods. Hermione stayed with Draco during dinner, Madam Pomfrey bringing her a plate of food with his. After they ate she still wasn't ready to leave him. She curled up beside him in his bed as he flipped through the Witch Weekly Pansy had left behind. Hermione's eyes fell shut as she listened to his heartbeat through his shirt, Draco winding one of her curls around his finger absentmindedly. She had just dozed off when she heard Madam Pomfrey enter.

"It's getting late Mr Malfoy." she whispered.

Hermione felt Draco shift under her but kept her eyes closed, not wanting to move. His hand gripped the back of her robes as he sighed.

"Can she stay?" he asked, his voice strained slightly.

"I suppose. You both are of age, after all." Madam Pomfrey agreed after a slight hesitation.

Chapter 25

Hermione sighed as she woke up the next morning, she was so comfortable she didn't want to move. Dracos scent engulfed her, his hand clutching the back of her shirt. She shifted a bit so she could look up at his face. He was still asleep, his eyebrows furrowed and mouth tense. She ran her thumb across his forehead to ease the stress there and his eyes flew open. Panicked gray eyes took her in for a moment before he closed them again and took a deep breath.

"I didn't mean to wake you." She said softly. "Pansy would have been mad if I let you wrinkle your forehead though."

He let out a breathy laugh as he stretched out.

"It's better that you did." He mumbled.

She knew he had been having a bad dream, she had seen him sleep peacefully before and his face was never that tensed up. She didn't know if she should ask about it though. He had said he has nightmares about what happened at the manor and in other circumstances she may have asked him without hesitating but the casual conversations yesterday had brought a lightness back into Draco and she didn't want to weigh him down again. She knew he would be pissed if he found out she was tip toeing around him, but he really should expect it.

"I get to leave today." He said, glancing around for Madam Pomfrey.

"Are you ready for that?" She asked him and he glared at her, no tip toeing.

"Yeah, there's some things I need to handle." He growled out.

"Like what?" She asked.

"Like kicking Theos ass for giving you that letter." He said, pushing himself out of bed.

He grabbed the bag that held the clothes he had come in wearing and glanced into it. Slowly he pulled his shirt out, the left side stained completely red.

"What do people know?" He asked her, his eyes still on the shirt.

"Just that you got hurt." She told him gently.

"What do your friends know?"

"They know how you got hurt."

"Ginny seemed awfully nice to me, considering the shit I said to you." He said, his gray eyes searching her face.

"They don't know about that." Hermione mumbled.

"Why?"

"Because you didn't mean it."

"You didn't know that." He said, Hermione looking up into his face at his hard tone.

"Yes. I did." She said, firmly. "Do you want me to get you clean clothes?"

"It would probably be best not to be wandering the school covered in blood." He said, throwing the shirt and bag back on the chair.

Hermione left when Pomfrey appeared, feeling a little awkward at the fact that she knew Hermione had spent the night with Draco. She found Pansy and Theo in The Entrance Hall, about to head inside for breakfast. Pansy led her down to the dungeons, pushing open the 7th year boys dorm.

"That's one's Dracos." She said, pointing out his bed and trunk.

"I know." Hermione said softly and Pansy smiled.

"Of course you do."

Pansy left her to return to Theo while Hermione opened Dracos trunk. She felt weird, like she was invading his privacy, but he had agreed to let her get him clothes so there wasn't anything in there he didn't want her to see. She pulled out a black pair of pants and a white t-shirt, staring at his clothes trying to picture what he would wear when they didn't have class. She grabbed his Quidditch sweater, digging a little deeper to find him clean socks and underwear. She smiled a little when she touched silk and grabbed the green silk boxers, hoping they were ones he actually wore.

The smile fell off her face when she shook them out and something silver fell on his bed. Her heart skipped a beat when she realised it was a loose razor from his shave kit. Why would he have it buried in his trunk, wrapped up in his boxers? She already knew the answer. Before she even realized what she was doing, Hermione had emptied his trunk. She found two more loose razors. She sat among his clothes, staring at the thin metal rectangles trying to figure out what to do with them.

Her eyes wandered over to his bedside table and she pushed herself up and began ripping open the drawers. She flipped through every paper, finding half written letters to his father and mum, discarded essays, school notes, and letters written to him. She checked every envelope and shook out the three books he had there before finding one. A razor came flying out from between the pages of his muggle studies book. Her stomach churned as she remembered helping him learn how a telephone worked and wondered if he had had one on him that night. Finally she shook her head to clear the thoughts from her mind. She couldn't dwell on it, couldn't fret over the 'what ifs' because he was still here and waiting on her. She left the mess, she would help him tidy it later, and grabbed his clothes, scooping up the razors as well.

Finally pushing open the hospital wing doors, she passed Professor McGonagall who was on her way out as she made her way to Draco's bed. She smiled at the older woman before ducking behind the curtain that hid Draco from the room.

"About time." Draco muttered, pushing himself up.

Hermione silently handed him the clothes and he smiled at her as he took them. His smile fell when he saw the boxers, his eyes flying up to meet hers.

"What do you want me to do with them?" She whispered.

"Them?" He asked with forced casualty.

"I found them all, Draco, in your trunk and your table."

"How many?"

"Four."

"Then you missed one." He said, with a shrug. "On top of my canopy, on the left side."

"Why are you telling me?" She asked him.

"Because I won't tell anyone else and I don't want it there anymore." He said, pulling his shirt off to avoid looking at her.

"I'll take care of it." She promised.

He turned and grinned at her but it didn't reach his eyes. He was holding his undershirt, running the fabric between his fingers, and Hermione gasped. She had never seen him clearly without a shirt. He had three pink scars across his chest from Harry's Sectumsempra in 6th year, a jagged pink scar on his right bicep, and his left arm held pale lines that seemed to shine under the light along with the partially healed cut through his dark mark.

"Sorry." He muttered, shaking out his shirt to pull over his head.

She stopped him though and he tensed up as she pulled the shirt back down. She ran her fingers across his chest, a low sigh rumbling from him.

"What's this from?" She asked, touching the angry one on his bicep.

"The Dark Lord was pissed when you lot slipped out of the manor. He made Bella do it. She didn't seem to mind terribly." He told her.

She opened her mouth, to apologize, to tell him how horrible it was, to scold him for his casual tone, but he kissed her before she could make a sound. She knew he didn't want to talk about it, maybe one day, but not now. She pulled back and he grinned at her.

"Are you staying for the show?" He asked, snapping the waist of his sweatpants with a wink and a smirk.

"Just get dressed, you tosser." She laughed, pushing herself back behind the curtain.

Hermione walked into the Great Hall with Draco when he was finally dressed, their fingers laced together, his thumb brushing back and forth against hers. He dropped her hand and charged over to Theo, who stood from his seat. Theo smiled at him but Draco didn't even pause. He shoved him, hard enough to make Theo stumble.

"She wasn't supposed to fucking see it." Draco snapped.

"I thought that only applied in the event of your death." Theo said, shrugging.

Draco glared at him and Theo just smiled again.

"You're welcome, mate." Theo said, pulling Draco into a hug.

Draco patted his shoulder and they pulled apart. He just nodded to Theo before they both sat down, Hermione sitting next to him. Pansy rolled her eyes across from her.

"Boys." She scoffed.

"Good to see you." Blaise said, tossing Draco an apple.

"First time anyones ever meant that." He grumbled, catching it.

Hermione's head shot up when Harry sat down across from her, Ginny and Ron with him. Ron immediately began loading his plate up but Harry smiled at Draco. Draco looked a little uncomfortable but he nodded at him.

"You ok?" Harry asked.

"No." Draco said and Harry's eyes went wide, not expecting an honest answer.

"You will be." Ron said, surprising everyone.

"Yeah?" Draco asked, making Ron squirm a bit as everyone looked to him.

"Yeah." He said, with a shrug. "We all know you're shit at killing people."

"Ronald!" Hermione exclaimed but Draco laughed.

"Yeah, that kind of sucked for you too, didn't it weasel?" Draco asked, remembering that Ron had gotten his poisoned Christmas gift in sixth year.

"Just a bit ferret." Ron replied, chuckling.

"Awe! Boys!" Ginny sighed out, looking between her brother and Draco.

The next day was Christmas Eve. For the first time in days Hermione woke up without a knot in her stomach. They spent the day in The Great Hall, playing chess, gossiping, filling each other in on the things they got up to during their early years at Hogwarts. Around lunch time Harry and Draco got into a loud argument that made McGonagall tense at the head table but

she settled quickly when she realized they were only bickering over quidditch. Hermione and Blaise played exploding snap before Pansy stole their cards and they began building a card house, laughing as it blew up. Theo regaled them with stories of their childhood, most featuring Dracos hot headedness or willingness to do something stupid. Draco listened to the stories quietly, twisting Hermione's sweater through his fingers, the ghost of a smile on his lips and a far off look in his eyes.

Hermione could feel the stares from the few students who had remained at Hogwarts throughout the day but for once the eyes on her didn't bother her. As Blaise and Theos' stories devolved more into their drunken teenage antics and Draco relaxed the less his parents were mentioned, even contributing to some of the stories, Hermione cared less and less about the people watching them. Draco met her eyes sheepishly as Blaise finished up a story about Draco and Theo making a bet about who could get the most girls to kiss them one summer and Hermione laughed, making him smile.

After dinner the Gryffindors invited the Slytherins up to their common room, deciding it was time they opened up to them as well. They laughed and joked in front of the fire, passing around a bottle of fire whiskey. As the night wore on and the whiskey settled into their veins, the conversations turned more serious. Ron and Ginny spoke about how worried they were for George, Ginny even vocalizing her concern that he might off himself.

"He won't." Draco told them quietly.

"You tried, so why wouldn't he?" Ron snapped at him.

"Because he has all of you. The only one I thought I was leaving was my mother." Draco said in the same quiet, calm tone.

Blaise got drunk and confessed that he knew who his father was. That he was a muggle man his mother had fallen in love with but left due to family pressure, which is why his mother never settled down again. Pansy admitted she had always loved Draco but was never in love with him, her father had simply thought it would be the best match for her. Harry told them about his nightmares and how most nights he doesn't sleep, how he sometimes panics that Voldemort might still be in his head. Draco talked about that night at The Manor, how he knew immediately that it was Harry but knew if Harry died The Dark Lord would win and, at that point, he was desperate for his downfall. How Hermione's screams haunted his dreams still. How conflicted he felt over Sirius' and Tonks deaths because, even though he never knew them, they were still family. Harry told him about Teddy and promised to get him in touch with Andromeda, if he ever wanted. Hermione admitted to how lost she had felt following the war, how she felt like she was constantly drowning until Draco gave her something to hold on to.

One by one they drifted off, Harry and Ginny going up to Harry's bed, Ron drifting up a half hour later to his own. Blaise fell asleep in the armchair and Theo and Pansy cuddled up on a pile of pillows in front of the fire. Once again Hermione found herself trapped between the back of a couch and Draco, Draco tracing patterns on her arm as she looked up into his face. She didn't know if it was just recent events playing tricks on her mind but he looked incredibly sad as he looked down at her. He just gently pressed his lips to her forehead, pausing there as if he was trying to memorize the feeling, before he pulled her against his

chest. She listened to his heart beating a steady rhythm as she dozed off, wondering how she would ever sleep without the simple sound again.

The next morning they all awoke to presents, the house elves leaving the Slytherins gifts on the table in the corner. They laughed at Ron's remark about McGonagall not missing a trick as they tore into their gifts. Draco giving Ginny a startled look when she squealed as he unwrapped a sweater, her having filled Mrs Weasley in on everything once Hermione told them about Draco being in the hospital. Draco raised his eyebrows as he held up the green sweater with a gray D on it.

"Usually my clothes have a M, if anything, for Malfoy." He muttered but he couldn't contain the small grin as his fingers traced the letter.

"Well we couldn't all walk around with Ws. How would she ever tell us apart!" Ginny teased, making Dracos grin grow into a full smile.

Lunch was simple, followed by a snowball fight on the grounds, Slytherin against Gryffindor. As they made their way inside for dinner, bickering over who won, Draco pulled Hermione aside and presented her with a box.

"I don't know why I bought this, I never actually planned to give it to you, but Happy Christmas." He mumbled as she untied the ribbon.

She pulled out a silver chain, a thin dragon charm wrapped around it, and smiled.

"A dragon for Draco?" She teased him lightly.

"No, to remind you that you're a badass." He told her, helping her latch it around her neck.

Hermione fell asleep easily that night, her heart and mind lighter than ever.

Chapter 26

A new year began with January and classes resumed. A healer from Mungos began coming up once a week to see Draco and Hermione could see him fight the urge to just shut down. Some days he barely spoke, others all you could get from him was snark. Hermione tried to treat him as normally as possible, knowing he would hate it if she didn't. After his second session with the healer, Draco disappeared. Hermione tried not to panic, as they searched the castle for him. It was Blaise and Harry who found him, standing on top of The Astronomy Tower, staring off the side to the ground. Draco and Harry sat up there for over an hour before coming inside. The next day as Hermione was walking into breakfast, Draco grabbed her arm and pulled her down to the dungeons, locking the door to the 7th year boys dorm behind them.

Draco trapped her against the wall, his body pressed flush against hers as he pulled her leg up to hitch around his waist. His mouth was frantic as it strayed from her lips, along her jaw, down her neck. His hand bunched her shirt up at her waist as the other tangled in her hair. He had yet to actually speak a word to her.

"Draco." Hermione tried to get his attention but his name came out as more of a sigh.

Draco slid his fingertips just inside the waistband of her pants. His hips pushed into her, making her gasp as she felt his hard length.

"Draco." She said more firmly.

He pushed away from her, running his hand through his hair and licking his lips. He sighed as he looked up at the ceiling.

"What's wrong?" She asked him.

"I don't want to talk about it." He snapped.

"So you want to, what?" She asked, unsure what he had expected from her.

"I want to forget!" He yelled and she was startled to see tears well up in his eyes. "I just want to fucking forget it all. I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to fucking analyze it. I don't want that batshit healer telling me what I was fucking thinking and feeling when I did things! Repressed memories? I don't have repressed memories. I wasn't fucking abused, my parents fucking loved me. I wasn't forced to take the fucking mark. I fucking chose to and nothing that bitch says is going to change it."

"They're not trying to change it, Draco." Hermione said softly. "They're just trying to help you realize why you made that choice."

Draco stared at her, the entire war pouring into her from his face, before he closed his eyes. After a couple deep breaths he sat on his bed and shook his head.

"I'm sick of talking about it." He mumbled, defeated.

"Then we won't talk about it." Hermione said as she pushed herself onto his lap, straddling his waist.

Draco looked up at her, his breathing deepening. After the last couple weeks, it occurred to Hermione that the times that Draco had pushed himself on her he had probably been trying to distract himself. She rocked her hips against his making his breath catch. He wrapped his arm around her back and swung them so he was pressing her into the bed. His lips found hers as he pushed her shirt up. Her own hands found the bottom of his shirt and he pushed himself up and pulled it off, tossing it across the room. He undid her pants before he leaned back over her, his lips finding her neck as his hand slid below her waist between them.

Hermione's head fell back as Draco's fingers found her. The now familiar heat pooled against his hand and she gasped when he pulled her bra down and wrapped his lips around her nipple. Hermione's hands wandered down his chest, memorizing every bump and dip, until she was undoing his pants as well. Draco was too caught up in her body to notice until she pushed them down. He looked up at her, eyes dark, hot breath brushing against her damp nipple as he tried to catch his breath. As their eyes watched each other, each gaging the others' reaction, Hermione pushed his boxers down so his erection was exposed.

"Hermione." Draco murmured as her hand found him.

His fingers had stalled against her but as her fingers ran along his length he pushed one of his own into her. Draco swallowed hard when Hermione wrapped her hand around him and his eyes fluttered shut as she slowly moved her hand. His finger matched her pace as she stroked him and he let out a low groan. She knew he was thinking about the day she would let him fully take her and when his eyes opened she could see it burning in them. His hips jerked into her hand and she sped her movements. His mouth found her breast again and she moaned pushing her hips down against his hand harder. Her hand worked faster, Dracos moans making her stomach erupt in butterflies. His hand slid along her neck, pushing her head up so he could look down at her face. His hips jerked into her hand as he grabbed her hair, tugging it and making Hermione grind her hips against his hand.

"Fuck, Hermione." He moaned out before crashing his lips onto hers.

She felt him go ridged against her, heat pooling on her stomach as he came. After a couple deep breaths Draco pushed off her, grabbing his shirt and swiping her stomach before he yanked her pants down. Hermione let out a small shriek as he pulled her to the edge of the bed before spreading her legs. As he pressed his mouth against her, Hermione couldn't help but think he may have been right about being psychic. He had said he wanted to rip her pants off and bury his face in her while under the Veritaserum.

Once Draco had returned the favor, they laid in his bed in an easy silence. Hermione's head rested against his bare chest, Draco twirling one of her curls around his finger. She pulled his left arm over to her and feathered her fingertips over the uneven skin. He didn't say anything and he didn't pull away as she traced out his dark mark, her finger bumping over the angry line he had carved through it. By the time Theo and Blaise were knocking at the door, Hermione was sure she had memorized every line on his arm.

January blended into February and Draco laughed again. Hermione felt like marking the day on her calendar as she met Pansy's eyes across the lunch table. She couldn't even remember what Theo had said but Draco actually laughed. There had been a few laughs before that day but this was a real full laugh, his eyes lighting up and his whole face softening with his smile. Pansy was right, the world was a better place when Draco was happy.

One morning a week later, Draco was eating breakfast with them when the owl post swooped in. Andromeda's familiar owl dropped two envelopes in front of Harry. After glancing at the envelopes Harry's eyes found Dracos.

"She responded?" Draco breathed out, snatching the letter Harry held out to him.

Draco unfolded it and she watched his eyes scan the page. Hermione glanced at Harry, not knowing Draco had contacted his estranged aunt. When she looked back, Draco was staring at the letter, chewing his bottom lip. His eyebrows furrowed as he scanned the words again. Hermione shifted over to see what had seemed to hypnotize him, seeing that it only held four words.

'It was worth it.'

"This is your cousin." Harry said, holding up a picture of Teddy Lupin and snapping Draco out of his daze.

Draco watched the little boy take a couple shaky steps before falling and the picture looping again.

"Why is his hair blue?" Draco asked.

"His mother always favored that color too." Ginny said.

Draco nodded, watching the picture again, a grin spreading across his lips. He carefully folded the letter and tucked it into his bag as they gathered their stuff up to head to class. Hermione stood and watched him for a moment before summing the nerve to ask him.

"What was worth it?"

Draco stood, his eyes running over her face quickly before he smiled.

"Being a disgrace." He said, throwing his arm across her shoulders.

Chapter 27

The weather slowly warmed and the ground began to thaw as March crept in. Draco seemed to thaw out along with it. The first Saturday of March Hermione was supposed to meet Draco and Theo in the library to start prepping for their N.E.W.Ts but when she arrived only Theo sat at their table. He looked up as she dropped her bag, giving her a smile.

"Where's Draco?" She asked.

"The grounds are dry and the sun is out. Where do you think he is?" Theo answered.

Hermione snatched her bag up and heard Theo chuckle behind her as she pushed her way back out of the library. As she crested the hill and found Draco staring across the water, flask in hand, she couldn't help but smile. He didn't move as she fell into the space beside him, he knew she would show up eventually.

"Getting drunk instead of doing your school work?" She asked, pulling the flask from his hand. "How very September of you."

He chuckled as she sipped the fire whiskey.

"Forcing all your friends to stick to a strict study schedule months before the actual exam, how very fifth year of you." He murmured back, grabbing his flask and her hand.

"We have futures to think about, Draco." She whispered, leaning into his side as his long fingers began toying with her own. "All of us."

"Yeah, I guess we do." He agreed softly.

"I forgive you, you know." She whispered to him.

"For what exactly?" He asked, tensing beside her. "That's a long list."

"All of it. We were kids, Draco. We all had to make hard choices."

"Yeah, but I made all the wrong ones."

"They brought you here though. I know it's silly but maybe everything really does happen for a reason."

Draco was still tense beside her, his fingers running along hers.

"I don't know how you can forgive me. Even before the war, I was horrible to you."

"We were children, Draco."

"I still knew what I was doing." He insisted.

"What you were taught to do. You realized you were wrong, you changed. Despite a few hiccups." She said with a small chuckle.

"I should have never talked to you like that."

"You're learning."

They sat in silence for about an hour before their friends found them. The silence didn't set Hermione on edge the way it used to, the still air did not make her think something bad was coming, and when Theos voice echoed around them she didn't feel the need to reach for her wand. Draco, Harry, Ron, Blaise, and Theo sat discussing the possibility of restarting their quidditch games as Hermione, Ginny, Samantha, Parvati, and Pansy caught each other up on gossip. Pansy nudged Hermione and when she looked at the smiling girl Pansy nodded over to the boys. Hermione smiled as she saw Draco and Ron talking animatedly, both relaxed.

"Never thought I'd see the day." Pansy whispered to her.

Hermione nodded, Draco catching her watching him. He furrowed his eyebrow at her for a second and she just shook her head. Nothing was wrong, how could there be as he smiled and winked at her before Harry pulled his attention away.

They decided to start their quidditch games again the next week. As Hermione watched them all kick off, there was no denying the relief on both Draco and Harry's faces as they took to the air. She vaguely wondered if the two knew how similar they actually were as she turned back to her book. Once the games were done, Draco actually besting Harry for once, everyone began filing out of their box to meet the players on the field but Hermione paused when she saw Draco taking another lap around the pitch. When he reached her box he swung his legs off the broom and over the ledge, catching Hermione's waist and pulling her into him. It would become a habit of his every Sunday, lacing his fingers with hers as they made their way down to meet their friends a few minutes later.

Chapter 28

April brought better weather and even better news. The Slytherins eyed the Gryffindors one morning as half the table, it seemed, cheered and all started hugging and congratulating Ron and Ginny. Bill had owled them and Fleur was expecting a new baby.

"Just what this world needs. More Weasleys." Draco mumbled when he heard the news.

"You don't hate us anymore, remember?" Ginny teased him.

"Hey, I'm just playing nice until Granger lets me into her knickers." Draco said and Hermione swatted his arm.

"More of you than your hand, you mean?" Ginny said quietly, making Draco smile and eye Hermione.

"You two better shut up or neither of you will know anything about who 'gets into my knickers'." Hermione snapped feeling her cheeks burn.

"Just teasing, Granger." Draco whispered in her ear before turning to Ron. "In all seriousness, congrats weasel. Let's hope your brother's kid is nothing like you."

"You ain't lying, mate." Ron replied with a grin.

The week before they were going to leave to head to The Burrow for Easter Ron got an owl from Molly. Angelina Johnson had showed up on their doorstep with a very drunk George. George was still a mess but he was ready to come home so Molly thought it would be best if they didn't overwhelm him. She apologized profusely but it would be best if they stayed at Hogwarts while George recovered more. She would see them in a couple weeks anyway, at the memorial for The Battle of Hogwarts. Hermione had to admit she wasn't too upset, she did miss Molly and Arthur and would have loved to see George, but she wasn't ready to leave Draco yet.

On Easter morning they joined the Slytherins for breakfast. The owl post swooped in and everyone received a chocolate dragon egg filled with treats from Molly, even Draco, Blaise, Pansy, and Theo. Draco opened a box his mother had sent and passed Blaise, Theo, and Pansy treats his mother had sent for them. Hermione saw his eyebrow twitch slightly as he stared into the box before pulling out a beautiful Fabergé egg. He flipped the tag on it, his eyebrows flying up before he set it in front of Hermione.

"It's for you." He mumbled and Hermione heart raced as she stared at it.

"I don't.." She started before clearing her throat and trying again. "I don't want to offend but it won't hurt me, will it?"

"I wouldn't have put it in front of you if it would." Draco said, amusement dancing in his eyes.

Hermione nodded and opened the egg to find a bit of parchment inside.

'I told you he wasn't that bad.
Thank you and Happy Easter.
With love,
Narcissa.'

Hermione grinned as she remembered her last meeting with Draco's mum. Draco was absorbed in a letter his mother had sent him but Ginny was watching her with wide eyes. When breakfast was done they made their way out to the grounds, Draco lost in thought.

"I can't believe she sent you that." He mumbled to Hermione while they trailed behind their friends who were racing to the lake.

"A show of goodwill." She said.

"That egg is an heirloom." Draco told her, "She must really like you."

"Like her son?" She teased.

Draco pushed her laughing, making her stumble. He kept hold of her hand until her feet were steady again then he dropped it and ran. She chased after him, laughing. Draco stopped when he reached the lake but Hermione jumped onto his back, making Draco stumble forward. His arms grabbed her legs and he hoisted her higher on his back, his grip getting tighter.

"You're going in the lake." He growled as he took a few steps toward the water.

"No! Draco, you wouldn't dare!" Hermione shrieked and when he didn't stop she brought her lips to his ear. "I won't let you touch me for a week."

Draco immediately dropped her.

"Cruel." He grumbled.

"Desperate times." She shot back.

They started a fire when the sun began to sink. Draco told them Narcissa had written to Andromeda and they had made plans to get together this summer. He called Topsy and the elf brought them snacks to pass around. It wasn't long before Draco's flask made an appearance. They played Never Have I Ever and their game about the headlines, laughing as Draco was torn between drinking or not over a headline that he was in love and planned to marry Hermione. Eventually Draco laid back pulling Hermione with him.

"I keep waiting for it to fade." He whispered to her.

"For what to fade?" She asked.

He stared up at the heavens, hesitating, like he was afraid to jinx it.

"Feeling happy." He murmured.

Chapter 29

The day of May 2nd was beautiful, the sun bright, the sky clear, and the 7th year students of Hogwarts stressed. Hermione could barely stand the tension in the air as she and Ginny dragged Harry from the common room. He had tried to hide in his dorm, Ron coming down to tell the girls he didn't want to be disturbed. Hermione didn't blame him as every eye turned to them as they made their way to The Great Hall. She didn't like the constant feeling of being watched that only intensified as they took their seats. Pansy sat across from them a few minutes later and Hermione glanced around, looking for Draco.

"He's coming. Theo and Blaise were threatening to stun him and carry him down if he didn't when I left." Pansy assured her.

"Sounds familiar." Ginny said and Harry glared at her.

Hermione knew the moment Draco entered the hall without having to see the door. The room hushed and everyone began whispering. Blaise and Theo pushed Draco down onto the bench beside Hermione and he folded his arms and glared up at the ceiling as if the nice weather offended him. Hermione was reminded of the welcoming feast as she watched his thumb nail slide over his left arm.

"I don't even see why I have to go." Harry grumbled. "I don't need a memorial to remember this day."

"Cheers, Potter. For once I actually agree with you." Draco said, glaring at Hermione as she tried to push a muffin on him.

"It'll do you both some good to be there." Ginny told them. "Now eat something!"

Hermione hid her grin as Harry jumped and grabbed a piece of toast. Ginny's tone had been so reminiscent of Molly that even Ron hunched over his plate slightly. Ginny glared at Draco until he snatched the muffin from Hermione's hand, his lips curling at her while he pointedly picked off a piece and popped it in his mouth. Ginny had a smug grin on her face as he chewed and swallowed but when he stuck his tongue out at her her eyes narrowed. She flipped him off before turning to Harry and urging him to eat more.

"My mums coming." Draco muttered beside her.

"It'll be nice to see her." She said as casually as she could muster.

"You should know, if anyone says the wrong thing to her today I'm going to Azkaban." He growled out.

"I'm sure it'll be fine." She tried to assure him but he just shook his head.

The rest of the morning was tense as they took refuge at the lake. Draco sat and stared silently across the water, turning his flask over in his hands, with Hermione beside him. Ron

and Samantha sat leaning against a tree, talking quietly to each other. Blaise was teaching Parvati how to skip rocks across the lake. Pansy was flipping through that morning's Witch Weekly with Theos arm across her shoulders. Harry looked like he was preparing for battle, Ginny watching him pace, knowing she wouldn't be able to get him to settle.

Harry froze, Draco tensed, and Hermione fought the urge to grab her wand when they heard the voices an hour later. They waited until the reporters that McGonagall had finally let past the gate disappeared into the castle before moving. Samantha entered first to make sure the vultures weren't in the Entrance Hall before waving them inside. They went to the library, Hermione vaguely wondering when the last time Harry and Ron had actually been inside of it.

Dracos fingers worried the edge of her robes as she tried to read. Theo read The Prophet as Pansy braided Ginny's hair. Harry and Blaise hunted down a copy of Quidditch Through the Ages while Parvati watched Ron and Samantha play chess. They sat together quietly, Madam Pince walking by a few times to check if they were still there, until it was time for lunch.

Hermione watched Draco as they sat at the Slytherin table for lunch. She could see the stress in the way he held his jaw, how his eyes darted around the hall every few minutes, his fingers never stilling, playing with his fork, napkin, tie. Despite this his face held a look of boredom, his eyes hard, blank steel. You had to actually know Draco to see his nervous habits.

"Shit." He breathed out as the families arrived.

Molly, Arthur, and George found them, Ginny and Ron hugging their brother tightly. Molly smiled kindly at the Slytherins as Ginny introduced them. Arthur shook each boy's hand, giving Draco his condolences on losing his father and actually sounding sincere about it. Pansy bowed her head slightly, reverting to her proper pureblood act in her stress. There was a tense moment as George eyed Draco and Hermione felt like the whole hall was watching them. She breathed again when the boys grasped hands, even if it only lasted a second. They all sat, Hermione and Ginny sharing a look in the uneasy silence.

"Mrs Weasley." Draco said suddenly and all eyes turned to him. "I wanted to thank you for the role you played in the battle, and for the gifts on Christmas and Easter."

"Of course, dear." Molly said, softly, a smile cracking her lips.

The tension at the table lifted slightly then, as everyone fell into quiet conversation. Hermione's hand found Dracos under the table, feeling a slight tremble in them. She knew he was really thanking Molly for taking down Bellatrix. She also knew he was probably nervous for his mother to arrive, anticipating the Weasleys to be hostile to her. She knew he wanted to bolt, but she wasn't going to let him. His eyes met hers briefly and he let out a low breath, shaking his head he glanced around the hall again.

Theo made a slight movement with his hand and Draco's eyes snapped to him. His eyes flickered beyond Dracos shoulder for a second before meeting him again. Draco took a deep breath and stood. He turned to face his mother, who had just entered the hall. Narcissa smiled warmly at him, ignoring the stares and whispers from the other students, and gliding over to them.

"Draco, dear, relax!" Narcissa scolded him slightly, cupping his cheek with a bedazzled hand.

"Yeah, okay." Draco mumbled under his breath as he turned to introduce her to the table.
"You all, uh, know my mother, Narcissa."

Narcissa smiled at them as Theo, Blaise and Pansy stood to greet her. Hermione's stomach clenched as Narcissa's eyes turned to Molly and Arthur. Arthur stood and shook her hand but Molly wrapped her arms around the other woman. Narcissa's eyes widened for a moment before she sighed and rested her hand on Molly's back.

"You look lovely." Molly said, once they broke apart.

"Thank you, dear." Narcissa murmured.

Narcissa slid onto the bench beside Draco, the rest of the Slytherins taking their seats as well. Her eyes found Draco's fingers, fidgeting with Hermione's on his lap, and she smiled.

"We tried everything short of binding them together to get him to lose that habit." She said, softly.

Draco's eyes snapped to his mother before he released Hermione's hand, stretching his fingers out before resting them on leg. The stillness only lasted a few seconds before he had bunched his robes in his fist.

"Oh, I wasn't chastising, dear. Simply reminiscing." Narcissa assured him.

"I don't want to do this." Draco whispered to his mother and Hermione was surprised to catch the fear in his tone.

"I know, baby, but you have to." Narcissa whispered back in a tone only a mother could hold.

Draco nodded, his hand finding Hermione's again as his fingers resumed their nervous movements. Hermione glanced around the table, everyone tense but chatting. No one had noticed the exchange between Draco and his mother, too distracted by their own conversations, but George was watching them. Something in his face softened before he turned and whispered to Molly, then he pushed away from the table and left the hall. Ginny jumped up and followed him.

"I hope he didn't leave because of us. It wouldn't be a problem to excuse ourselves." Narcissa said to Molly, her tone apologetic. "It's a hard day, we don't want to make it harder."

"It's just hard for him to be in here. I offered to stay home with him but he insisted on coming. I'm sure it just overwhelmed him." Arthur assured her, Molly nodding beside him.

"You know what they say about Gryffindors." Draco mumbled, his eyes going wide when everyone looked at him. "I'm sorry! That wasn't an insult. He lasted longer than I did the first time I had to be in here and I imagine it's worse for him."

"We are a stubborn lot. Always charging head first into strenuous situations." Molly told him, her eyes resting on Hermione.

There was a flurry of activity at the doors and Hermione tensed up, Draco squeezing her hand, as the reporters entered. The air around them was filled with flashes and the reporters scrambled to get over to them.

"No comment, Draco." Narcissa warned her son.

"Just let me tell one of them to fuck off." He whispered, spotting the reporter from Witch Weekly that Astoria had been selling stories to.

"Mouth!" Narcissa scolded him and Pansy stuck her tongue out from across the table as he pouted at his mother.

McGonagall stood and silence filled the hall again. She welcomed the families and other guests and directed them out to the grounds where the memorial would begin in a half hour. As they pushed away from the table Draco dropped Hermione's hand and helped his mother up. Hermione held her head high as they pushed out of the room, hearing Harry behind her snapping at a reporter exactly what Draco wished he could. As they took their seats Hermione reached for Draco's hand but he snapped at her.

"Don't."

"Why?" She asked.

"It's bad enough we're sitting together. They'll tear you to shreds if they see you showing me any affection." He whispered to her, nodding at the photographers.

Hermione huffed at him before grabbing his tie and pulling his lips down to hers. He tried to glare at her as she pulled away but his grin won out.

"Plenty of people have tried to ruin my reputation, most of them are dead now." Hermione said, lacing their fingers together.

"I love you." He breathed out and she smiled.

The memorial was long and Hermione felt bad for wishing it would end. She didn't need to bow her head and think of the lost because she thought of them everyday. When the minister stood and started talking about Voldemort's defeat on those very grounds she saw Harry get up and leave. Her and Ron stood at the same time and followed him. They found him sitting on the steps of the castle, glaring at the crowd.

"I hate these things." He grumbled.

"Get used to them, mate. I expect we'll have plenty of years of them." Ron said, sitting beside him.

"At least you know we'll be dragged along too." Hermione said, sitting on his other side.

"Hey, you had your chance to turn back." Harry said, grinning at her.

Hermione smiled and shook her head at him, Ron letting out a small chuckle. Turning back had never been an option. She had a feeling she would have always ended up right here.

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

An epilogue and playlist will be posted tomorrow.

Things moved very quickly after that, Hermione getting frantic the closer the N.E.W.Ts came. Draco started hiding from her as he openly admitted she scared him sometimes. Ron teasing him about being an amateur, him and Harry have dealt with Hermione's test stress for years. One night a week before the exams Ginny finally snapped.

"Will you just go out to the lake and see your boyfriend?" She snapped at Hermione. "Maybe he can relieve some of your stress."

Hermione glared at her as she threw her quill down and stormed out through the portrait hole. She vaguely wondered if Draco would even be out there but of course he was. He eyed her wearily as she sat down in a huff and tossed her his flask before holding his hands up in surrender.

"Peace offering?" He said and she laughed, taking a sip.

"I haven't been that bad." She murmured.

"Granger I thought you were scary around finals when you hated me, it's worse now that you like me." He told her.

"Maybe I do need to relax." She sighed.

"That would be brilliant." Draco muttered.

Slowly their friends drifted out to join them and they got a fire going, everyone a bit subdued as the weight of the future settled over them all.

"I want to be a healer." Draco told them, his eyes on the dancing flames.

"Gonna have to work on that bedside manner a bit." Ron quipped and Draco grinned.

"I didn't take years of etiquette lessons for nothing." He mumbled.

"It's ok to be scared, right?" Pansy asked them. "I mean, we've survived a war. Why am I scared to be an adult?"

"Because our adults failed us. So now we have to figure out how to do it right." Draco told her.

There were no games that night as they passed Draco's flask around the fire. Just quietly murmured fears and soft reassurances that they had each other.

The week of the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s passed in a blur, both Pansy and Hermione ending up needing multiple calming draughts from Pomfrey. Draco acted more arrogant than he had been all year, which they all knew by now was how he showed stress. Theo and Blaise just got quieter and Harry and Ron got louder. Finally on the other side of the tests that determined their futures they threw a two day party, starting in the Gryffindor common room and ending in the Slytherin common room. Hermione spent the entire Sunday in Draco's bed, feeling the stress leave her as they teased and laughed and learned each other's bodies.

Hermione woke up on her final day as a Hogwarts student before the sun. She sat in her bed, staring at the purple graduation robe draped across her chair. She had dreamed of this day since she first received her letter but she never imagined the path she would take to get here would be so rocky. Ginny stirred across from her and smiled at Hermione as she climbed out of bed. Hermione pulled on her simple white dress, slipping the purple robe on over it and turned to take in her reflection. She sighed as Ginny slipped her hand in hers and they made their way downstairs.

The Great Hall was loud with excited voices as everyone sat at their house tables in honor of the event. She met Draco's eyes across the room and he smirked at her, his fork twirling between his fingers. She had no appetite but she ate to keep Ginny off her back. Finally McGonagall stood, smiling kindly over them and began dismissing them by house to make their way out to the grounds. They all found their seats, the 7th years pulled to the front and the younger years mingled a few feet behind them. This year it was a closed event to respect the students who had had to fight a war, literally and figuratively, to get to this moment.

McGonagall's eyes scanned the crowd as she stepped up to the podium and Hermione shoved her hands under her thighs to hide the shaking. Her eyes wandered down to where Draco was sat, his arms resting on his knees, lost in thought. McGonagall cleared her throat and the crowd grew quiet.

"Every single one of you has been touched by the war, whether directly or indirectly. You've all been marked, by a blemish on your skin or one on your mind, it is there. You can ignore it, pretend everything is fine, drink yourself into stupors, but it will never heal unless you face it. This year I've noticed behaviors that give me immense hope for the future of our kind. I have seen people who, a year ago would have cursed each other on sight because that is what they were taught to do, sit in the library together and study. I have seen old rivalries be reborn in a place of mutual respect instead of hatred. I have witnessed the most unlikely people find peace in a comfortable silence together." McGonagall started, smiling softly at the graduating students. "War can tear people apart. Best friends can become enemies, enemies can become unexpected allies. War strips you down and forces you to bare your soul to the world and no one has the right to fault you for how you recover from it. Pureblood, half blood, muggle born, witch, wizard, death eater, order member, chosen one. Above all of that, we are human. We all feel, we all struggle, we all fear. Whether you called him You Know Who, Voldemort, Dark Lord, or Tom, he has affected who you are today." McGonagall said solemnly. "Now for my 7th year students, I want you to raise your hand if you or someone you know actively fought in the war, on either side."

The entire graduating class raised their hands.

"Keep your hand raised if you actively participated in the war, in any way." Only one or two hands fell. "Keep your hand raised if you participated in a battle." Another handful of hands fell but the majority stayed up. "Keep your hand up if you thought you were going to die. If you witnessed someone die." Another few hands fell but not enough. "Keep your hand up if you have had an unforgivable cast on you. If you had to cast an unforgivable." Hermione's hand was beginning to shake and she rolled her fingers into her palm to hide it as she held her hand up. "Keep your hand up if you've ever personally seen Lord Voldemort." Hermione glanced around and noticed a lot of the hands had dropped at that. "Keep your hand up if you've ever had to look Lord Voldemort in the eyes." Just Harry, Draco, and Theos hands remained. "Keep your hand up if you were ever close enough to Lord Voldemort that he actually touched you."

Theos hand fell and Draco and Harry exchanged an uncomfortable look. McGonagall motioned for them to lower their hands. She looked through the crowd, making eye contact with as many of them as she could.

"Raise your hand if you've ever felt like you were alone?" Everyone dressed in the deep purple robes raised their hand. "You are never alone. Mr Potter and Mr Malfoy just proved that. Two boys who could not have been more different at the beginning of the war, who stood on opposite sides even, still managed to have the same experiences. Each and every one of you is special, but you are never alone in your experiences."

McGonagall watched them silently for a moment before taking a deep breath.

"I was worried about this school year, for many reasons, it being my first year as head mistress but also because of all of you. I was gaining a class of traumatized children who had been forced to go through adult experiences. I expected anger, violence even, but what I've seen has shocked me. A couple weeks into the school year, I took a walk. I was seeking some peace, some time to myself, but I found far more than that. I found myself by The Black Lake. Sitting beside the lake, was a Death Eaters son and a muggle born witch." Hermione's eyes drifted to Draco again and saw him watching her, a small smile on his face. "They silently shared a drink together and watched the water. I don't think they spoke a word to each other, but there was peace in that moment. A stillness that I had been trying to find. I knew, prior to the war, there had been a lot of animosity between these two, and I had expected to find it again when they returned but instead, they seemed to take comfort in each other. Both being on such extreme sides of the war, not by choice but by pure circumstance, it was a miracle they could even look at each other. As the weeks went by I saw a friendship bloom, I saw them seek each other out, even when they didn't realize they were doing it, and when they did realize it, I saw them try to fight it. But after everything you all have been through, when you find peace, it's hard to let it go." McGonagall's eyes lingered on Draco before sliding over to Hermione. "You all are going to leave Hogwarts and face the real world, and I know you don't need me to tell you that the real world is harsher than anything you'll find in these halls. So as you go out to face a new kind of battle I want you all to remember that Death Eater's son and muggle born witch, remember that you are all human and you're never alone and that Hogwarts will always be here to welcome you home. Congratulations, I am so very proud of every single one of you."

"Think she called me a Death Eater's son because she didn't want it to be too obvious?" Draco asked, walking up to her.

"You were never a Death Eater, Draco. Regardless of what's on your arm." Hermione said, smiling up at him.

His eyes wandered over her shoulder toward the lake before he grabbed her hand and pulled her away from the crowd. She laughed as they ran, her hand locked into his. As they crested the hill and the crowd vanished from sight, Hermione sighed. She fell down onto the grass, pulling Draco with her, and rested her head on his shoulder as they both looked out over the water.

They say war is hell, but hell is endless, eternal suffering and with war, well, there's an after. There comes a time when you finally find peace, when everything is still, and quiet, and you're comfortable in it. When everything isn't life or death or darkness. When you've finally moved on.

"Draco!" A booming voice broke through their silence.

The pair turned to see Theo, Blaise, Pansy, Harry, Ginny, and Ron cresting the hill.

"Told you. 10 galleons." Pansy said, swatting Ron's shoulder.

"Bloody witches are always right." Ron grumbled as he dug the coins from his pocket.

As they all sat around them, Draco pulled out his flask. He took a sip before passing it along, Ron scrunching up his face as he swallowed.

"That thing's as evil as you are, Malfoy." Ron laughed, passing it back.

"Cheers, Weaslebe." Draco said, before he turned to Pansy. "I heard you and Theo are to be wed this summer."

"Keep the fucking flask, Draco." Pansy said, waving her left hand, the Nott family ring sparkling on her finger and turning to Harry. "I heard Potter and Weasley are going to be aurors, forever defenders against the dark."

Draco threw the flask at them but it remained unopened.

"I heard Nott got accepted to work at the Department of Mysteries." Harry said, tossing Theo the flask.

"I heard Weaslette is going to play for The Holyhead Harpies." Theo said, tossing the still unopened flask to Ginny before she could even respond.

"Well, I heard Blaise and Parvati are moving in together." Ginny said, holding the closed flask out for Blaise who didn't take it.

"I heard.." Blaise started, smiling over to Draco and Hermione. "That a Death Eater's son and a muggle born witch fell for each other this year."

"Wonder how that happened." Draco muttered, turning the flask over in his hands.

"Guess his crush didn't end when she punched him in the face." Hermione said, making Pansy snort.

"Wait, Malfoy had a crush on you?" Harry asked, "When?"

"Potter, how is it even possible that you saved the wizarding world." Draco asked.

"I had to literally throw myself on him for him to realize I liked him." Ginny explained. "He grew up in a cupboard, he's allowed to be a little socially inept."

Draco laughed as he began toying with Hermione's fingers. The conversation continued, with the usual teasing and jabs at each other as she rested her head on Draco's shoulder. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, relishing in the feeling of contentment that swarmed her. Draco's fingers pushed her chin up and he caught her lips with his, and Hermione felt her heart rate jump slightly. Draco pulled back and looked down at her, a smile ghosting his lips.

"Are you ok?" He asked, softly.

"Yeah." She nodded. "I am."

The group continued to sit there, laughing and talking as their last day at Hogwarts came to a close. As the sun set and stars dotted the sky, the only thing that broke the stillness of the night was the occasional shriek of laughter and the quiet sound of the soft waves that rolled through the lake.

Epilogue

"Fuck!" Draco yelled, ducking so the spell just missed his head. "What the hell, Potter? We said nothing lethal."

"It wasn't lethal!" Harry said back, his wand still trained on Draco.

"No but it fucking hurts!" Draco snapped, his wand steady on Harry as well.

Harry laughed and Draco shot off three spells in quick succession. Harry managed to deflect one, dodge another but the third caught him, knocking him off his feet. He pushed himself up quickly, rolling to avoid a fourth spell from Draco's wand. The pair circled each other before something blew between them, knocking them both back into their butts. Draco's eyes snapped over to see Hermione stowing her wand.

"Wands away. You're scaring the children." Hermione snapped.

Draco pushed himself up, twirling his wand between his fingers.

"The kids aren't even out here." Harry said.

"It's cute that you think they're not watching from the windows." Theo said from where he was sitting watching the duel.

Draco's eyes snapped up to the second floor, watching a curtain flutter as though it had just been closed. He rolled his eyes, shoving his wand in his pocket.

"In any case, the food is ready." Pansy said, coming out from the side door carrying a bowl.

Draco pushed his sleeve up from where it had sagged down from the duel as Harry stopped beside him.

"Rematch after dinner?" Harry whispered.

"You're on." Draco muttered back. "Granger!" He grabbed Hermione's hand and pulled her over to him. "Where's Hara?"

"You've been married, what, 10 years, and you still won't call her Hermione?" Ginny said, shaking her head and sitting down across from Theo.

"Oh, I call her Hermione, just not in any situations that are fit to be discussed at a dinner table." Draco replied, winking at Ginny.

Hermione's cheeks turned pink as she swatted at his chest as Ginny and Pansy laughed.

"Ron, call James and Adhara down." She called as Ron dodged Albus who came flying out the door.

"Scor hit me!" Albus cried out, throwing himself into Ginny.

Scorpius came pushing past Ron, grabbing onto Draco's shirt.

"He said you eat dead people." Scorpius blurted out.

"I said he was a Death Eater!" Albus snapped and all the adults in the yard froze.

"Al, where did you hear that?" Harry asked his son gently.

"James said it." Albus muttered.

Ginny pushed herself up and stormed over to the door.

"James Sirius Potter!" She yelled and moments later James and Adhara came stumbling through the door.

"I didn't do it!" James insisted.

"Did you tell your brother Draco was a death eater?" Harry asked, sternly.

Adhara glanced between James and her dad, suspicion written all over her face.

"Isn't that what his tattoo means?" James asked quietly, glancing at Draco.

"Where did you learn that?" Draco asked, his voice cold.

"It was in my book." James replied, looking like he might cry under Draco's intense gaze.

"Which book?" Ginny asked him.

"History of Magic. I was just flipping through it and I saw the picture. Theo has one too." James mumbled.

"Is it something bad?" Scorpius asked, looking up at his dad.

Hermione looked up at Draco, watching his old guard go up in his eyes. A muscle along his jaw ticked as he looked over at Adhara who was watching him carefully. Hermione could tell he was nervous, his fingers fiddling with her robe where he clutched at her waist.

"I think we should have a conversation after dinner." Hermione said, gently.

They knew this day was coming. James and Adhara were starting school next month, they would learn what Draco had done. They knew about the war, of course, there was no way of keeping it from them, but the adults had sheltered them from the roles they all played in it as much as possible.

"About what?" Adhara asked, Hermione hearing the same tone Draco used when he was frustrated in her voice.

"The war." Ginny said. "Guys, you know Draco and Theo, you've known them since the day you entered this world. Do you think they're bad?"

"No." Albus said, quickly.

"Of course not! Draco taught me how to jump into a window from my broom!" James said.

"James!" Draco snapped as Ginny glared at him.

"I knew it!" Ginny yelled, pulling her wand. "You used to do that all the time, jumping into the box to show off for Hermione!"

"Hey, now. We don't want to scare the kids!" Draco said, throwing his hands up.

"He could have broken his neck, Malfoy!" Ginny snapped, advancing on him.

"But he didn't!" Draco pointed out.

Ginny sighed, dropping her wand and running her hand down her face.

"Let's eat." She said, ushering the kids toward the table.

Adhara didn't move though, she was still staring at Draco. He bent down in front of her and took her hand.

"What, baby?" He asked her softly.

"I didn't just look at the pictures in my book." She whispered. "I know what a death eater is."

Draco's eyes closed, and when he reopened them Hermione could see his heartbreaking. She kneeled down beside them, smoothing Adhara's wild blonde curls back.

"And what do you think about daddy?" Hermione asked her.

"He's not bad." She said quickly, twisting the bottom of her shirt between her fingers. "He wouldn't be here, with Uncle Harry and you if he was. Right?"

"Hara, I'm not going to lie to you. I've done things I would give anything for you to never find out about. I regret them, more than you could possibly understand, but I wouldn't go back and change it because I learned from it. If things had been different, you and your brother wouldn't be here. Hell, I wouldn't be here. I would have never become the man your mum chose and I wouldn't trade what I have now for anything, even a clean arm." He told her, glancing down at his marked up left arm.

Adhara threw herself into him, burying her face in his chest for a moment. Draco let out a long breath as his hand rested on her head.

"Go eat, baby. Aunt Ginny cooked so you know it's good." He murmured to her, Adhara smiling up at him. "If you tell her I said that you're grounded."

Adhara laughed as she pushed away from Draco and ran over to the table. Hermione took his hand as they straightened up.

"Do we have to tell them?" He asked her.

"It's better they hear it now from us, instead of in History of Magic from Binns." Hermione reassured him.

"I don't want them to look at me like that. They're the only people who never have." He said, his eyes turning on her.

"So we'll tell them the story of a Death Eaters son falling for a Muggle Born witch." Hermione said, reaching up to cup his cheek. "It's so romantic, Hara will swoon!"

Draco grinned at her as he leaned into her touch. He was still scared, still nervous but the last 10 years outshined his role in the second wizarding war. His years as a healer, his gentle bedside manner, the relationship he had built with all the kids, the money he had donated to multiple organizations to make up for the damage his family had helped cause, and of course, his marriage to Hermione. In the end she really had done wonders for his image, but not just because he connected himself to her. She helped him see that it was ok to be weak, broken, ashamed. That he could learn from the past and not repeat his father's mistakes. That he could wear his scars as a badge that he had survived, instead of burying it all away. That sometimes you had to embrace the stillness instead of trying to break it.

Playlist

1. War by Sum 41
2. Control by Halsey
3. IDK you yet by Alexander 23
4. Who's Gonna Carry You Home? By Elder Brother
5. Sophomore Slump or Comeback of the Year by Fall Out Boy
6. Panic Room by Au/Ra
7. Lover I Don't Have to Love by Bright Eyes
8. Stuck In Your Head by I Prevail
9. Are You With Me? By nilu
10. Do I Wanna Know by Arctic Monkeys
11. Title Track by Machine Gun Kelly
12. House on a Hill by The Pretty Reckless
13. Famous Last Words by My Chemical Romance
14. I Don't Care by Fall Out Boy
15. Bloody Valentine by Machine Gun Kelly
16. Believer by Imagine Dragons
17. Stay The Night by Green Day
18. Can You Feel My Heart by Bring Me to the Horizon
19. My Heart I Surrender by I Prevail
20. Almost Lover by A Fine Frenzy
21. Play This When I'm Gone by Machine Gun Kelly
22. All Hail the Heartbreaker by The Spill Canvas
23. Call Me In the Morning by Billy Lockett
24. Train Wreck by James Arthur
25. Climb by 24kGoldn
26. Only One by Yellowcard
27. Metaphor by Mt Eddy
28. When It's Time by Green Day
29. Final Masquerade by Linkin Park
30. Could Have Been Me by The Struts
31. Warrior by Beth Crowley

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