Promethean Fire
by keening

Summary

"From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
They are the books, the arts, the academes,
That show, contain and nourish all the world."

In the aftermath of the war, Hermione is ordered to marry a Pureblood in order to raise her above her station. A marriage law fic.
"Do you believe you are the first woman forcibly married to a Malfoy?"

Chapter One

The silence hung heavy in the air as a small, delicate piece of parchment fluttered from her fingertips to the table.

"Hermione." Harry rose from the table and moved towards her but stopped, sudden. The sudden absence of his padded footsteps on the thick carpet almost deafened the room.

Hermione stood, one hand steadying herself against the drawing room table.

Then suddenly, the windows blew back. They cast fragments of glass that looked like ice all over the carefully maintained rose bed beneath the window.

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"Sirius, no." Remus pulled the other man back. "You can't shout at every problem until it goes away."

"I bloody well can Moony!" Sirius roared, so hard that Hermione thought that his voice may well rip straight from his throat at any moment. "I can shout at the Minister. I can shout at Amelia Bones. They fought a war. They won the war. They deserve one year to be children." Sirius slumped against the wall, sliding down until he finally came to a stop on the plush carpet.

"I don't think we were ever children." Harry's voice sounded hollow in the air. Hermione turned her head towards it, seeking his voice as though it were a lifeline. Something to grab to. She felt as the ground were being pulled out from beneath her feet. As though she were in an elevator plummeting as the cable snapped under immense pressure.

"I don't think I have the energy left in me to fight any more." Harry said once more before the air in the room grew too thick to breathe.

"Besides, Amelia Bones is dead." Her own voice sounded steady and unaffected. Hermione dropped the letter-opener onto the green leather writing pad, carefully laid on the desk. The thump was echoed as the door to the room slammed shut as Sirius whirled out, no more than a bundle of robes held up by a pillar of fire. Hermione felt like she was choking.

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"So you see, Headmistress. I'm not certain I will be able to return to complete my NEWTs."

Hermione, ever the academic, was sat in the Headmistress's office. She wrapped her hands around the delicate china cup of tea. As though it were an anchor. Hermione felt as though she were drifting away, lost in the storm that raged her around her. She steeled herself.
"Nonsense, girl." Minerva McGonagall snorted. "You're far from the only one. We'd have no Seventh Year left if we dismissed all those that were married."

Hermione gazed in to the cup of rapidly cooling tea before taking a long swallow, wishing it were firewhiskey. Minerva seemed to sense this and unlocked the bottom drawer in her desk with a flourish of her wand. Hermione looked up to see two tumblers with two fingers of whiskey in the bottom. She let out a breath she hadn't realised she was holding.

"Do you know who your husband will be yet?" Minerva asked. Hermione shook her head in response.

"The letter only said that I was going to be allocated a family of status, given my efforts as a war heroine."

"I imagine you'd have preferred an Order of Merlin, aye?"

And suddenly, Hermione felt as though a weight had been lifted as she let out a snort of laughter for the first time since the owl post had arrived on Tuesday.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

"For what is wedlock forced but a hell,
An age of discord and continual strife?"

Chapter Two

Hermione stood in one of the rooms she had claimed for herself in Sirius Black's manor house. She hadn't dreamed that she'd be living in an Edwardian mansion once the war was over along with the other waifs and strays that Sirius and Remus had seemingly adopted.

Currently, herself and Harry lived at Black Manor while Grimmauld Place has become a sort-of boarding house for members of the DA and the Order. A revolving door of people who no longer had places of their own to call home.

Harry and Hermione had stayed with the Weasleys the first few nights after the final battle. Until Harry's grief became too much and he retreated to Grimmauld Place, where the shadows under his eyes matched those on the walls. Hermione, always at Harry's back, followed.

After he arrived, Harry spent the first hour systematically blowing up every trinket in the Gentleman's Study on the first floor. He didn't notice when the front door opened with a whispered breath. He didn't notice when Hermione curled up in the faded armchair. The plush red velvet now a dusky (and dusty) rose. Hermione sat there, absorbed in a tome she'd rescued as Harry's screams pulled the books from the shelves. Her bushy hair falling over her eyes. A mask that she hid behind.

Sirius had stormed in to the house, a cacophony of noise. He had clattered up the stairs two at a time, bellowing Harry's name. Harry finally stilled. In that brief pause, Hermione noted the look of sheer panic upon his face. Sirius crashed in to the room, the door hitting the wall with a loud bang. Sirius promptly scooped Harry in to his arms. After a heartbeat, Harry's shoulders sagged as he wept in to older man's chest.

Hermione steeled herself. Be strong, beat her heart against her breast bone. Be strong, be strong, be strong.

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And strong Hermione was.

She stood, ramrod straight throughout the funerals that stretched over May and June. She stood, unflinching in the public eye as vultures snapped flash photographs, hoping to catch a tear to publish. She stood, a head shorter than Harry and Ron who flanked her, but she was just as tall as they.
And now she stood in the Department of Births, Marriages and Deaths.

The queue shuffled forwards slowly. Hermione's feet dragged on the waxed, wooden floor. Harry stood next to her, a pillar of support. Ron had already received his allocation that morning, beating the queue by coming to work with Arthur. Ron had elected not to return to Hogwarts and instead was working in the Department of Misuse of Muggle Artefacts alongside his father. Ron enjoyed the work - tracking down cursed objects was something he'd become rather good at.

Hermione's breath caught in her chest as she realised she was next. The witch in front of her she didn't recognise, but knew she'd have to be muggleborn. It wasn't often you saw purebloods wearing faded Iron Maiden t-shirts. The woman received her slip and let out a small whoop of glee. Hermione felt her heart lift - perhaps she'd get a good match after all.

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All too soon, that moment of hope crashed down around Hermione.

'Draco Malfoy'

The slip of parchment contained only two words. Hermione felt the shutters on her life close around her. She turned and fled the hall, her sensible shoes carrying her out out out the Ministry until she stood, shaking next to an old telephone box outside. Her legs felt like lead and she could move no further.

Hermione looked around the alleyway, making sure she was in no-one sight, before she lifted her wand and twirled.

With a small crack, she was gone.
Chapter Three

Chapter Summary

"Give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone."

Chapter Three

Hermione was unsure of where exactly she was apparating to until her feet touched the ground. She took in a deep lungful of the warm air in the Forest of Dean. She began to move in circles, her wand casting the spells that came to her tongue so readily.

If Hermione Granger needed space to think, she'd damn well make sure she couldn't be found.

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"But why Malfoy, Sirius?" Harry asked, once he was back at Black Manor. Harry, Sirius, and Remus were sat around one of the battered tables in the kitchen. One of the elves poured everyone a fresh cup of tea before turning back to the stove.

"Thank you Poppy." Remus murmured at the retreating elf, who gave a small nod in response.

"Hermione is a war heroine and Draco and his family were very prominent before the war. It's the Ministry's way of ensuring that the Malfoy Heir can take the seat on the Wizengamot and still be a respectable wizard," Sirius took a sip of his tea. "This way, Hermione can be married in to a family with money, she can appear in public and at Ministry functions in designer robes and expensive jewellery and look the way the public expects a successful witch to look."

"Like a Pureblood, you mean." Harry snorted in to his tea.

"Exactly," replied Remus. "She needs acromantula silk dress robes to pin that Order of Merlin to."

"Hermione never got an Order of Merlin," Harry said. "Only I did."

"She will now she'll be married to a Pureblood, mark my words." Sirius said as he stood up, scraping the chair across the ancient stone flags and tipped the dregs of his tea in to the sink.

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Hermione did not have her full library at her disposal, but her beaded handbag still contained a respectable reference library. She sat, cross-legged on the camp bed inside the stiflingly hot tent. She rather thought she'd learnt her lesson about camping in August, but here she was yet again.

Unfortunately, Hermione decided, there wasn't much in the way of legal recourse. The original Marriage Law Act had been passed in the 1600s after one of the many Goblin Rebellions had wiped out a not-insignificant number of fertile men, causing low magical birth rates for several years. There was a boom in the population over the next five years as these forcibly wed couples had done their
duty for King and Country.

There were several other short periods were the Marriage Law had been enacted, including, she found, 6 months after the end of the war with Grindelwald. Although, she rather supposed that may explain why Septimus Weasley married Cedrella Black. She'd have to ask Cedrella's portrait at Black Manor, presuming she had one.

Hermione sighed and uncrossed her legs, rubbing her thigh as she did so to regain some feeling. She began to pack her belongings away. She'd only been away for one night and she'd sent a patronus to Harry, explaining that she needed some time to think and to come to terms with being Draco Malfoy's fiancée. He'd be expecting her back at Black Manor that afternoon.

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"Mother, you cannot expect me to actually go through with this." Draco threw himself back in to the lounge chair in the immaculate sitting room. Narcissa had been relentlessly decorating and remodelling Malfoy Manor, as though she were trying to scrub every last memory of The Dark Lord and her Husband from the flag stones.

"You are not the first Malfoy to enter an arranged marriage." Narcissa sniffed. "If your father were still here, he'd be arranging a contract with that Greengrass girl."

"So why aren't you?" Draco took a gulp from his glass of firewhiskey. "Why aren't you trying to save me?"

"Oh Draco, darling. Don't you understand? The Granger girl will save you."
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

Hermione stood in the waiting room. There were chairs available but she felt far too tightly wound to sit down. She needed to fidget, to pace aimlessly while she waited to be called.

Eventually, the witch behind the desk called her name in to the room. The very sound of it seemed to echo off the walls.

Hermione couldn't help but grieve. It was probably the last time she'd be known as Hermione Granger.

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In the room was Draco Malfoy. She already knew him of course, but the witch blithely continued on with their forced introduction. Hermione knew he went to Hogwarts, and in what years. She wanted to scream that she was there. She was there through all of it.

A small part of her stopped to think. She chose to fight the war, and on what side.

She doubted Malfoy had the same choice.

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Hermione stood up to leave the room once their introduction was complete. From the pamphlets she'd read, they'd have a short courting period, followed by a simple Ministry wedding, then they'd have two years in which to produce an heir, and a further two years to produce a second child (a spare, like Muggle royalty).

Which was why she felt shocked when the witch informed them that they were going to have to rush things a bit. After all, their wedding was the first.

"You'll be getting married on Monday, first thing!" the witch said, brightly. "It's ever so exciting to have you and Harry get married on the same day."

"Why isn't Potter getting married first?" Draco Malfoy asked. "After all, he's the star, isn't he?"

"Well." The witch deliberated for a moment. "I imagine his is closer to lunchtime so it can be photographed and shown in the Evening Prophet - ready for everyone finishes work."

"Of course." Draco nodded. "Can't have Potter missing a moment of publicity."

"When's Ron's?" Hermione finally spoke. "Do I at least get to see my friends get married?"
"Oh no dear. His wedding is at the same time as yours. We have multiple chapels, see."

"I see." Hermione left the room with Draco at her side.

"What do you want to do now Granger?"

"Hermione."

"Sorry, what?"

"I'm not going to be Granger for very much longer. You should get used to calling me Hermione."

As they left the Ministry building, Hermione was blinded by camera flash.

And so, the whirlwind began.
"Hermione, where are you going?" The words sounded odd coming from Malfoy's, no, Draco's mouth. His delicate, pale fingers caught her wrist as she turned to apparate.

Hermione stopped dead. "I rather thought I'd go back to Black Manor and prepare."

"You don't understand - this is going to be a society wedding. They're expecting us to do it properly. You can't just go back to the house that you share with unmarried men. You should go to your Mother's."

Hermione then probably surprised him by letting loose a snarl of rage. "And what would you know about my parents, Draco?" she spat. "Is that supposed to be a joke?"

Draco floundered. "I have no idea what you mean."

"My parents don't know who I am. I memory charmed them. They don't remember me. I can't undo it." Hermione sank down on the step. "I just shouted that where reporters could hear, didn't I?"

Draco looked at the step and seemed to deem it clean enough to sit down upon - although he did lay out his travelling cloak first. Hermione wished she'd thought of that. She had the sinking feeling she was sat in cigarette ash.

"Don't be ridiculous, Hermione. I stuck up privacy charms around us the moment we left the building." He cast a wary eye across the gathering crowd. "Of course, they can still see us, mind."

"Where do I go?" Hermione didn't dare look at his face, so instead focused her eyes on his polished shoes. "I don't have any family left."

"We'll call in to Mother." Draco rose, brushing creases out of his robes and extended a hand to Hermione. "Mother will see that everything is as it should be."

Hermione wasn't sure if there was a note of bitterness in his voice, but she took his hand anyway.

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Draco had side-alonged her to the mat outside Malfoy Manor's side door. Hermione wasn't sure if she was insulted that he'd seeming brought her to the servant's entrance. Before she'd fully gathered her surroundings, the door clattered open to reveal the impeccable Narcissa Malfoy.

"Draco. Miss Granger. Do come in." Narcissa stepped aside and Draco's hand was at the small of her back, gently guiding her indoors. The utility room they entered was cool and dark in the midsummer heat.

Hermione took in the small details around her, the slightly faded sun hat, the still-muddy trowel, the kneeling mat. Narcissa? Gardening? Hermione couldn't quite believe it. The Malfoys weren't rich enough to afford human servants, were they?

"I was just finishing up the flower beds." Narcissa informed them as they were swept in to the kitchen in her wake. She tugged off her gardening gloves and put them down next to an ice cold jug
of lemonade that appeared from nowhere with a small pop.

"I think I need something stronger than lemonade." Draco finally let go of Hermione's wrist and she mourned the loss of his touch.

"How did it go?" Narcissa poured three glasses of lemonade, regardless. "When do you need to be married by?"

"Monday." Hermione said, abruptly. "In the Ministry registry chapel."

"Today is Thursday." Draco said, his head emerging from a cupboard near the wood-burning oven.

"Draco, don't get in to the cooking sherry. Go up to the study if you desire a drink. I am also aware of what day it is, thank you." Narcissa turned back to Hermione. "I imagine your parents are still… unavailable."

"Permanently unavailable." Hermione replied.

"They're not?" Narcissa balked and put down her lemonade glass.

"Oh no, they're not dead. I just used an untested memory charm and I can't undo it. I requested that one of the healers taking care of Lockhart take a look at them, but once he'd looked over my notes he declared it a lost cause." Hermione picked up the cool glass of lemonade and trailed her finger through the condensation. "I have no-one else, you understand?"

"I think that's the most I've heard you speak, Hermione." Draco said, pouring himself a healthy measure of a bottle of red wine he'd found.

"Draco no, that's for Coq au Vin tonight."

"Too late." Draco smiled and handed Hermione his glass.

"What do we do? How do you arrange a wedding in three days?" Hermione sipped the red wine. It was a bit better than the wine she'd usually use to cook with. Okay, a lot better.

"You don't, dear." Narcissa straightened. "Leave it all to me."

Hermione was at a loss. She was stood in the kitchen of a house she'd wished to never see again, calmly discussing wedding plans and her parents while inside she was screaming in terror. The scar on her arm itched with the memory of spilt blood.

She downed the rest of her wine and allowed herself to be led out of the kitchen.
The rest of Malfoy Manor was equally unsettling. Hermione did not recognise the rooms Narcissa was leading her through, but the oppressive atmosphere in the house remained. Although, Hermione thought, this wasn't really a house. No-one had ever been at home here. These were just walls put up to protect the pure-blooded artefacts that lay within. This wasn't a home. This was a fortress.

Narcissa eventually stopped outside a shining, black wooden door.

"In here is my dressing room. Draco has never once been in here. There are some places that Witches must have without a male influence." Narcissa opened the door and ushered Hermione inside. The room was large with incredibly high ceilings. The walls were white marble with gold trim. There was a soft grey couch in the centre of the room, with a spindly table next to it. Narcissa gently pushed Hermione towards the couch.

"Sit. We'll begin shortly." Narcissa sat down and gently patted the space next to her. "This is a happy occasion, so we will begin with champagne." Hermione wondered if Narcissa was speaking to her or to the air around her.

Her question was soon answered when two delicate flutes of champagne popped on to the spindly table.

"I don't understand what we are about to begin." Hermione picked up the flutes and passed one to Narcissa. "I don't understand much about anything that is happening right now."

"There are many things you need to know about being a Malfoy wife." Narcissa sipped from her flute. "I will not presume you do not know how to dress. I am not here to make you over. You have an image. You are iconic. What you need to learn is how to exude power and control."

"I have never been in control of anything, Mrs. Malfoy. I spent the entire war under Dumbledore's influence. I ran blindly from one problem to the next while the entire world span beneath me. Even now, I am still running. I am running in to a marriage with a man I only know from a schoolyard rivalry. I am sat here, yet I want to do nothing more than run from this Manor. I was tortured here, as you well know, and yet now I am expected to be Madam Malfoy. I am expected to be this mistress of this manor and yet I can taste the adrenaline in my mouth." Hermione attempted to wash the taste away with a rather large swig of champagne.

"You are the epitome of power and bravery. You are success." Narcissa sat her champagne flute on the table. Hermione had never realised that Narcissa moved her hands a lot when she spoke. "You are brave, Hermione. You are walking in to the pit of snakes, as you have walked so many times before, and you will emerge stronger on the other side."

"I still don't understand how." Hermione was now fiddling with the condensation on her glass.

"You have a remarkable amount of power, Hermione. You are not called the "brightest witch of the age" by the press for no reason."
By the time Hermione returned to Black Manor, she was unsure which way was up. She was holding on to Narcissa's thin, pale arm as the Daughter of the House of Black gazed up at the entrance.

"It has been a while since I have been here." Narcissa coolly brushed some non-existent creases from her travelling cloak. "I rather wonder if Cousin Sirius has decorated at all."

Hermione let out a small laugh. "I doubt much has changed at all. None of us have been particularly bothered with decorating. The shadows still have their secrets."

"Ah," said Narcissa. "Then it won't have changed at all."

As they opened the door, the house immediately came alive with the sounds of life. Sirius was banging out some jaunty ragtime tune on a poorly tuned piano, Remus was hollering at Sirius to cut it out, Harry was shouting down the stairs that he was taking a very important floo call and could both of them just quit it for one moment.

Narcissa stepped over the threshold and the house immediately went silent. There was a great shuddering as the wards seemed to recognise one of their daughters coming home. The air was still. A heartbeat. Another. Hermione felt them in her throat. She'd been away for one night - how did this no longer feel like home?

Hermione supposed that nowhere had really felt like home since the day she left for Hogwarts. She'd lost her home in the muggle world. She'd lost her home at the school, tainted by memories of battle. She'd lost the home that comes from returning to your parents' house, how even when you're an adult you can kick off your shoes and know that the same brand of tea there always had been was in the cupboard. And now, she'd lost the home she'd made with three other people who were seemingly adrift.

No, Black Manor had never been home. It was merely a life-raft they were all clinging to because they were drowning in grief.

"Cousin." Sirius had emerged from the music room, looking every inch the rakish Lord he was. Hermione imagined that Oscar Wilde would have approved.

"Cousin." Narcissa stepped forward and smoothly air-kissed Sirius's cheeks. "It is good to see you. I have come to escort Hermione for her things."

"Her things? Hermione?" Sirius turned towards her. "You don't have to move out, you know."

"I do Sirius. I do if I want this to be proper. I am going in to seclusion under Narcissa's guidance."

"You're not making her do all that rot, Narcissa!" Sirius practically roared. "She's a hero! She saved us!"

"She's saving us all Sirius! She's saving the House of Black. Do you not see it? Do you not see what
we have been taught?" Narcissa gestured angrily towards Hermione. "You heard the same stories I did. You know who she is. You know that we need to do this properly if we have any hope of retaining what an Ancient house truly means."

"Hermione is not Nimue reborn, Narcissa. Hermione is all Hermione."

"Arcturus never said she was Nimue reborn, Sirius. You need to see the parallels. The brightest witch in her generation, in living memory. She could do things Dumbledore never dreamed of!" Narcissa turned towards Hermione. "There is a tale, among the Blacks, that the Greatest Witch would have powers we dare not speak of, and she would restore the House to glory."

"Toujours Pur." Hermione spat. "No mudblood could ever restore your house."

"You're wrong there, Hermione." Harry said as he padded down the stairs in his socks. "That's exactly what they were told. That is what they were so afraid of. That the mudblood would come and burn out the unworthy."

"You did a good enough job of that yourselves." Hermione turned and rounded on Narcissa. "Bellatrix, dead. Andromeda, disowned. Tonks, dead. Regulus, dead. You are the surviving two of your generation and neither of you are exactly well-adjusted adults. Sirius threw his lot behind a teenaged boy and you threw yours behind a madman."

Everyone looked at Hermione, while fire burned in her eyes and they felt their skin grow cold, such was the heat of magic radiating from her.

"I am going to get my things." Hermione stomped off up the stairs to her room. Back downstairs, the inhabitants of the house let out a breath they did not realise they had been holding collectively. The House itself shuddered and they could hear doors behind Hermione slamming shut as she wound her way to her quarters.

"The House already recognises her as a daughter, Sirius. We need to ensure the rituals happen properly or else we'll suffer the wrath of the House."

Sirius barked a laugh. "Cissy, you speak of the house as though it is sentient. It's just four walls."

"No, Sirius!" Narcissa's voice was rapidly reaching shrillness. "You saw what happened to Grimmauld Place. The House of Black is unhappy. When the House is unhappy, we'll all suffer. Why do you think your parents were mad? Why is the House of Black known for madness? Why do you think we all turned out the way we did? It is because we have turned our backs on the Old Ways, and the Ancient Houses know this! Where do you think our magic came from? We have angered Magic herself."

Sirius shook his head. "You cannot seriously believe that."

"Look at history, cousin. I'm telling you, if we do not begin to reintroduce the Old Ways in to our daily practice, then we will all suffer for it."

Hermione reappeared at the top of the stairs, her bottomless handbag at her side. "I am ready to leave now."

"Where are you going, Hermione?" Harry asked, as he took her hand to lead her down the last few steps.
"I'm going to get married."
Seclusion was an odd concept, Hermione reflected. She was currently laid in a bath of milk and roses ("For Good Fortune, dear," she heard in Narcissa's voice.) while a female house elf rubbed some sort of oily potion in to her hair. She had asked what it was, but the elf had said nothing.

Hermione was to be hidden from the sight of men from now until she entered the Ministry chapel and lifted her veil. Part of her thought it was utterly medieval, but another part of her rather enjoyed drinking prosecco in the bath.

When the elf finished her duties, she winked out of existence. Hermione felt utterly wretched that she did not know the elf's name, but when she had asked them, they had refused to speak. A lot of people were refusing to speak to Hermione at the moment.

Narcissa had been dutifully teaching her the wedding ritual. Hermione quickly began to realise that she was expecting Narcissa to plan a grand affair, but the ceremony was actually rather restrained. Hermione had spent several hours in Narcissa's dressing room, learning the steps in the ritual before she had them down perfectly. Following the ceremony in the Ministry courthouse ("It's close friends and family only, considering your friends are getting married at the same time, I imagine it will just be you, Draco, and myself there.") there was going to be a big bash of a garden party held at Malfoy Manor with Harry and Ron with their brides in attendance.

Hermione leaned over the edge of the bath and plucked a small, amber bottle of oil from the floor. She rolled in her hands to warm it and tipped a small amount in the palm of her hand. With a deep breath, she began to anoint herself. As she brushed the heavily fragranced oil across her forehead, she breathed deeply again.

There was a sudden, powerful, blow of magic to her sternum. Hermione felt as though she should have rocketed over the edge of the bath. It was so intense, it was almost painful.

Hermione suddenly understood the reason for silence as a bell rung inside her mind.

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Draco was standing in the centre of a small stone circle at the rear of Malfoy Manor. He had just spent his time pacing between the stones, scattering herbs in front of him and wafting the incense smoke with a delicate fan. Finally, he pulled out a jar of moonwater from his pocket, dipped his fingers in to it, and flicked the moonwater across the stones.

The very moment the water splashed against the ancient stone, it was like the ground beneath his feet quaked. Draco felt rocked to his very core and there was the oppressive pall of magic in the air, the pressure building on his person until he thought he heard a bell chime, and the spell was broken. Suddenly, Draco found himself on his knees. He stood slowly, brushing dirt from his soft, grey trousers. He whispered his thanks to the stones for their blessing and turned back towards the house.

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Narcissa was stood at the small stone altar, hidden within the forest at Black Manor. The Malfoys (French-upstarts!) would not have gotten their hands dirty in this way. She pulled a ritual dagger
from her sleeve and quickly sliced the throat of the lamb. The blood dribbled down her arms and dripped on to the altar, while Narcissa silently pled with the Old Gods.

*Please, please hear our calls to you. Witness our sacrifices. Bless these children, with a happy, fruitful marriage. Deliver us from the darkness that has haunted our days. Please, please hear me. I beg of you.*

The sound of the bell echoed through the forest, leaving an incredible silence in its wake.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

As Hermione entered her bedroom, she could feel magic in the air. She ran her fingers along the witch garland that was placed beside her bed, ready for the morning. It was, she reflected, a truly beautiful bouquet. A bundle of hawthorn, interspersed with sprigs of lily of the valley. Ivy climbed around the stems, holding in place the oak leaf hidden where her hand would hold. Hidden amongst the hawthorn, a single dark crimson rose, and a moonflower. The flowers were carefully preserved. Moonflower only blooms for one night, the magic inherent in moonlight encouraging the white blossoms to open.

The secret flowers that Hermione had hidden there, away from prying eyes. Those were for her.

Hermione glanced over the wardrobe containing her wedding robes. For some reason, she had expected the robes to be elaborate, like a muggle wedding gown, but in actuality they were a surprisingly simple garment.

Narcissa had quietly taken her aside that morning, enquiring as if to her maidenhead was still intact. Hermione had spluttered and stuttered a yes and Narcissa had seemingly swished a pure white robe in her general direction.

So white, it looked like a unicorn. Hermione felt a pull at her heart, knowing that she would never again be able to approach a unicorn in the Forbidden Forest or get close to one in Care of Magical Creatures. The centaurs would now truly see her as a woman, and she did not know if she'd be safe to enter the Forest again.

She wanted to weep at the final nail in the coffin that held her childhood.

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Hermione was unsure how she had fallen asleep, but she awoke with the headache and puffy eyes that usually accompanied crying oneself to sleep. She did not have long to dwell on it before there was a soft, but insistent knock at the door.

"Hermione? It's time." Narcissa's soft voice rid her from the last stages of slumber. She picked up the silky dressing gown from the floor next to the bed and crossed the room to let Narcissa in.

"Good morning." Hermione said, moving to the side to allow Narcissa in to the room. Narcissa swanned in to the room like she owned it ("She does own it." Hermione thought to herself) and promptly sat herself at the chaise longue.

"I am aware that one usually conducts this process with a gaggle of bridesmaids and mothers, in order to imbue the space with feminine energy. However, you will just have me. I hope you do not find this too disappointing." Hermione looked closely at Narcissa's face, and found that the other woman looked… vulnerable? Was Narcissa afraid that Hermione would reject her?

"I await your guidance." Hermione nodded. "After all, I would be unable to get the veil on without your assistance." Hermione's eyes cast over to the black bag hanging from the back of the dressing
room door. The veil, at this moment, was too powerful to look at.

"I do hope that, with time, you will be able to see me as a confidant. After all, we are both… unwilling Malfoy wives."

Hermione took a half step back. Narcissa laughed. Her laugh was delicate, like glass bells pealing.

"I will always be a daughter of the House of Black, Hermione. Draco may not carry the name, being the last of his line, but make no mistake. I am a Black. That I had to give up that identity and prestige to be His wife rankles. I will not see the same done to you." Narcissa patted the seat next to her. "Come. We may never be girlfriends, but I think it is time to get to know one another."

With that, Hermione lowered some of her defences and began to idly chatter with Narcissa while getting ready. After all, what was telling someone that secretly, you wanted to work in the Department of Mysteries while they were helping manoeuvre your breasts in to a corset?

Chapter End Notes

In case you don't want to work out the meaning of the bouquet using the language of flowers. I compiled it from several different sources, so if some of it isn't what you're expecting, I apologise!Apparently, there are a lot of regional variations. Who knew?

Hawthorn: hope
Lily of the Valley: return to happiness
Ivy: Wedded love, friendship, endurance.
Oak: Both representing the green man and strength
Dark Crimson Rose: Grief, mourning
Moonflower: Dreaming of Love and representing the goddess of the moon.

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