Arbitrary Jurisdiction

by Nantai

Summary

After the War the life has to go on and Draco is exceptionally lucky that he gets to experience it. A simple act of kindness has changed his life for the better and he gets a chance at real redemption.

Hermione saves a life out of a feeling of righteousness, appalled by the arbitrary jurisdiction of the Ministry. But a small gesture can go a long way at changing things.

A story about redemption and survival.

ON HIATUS BECAUSE OF WRITER'S BLOCK - not abandoned, I promise
The beginning

Chapter Notes

italic = flashback
Betalove to viv-heart

Warning: This is a story about the effects of the trauma these characters went through. It will talk about symptoms of PTSD, Depression and Anxiety. Those symptoms warrant the M rating in at least three cases. But this is by no definition a dark story! It's a story about survivors and learning to actually live (and not just survive) again. Please take care and feel free to message me if you want a more detailed warning!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As soon as the battle ended and the Dark Lord fell, dead like any other human, the Ministry officials decided that every Death Eater who had used an Unforgiveable during the battle was to be punished with death. They arrived the moment You-Know-Who died and claimed the power he had left for themselves. The Aurors arrested everyone who had a Dark Mark and checked their wands.

The moment they came to him to check his wand he knew his fate was sealed. Draco Malfoy had fucked up his life completely. He was glad that at least his parents would survive as neither of them had had a wand during the battle. He had his mother's wand, which he had used to kill some Death Eaters, but that wasn't important. It wasn't relevant that he had defected in the middle of the battle. He had the Dark Mark and he would die today. He was lined up with everyone else, a black sack over his head. Anonymous. No one would know who had been killed, no one could ask for mercy.

Draco fell from the broom as soon as they left the Room of Hidden Things. He gasped for air and clutched his wand tightly, knowing that he was lucky that he still had it. A stunner which was aimed at Crabbe nearly hit it but he was able to move away fast enough. He still tried to get his breath under control, when he heard the trio talking. He lifted himself up and was nearly impaled by the Weasel's wand. The blond raised his hands to show that he didn't mean to attack. "I want to defect," he said, his voice still quivering from the near-death experience. The trio narrowed their eyes suspiciously at him but nodded and started down the hall not caring what would happen to him.

Hermione seethed. Hadn't they learned anything from Sirius' case? Death sentence without trial! She had used Avada Kedavra as well and the only reason she hadn't a black sack on her head was that she was officially a 'good one'. She stormed into the courtyard were the Death eaters waited for their death but also those who were set to deliver the sentence.

When she spotted Kingsley Shaklebolt she knew that she would be able to help. While she walked
to him the Death Eaters were forced to stand. She suddenly felt a sense of dread curl in her stomach when she recognised a pair of hands. Just hours before she had reached for exactly those hands in the Room of Hidden Things to pull him from the Fiendfyre Crabbe had let loose.

But he had defected! Why was he here with everyone else?

When she reached Kingsley she called his name and he turned around.

"Hermione! What are you doing out here? You should rest!" His voice was concerned and pleasant, but she was far too angry.

"What are you doing out here? Death sentence without trial?! Didn't you learn anything from Sirius' and Pettigrew's story? You should have stopped this! The Ministry may not know the story, but everyone in the Order does! Why didn't you intervene? They may be Death Eaters, but they are still human! You can't just kill them!" she screeched and gestured to the people behind them.

Kingsley became serious within seconds. "Do you think they would treat us any better if they had won? We would have been killed without being asked whether we deserve death or not!"

Hermione bristled. "So we are no better than them? Giving them the same treatment they would have given us? I didn't fight for an arbitrary jurisdiction!"

"The decision is made, you can't change it now. If you still want to change the law system after this you should become a lawyer," Kingsley answered mildly annoyed.

"For a corrupted ministry, no thanks. No one there was elected, why should I work in a system which was mainly built by pure-blooded bigots who hate me and my 'kind'? You should rebuild it with trustworthy people before you make any decision!" Hermione argued.

"We don't have time for that, we have to make a decision to reassure the public that we are taking action against those who wronged them!" Kingsley replied calmly.

Hermione went silent for a moment, contemplating her possibilities.

"Are the Malfoys to be killed?" she asked finally and Kingsley answered that only Draco had a wand and used it for Unforgivables. She resumed her contemplating and finally had an idea.

"I, Hermione Granger, want to call in my life debt from Draco Malfoy! I saved him from the Fiendfyre in the Room of Requirement that means his life is mine to decide about." She looked at Kingsley with fierce determination and when he tried to speak up she continued. "He defected after the destruction of the Room of Requirement and is, therefore, to be treated like any other fighter on the side of the Order of the Phoenix. I forbid him to be killed." From the corner of her eye, she saw his head shoot up but she held her gaze on Kingsley.

"But…That's not possible! There is no such law." Kingsley answered looking quite distraught over the fact that Hermione Granger wanted to save her lifelong bully.

Hermione narrowed her gaze at him. "There is no law for what you are doing! A life debt, on the other hand, is ancient magic and ancient law, from a time the laws weren't written down yet. You can find it in any tome about old magic and I thought, you as an Auror would be informed better about these laws! I saved his life, therefore he owes me a life. To be more precise: his life!"

Draco didn't believe what he had just heard. Hermione Granger calling in a life debt from him, demanding that he was to be treated like the traitor he was. Of course she wanted trials. She was
utterly fair even towards people who had tortured her and tried to kill her. And yet she tried to save at least his life. Why would she do that? What did she want in exchange? Or was it her bloody Gryffindor mentality that made her help him? Whatever the reason was, he was being lifted from the ground and levitated, probably to Granger.

The sack was removed from his head and he was forced on his knees by a spell. It didn't allow him to lift his head to look Granger in the eyes to find out what she planned. He kneeled at her feet like he had at the feet of the Dark Lord but he feared more for his life now than he ever had at the meetings. She had the key to his freedom, although he knew if she asked for his life as a life debt it was hers, he would be hers. He started to hyperventilate at the thought until he felt a soft hand on his shoulder and was finally able to look up.

"Calm down, Malfoy. Breathe!" she whispered and looked at him with her big brown eyes. Granger seemed to be worried and angry, but at least showed no pity. He could deal with everything but not pity. She turned away from him and talked to Shaklebolt again. Draco wondered whether she could really save him. He certainly hoped so, for the sake of his parents. His mother would probably go crazy if he was killed. His father wouldn't care and hopefully, he would get a trial which sent him to Azkaban. His train of thoughts was interrupted, when he felt the magic binding his hands and keeping him down vanish and Granger lifting him up.

"You will need medical attention. Hopefully, Madam Pomfrey isn't as prejudiced as these Ministry officials or certain Order members!" she spat furiously and brought him to the Great Hall. The moment Draco and Hermione walked in everything went silent and a white blond flash nearly knocked the air out of his lungs.

"Oh darling, I thought you were going to die!" his mother sobbed into his shoulder. He was utterly terrified. Never, not even when he was brandished with the Mark he had seen his mother cry. After a few moments, she gathered herself and looked up at Granger gratefully.

She stepped to her and held her hand out. "Thank you for saving my son, Miss Granger. I know I, and my family as well, have been terrible to you and I am truly sorry for that. I was raised to believe that purebloods are superior. By looking past your hatred for my son and saving his life although he treated you more than badly for so long, you have shown real greatness. I'd like to have a fresh start, at least with you. I'm Narcissa Black Malfoy, it's a pleasure to meet you."

Draco frowned over his mother's maiden name, she never used it to introduce herself. She probably wanted to distance herself from the Malfoys. Interesting. Granger looked at her completely in shock and didn't react until Saint Potter put his hand on her arm. That seemed to jolt her out of her stupor and she took his mother's hand.

"A fresh start sounds like a good idea, Mrs Malfoy. I am Hermione Granger and I'd like to thank you for saving Harry so he could save everyone."

Narcissa looked like she would start to cry all over again and shook the hand of the Muggle-born witch like it was the most normal thing to do for her.

"May I ask you a question, Miss Granger?"

The younger witch nodded. "What did you do to save my son?"

Draco turned to look at her completely and caught the light blush on her dark cheeks.
"I called in a life debt. I saved him from the Room of Hidden Things and therefore his life is mine according to ancient laws. I am sure you are rather familiar with them."

Mrs Malfoy nodded and looked with interest at the small witch in front of her.

"He won't have to live with me or serve me, but I'd like to see him completing his education and working for his living in a job he enjoys. I won't accept if he throws away the life I gave him either by not using it or by using it to work for nefarious purposes such as leading or participating in a terrorist group." Hermione finished her speech and waited for the objections to her demands, but there were none. At least not from the Malfoys. Ron, on the other hand, looked like he was going to explode at any given second.

Mrs Malfoy looked pleased. "I think that shouldn't be a problem. I never wanted to participate in anything my deranged sister Bellatrix thought to be fun, but I was too weak. That's different now. I won't allow that he falls in the abyss again. But I think I'd like to get to know you a bit better. Not many know the old laws well enough to use them to save lives in the middle of such despair and chaos. Maybe I could owl to you about tea sometimes?"

Hermione nodded and smiled at Draco.

"You know that I will find out if you step as much as a toe out of line and I will make sure that it won't happen again," she said eerily calm to Draco before she snatched Ron and dragged him out of the Great Hall so he wouldn't make an idiot out of himself while everyone was mourning and celebrating.

"Why did you save that mean, little ferret? He deserved to die! He watched you being tortured and didn't do anything!" Ron yelled at her as soon as they were on the first floor and relatively alone.

"What could he have done? Kill Bellatrix?" Hermione asked angrily. "It needed four witches to kill her and he wasn't even able to kill Dumbledore! She was his aunt, no matter how deranged she was, no matter how much he possibly hated her! And do you really think he had a choice to disobey Voldemort while that monster lived in his house, with his parents! He would have probably killed them if Malfoy didn't do what he wanted." Hermione had never in her whole life been so furious with Ron. The problems over Viktor and Lavender were a close second but never had he been so prejudiced and cruel over something so small.

"He would have tortured us to death in front of Draco," a cold, male voice said behind them. "But basically Miss Granger is right, Mr Weasley. He had no choice and we were too terrified to call for help."

Hermione turned around and saw Mr and Mrs Malfoy standing behind her, Draco nowhere in sight.

"What are you doing here?" she asked a bit confused. Mrs Malfoy smiled gently at her and freed her arm from the grip of her husband to come closer and take Hermione's hands.

"I wanted to say goodbye. We are sent to holding cells in the Ministry as we are understandably not allowed to go back to the Manor. Our trial will be probably sometime next week and I wanted to ask you whether you would be so kind as to attend. It would mean quite a lot to me." The older witch looked at her hopefully and although Hermione was sure it was a well-played game to keep her husband out of prison she accepted. She would wait for the owl about the exact time and date.

"Where is Draco?" Hermione asked before the Malfoys could go.

"He didn't want to be drawn into the argument between you and Mr Weasley and he used the time
to get his wounds healed,” Mrs Malfoy answered and swept back to the Entrance Hall where Draco Malfoy stood with some Aurors, who were already waiting for them.

"Do you think she is genuine?” Ron asked after the Malfoys had been apparated away.

Hermione shrugged. "I don't know. But I will owl her and maybe I can find out. I really hope she was. I'd like to ask her more about these old laws as I didn't find much about them in the library." Ron chuckled even after she glared at him.

"It's good to see you still love your books and knowledge 'Mione," he said, with a big smile still on his face.

Two days later Hermione was back at Grimmauld Place to take some time off. She had helped those who were wounded the worst and she made a plan for the rebuilding of Hogwarts at Professor McGonagall's suggestion. She had also written to Mrs Malfoy the previous day to let her know her address and had gotten a reply in the morning not only from Mrs Malfoy, who had asked her to call her Narcissa, but from Draco, who had thanked her again for saving him and his mother's sanity, as well. He had also apologised for not saying goodbye properly as he knew that Ron wouldn't have calmed down at the sight of Draco thanks to their long-lasting hostility.

Hermione retreated to her room to answer the letter when another owl picked at her window.

The letter was from the Ministry and asked her to come to the trial of the Malfoy family the following week as a witness for the Wizengamot.

The Aurors had asked her for a statement the day after the battle and now they wanted to use her against the Malfoys. She remembered her wish to research ancient laws and decided that she should just in case know them by heart in time for the hearing.

Chapter End Notes

a/n: I hope you like it, the next chapter will be up in two days. Cya!
Research and observations

Chapter Notes

My lovely beta is still viv-heart. I don't own anything aside from the plot (cause I am not J.K., otherwise certain events wouldn't have happened *coughs* Fred *coughs*)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Black library on the first floor of 12 Grimmauld Place wasn’t as huge as one would think it would be in an ancestral home. And yet it still had thirteen books about ancient magical laws. Five were from the tenth century when wizardkind became more organised. Those were hefty tomes bound in black leather with texts written in Latin with a tiny script. Six books were from the time of the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy and were much smaller, with an easily readable script and in English. The last two books were from the early twentieth century and looked much more like a legal text than the others.

Hermione decided to start with the oldest books as they were closest to the instalment of laws she was researching and therefore probably the most accurate.

The next time she looked up Harry stood in front of her and the room was quite a lot darker than before.

“Are you alright ‘Mione? You read the whole day and haven’t eaten a bite since breakfast,” he asked a tad worried and she blinked owlishly at him and before turning to look at the clock on the other side of the room. It was indeed 7 in the evening.

Hermione stretched her legs and noticed the pain caused by her lack of movement for the last hours. She carefully closed the old book she just finished and put it aside to the two others she had read over the day. Only one had a piece of parchment as a bookmark in it.

“Why didn’t you call me down for lunch?” she asked with a yawn.

Harry shuffled his feet awkwardly. “We did call you and after the second time, you cast a Muffliato and a locking charm we weren’t able to get through. We only tried it now because dinner is ready. Kreacher has really outdone himself.”

Hermione blushed. She didn’t remember anything from the interaction and she didn’t like not having full control of her senses. Ever since her third year and the disaster with the time-turner, she tried to stay aware when studying. She had occasionally lost time while doing all her homework and revision and it had scared her quite a lot at that time.

Harry offered her his hand to help her up and steady her when she swayed a little at first. They walked down to dinner and Hermione had to admit that it was a right feast Kreacher had cooked. The ancient elf bowed politely when they entered and Hermione smiled at him.

“Kreacher is happy to present the dinner to the conquerors of the vile Dark Lord who killed his Master Regulus. Kreacher hopes everything is to the taste of the Masters and Mistress,” he exclaimed with a bow to the table where Ron was already seated.
Hermione sat down on the opposite side of Ron while Harry took the place on the head of the table.

“What were you reading all day, ‘Mione?” Ron asked around a mouthful and Hermione tried not to scold him for it, again.

“Law texts. I have a feeling that the Ministry isn’t too happy that I saved Malfoy,” Hermione frowned. “I want to be prepared to defend my decision. After all, it is backed up by laws quite to the contrary of their actions. Harry, will you come as well and tell them how he refused to tell Bella who we were? And how Mrs Malfoy lied to the Dark Lord about you?”

He nodded and they all resumed eating. When they were on the run they had learned to eat first and talk later. You could never know how much time you had left before Snatchers would turn up.

After dinner they retired to their rooms, too sleepy to be social. But even though Hermione was extremely tired, her brain didn’t find any rest.

She couldn’t stop thinking about what she had found earlier that day. The law texts she had read were Latin but thanks to her ambition to be able to understand every spell they were taught she had learned the supposedly dead language to the extent to be able to read it just like English. Still, she would need to translate the text for the trial. While mulling over the best translation for “per alium” she finally fell asleep.

Narcissa couldn’t sleep. Hermione had written to her, that she was searching for ancient laws and the blonde wondered where. If she searched the tomes in Hogwarts she wouldn’t find much. Life debts were considered darkest magic since the ’50s and were therefore no longer present in the school library. On the other hand, she had found and destroyed all of the Dark Lord’s Horcruxes with the two boys and those were really despicable pieces of magic. If what Draco had told her about the girl was true, she researched everything quite thoroughly before taking action. Her son had ranted about it in his third year and Narcissa prided herself to never forget any information about people.

Where could she have gotten books about Horcruxes? Yaxley had told the Dark Lord last September that the trio had stayed at the old Black townhouse for a while. Maybe they returned there after the war? If that was the case, Hermione would have the second darkest library of wizarding Britain at her disposal and would definitely find those laws.

Narcissa surely hoped that to be true as her son’s life depended on these laws and their legality. If the Wizengamot decided that these laws were outdated and no longer legally binding, they could decide to execute him on spot. The Malfoy matriarch wasn’t going to let that happen.

So she closed her eyes and descended in her mind palace. It was an occlumency practice she had learned as a small girl and had come in handy when the Dark Lord, no Voldemort, had returned. Now she went to the huge library which occupied most of the space in the palace. She opened the huge oak double door which had intricate inlays of pearl and rubies and led to a two-floor library. The library had shelves along the walls and a network of dark and light aisles in the rest of the room. Here and there stood a few tables and reading armchairs - some lit with candles, some reached by the light from the glass dome above.

Narcissa mentally went along the light aisles searching for those old law books. She kept the dark magic in the light and the light magic in the dark to always remember both sides. Finally, she found the section she had looked for. “Leges antiquae” was written on the headboard in gold letters. She let her fingers travel over the spines of the books and concentrated on the laws about life debts.
One book leapt to her hand when she touched it and she opened it.

It was an ancient tome, bound in black leather and handwritten in Latin in a tiny script. Its title was “*De legis vitae et potentiae magae*” and a year was written on the bottom of the title page, 934 A.D., sixty years before Hogwarts was founded. Narcissa browsed the pages and found the law. She smiled to herself and retreated from her mind palace.

When she reopened her eyes Lucius looked at her curiously.

“What did you search for, dear? You seemed to be deep in thought,” he asked quietly to not raise any suspicion from the guards. They were lucky to be in one big cell in the Ministry instead of small cells in Azkaban, but they didn’t know how long their luck would hold on if they were caught whispering too often.

Narcissa sighed. “I searched for a book Hermione would need to convince the Wizengamot to let Draco live.”

“Did you find it?”

She nodded. “Hopefully it is still in the Black library. Maybe Hermione has found it as well. I will write to her and ask.”

Lucius leant back. He didn’t look like the man he had been just two years ago. His cheeks were hollow, he had dark circles under his eyes and his much thinner hair looked more grey than platinum. He was broken. His stint in Azkaban, the continued presence of the Dark-; no, Voldemort in their house and the danger he and his family had been in for the last year have taken their toll. He looked much older than his forty-five years and Narcissa dreaded to look in the mirror because she knew that she probably didn’t look much better.

Her gaze fell on her son, lying on one of the two beds in their cell, who had even in his sleep a deep frown on his face and had aged prematurely as well. She sighed deeply and sat down next to him to caress his head like she used to do when he was younger. The happiness she had felt in the moment he entered the Great Hall had been overwhelming. She had been so sure that she had lost him after having found him again just hours earlier. He brought out the best in her and she was fiercely protective of him and his father. If Hermione hadn’t been…

No! Narcissa chastised herself. She wouldn’t let her thoughts wander in that direction. Hermione saved him and there was no “what, if” anymore.

After a last caress over the wrinkled forehead of her sleeping son she stood up again and started to write a letter to the young witch who saved her from so much grief. She refrained from expressing her gratitude again but settled on a much friendlier tone than she normally used in her correspondence. She was going to give the letter to the guard in the morning.

For now, she lay down next to her husband of twenty-one years and he pulled her in an embrace. She wondered fleetingly when they had been that affectionate the last time before she drifted off to sleep.

When Hermione walked down for breakfast the next morning both boys were already sitting at the table, eating. Kreacher asked whether she would prefer coffee or tea and scurried off to bring her a plate and her mail. She got only one letter, which had the stomp of the Ministry checked letters, indicating that it was probably from Narcissa. The still tired witch read it while drinking her first cup of tea and was pleasantly surprised by the contents.
Dear Hermione,

my son always told me how much time you used to spend in the library and I have, therefore, concluded (hopefully correctly) that you love to research and learn from books. Your successful hunt for Horcruxes tells me furthermore, that you also were able to get your hands on books about very dark magic.

It might surprise you, or maybe not at all, but since the fifties, life debts are seen as darkest magic, for they can be used to force people into slavery or to do things they would never do in their own free will.

I am sure you already started searching for books on the laws of a life debt, but I wanted to recommend one to you never the less. It is called “De legis vitae et potentiae magae”. I read it during my youth in the Black townhouse and I remember it to be quite informative on the subject. I hope you are fluent in Latin or very good with the translation charm as it is written only in Latin and I don’t remember any translated copies.

I hope I was able to help you.
Kind regards

Narcissa Malfoy

Hermione smiled. She had indeed already read the book Narcissa suggested, but she was really happy, that the older witch had been so thoughtful to recommend it.

Suddenly the letter was snatched from her hands by Ron and both he and Harry read it in silence. Ron seemed to grow angrier with every word but Harry smiled a little bit, seemingly coming to the same conclusion as Hermione had.

“Unbelievable how that woman tries to gain your trust! I am sure she just wants you to speak in her favour at the trials so she doesn’t have to go to Azkaban!” Ron spat as he had finished the letter.

Hermione looked at him incredulously. “Are you serious, Ronald? How should suggesting a book on supposedly darkest magic help her staying out of Azkaban? This recommendation itself could give her trouble because she was born after the law was issued and therefore shouldn’t have read it at all! But not only does she writes it in a letter which will be checked by the ministry, but she also hints where the book could be.” During her speech, Ron sank back into his chair and Harry looked majorly uncomfortable. He tried to diffuse the tension in the air by putting a hand on the shoulder of his two best friends but they ignored it and just glared at each other.

“Please, ‘Mione, calm down. You as well Ron. I don’t think that Narcissa is so dumb that she would try to manipulate Hermione into helping her. She stated from the beginning, that she was interested in Hermione’s friendship and I think this letter is just that - a friendly gesture,” Harry argued and Hermione nodded along. Ron still seemed furious and left the kitchen, going upstairs.

Just as Kreacher had vanished the rest of the meal Ron came back down and looked at Hermione apologetically.

“I am sorry, ‘Mione. I overreacted. I guess I am so used to the Malfoys being the bad guys that I can’t see them as, well, good guys without ambiguous thoughts,” he said looking down at his feet.

Hermione smiled and pulled him into a brief hug. “That’s alright. I don’t trust them completely as
well. It is just so new that I have difficulties to believe it, but Narcissa has been nothing if not genuine to me so far. I am inclined to really give her and, if they prove themselves, her family a second chance.”

Ron grumbled a bit but smiled in the end. “I’ll try to trust your judgement, ‘Mione. You are after all the brightest of us.”

Chapter End Notes

The mind palace came to my attention thanks to the series "Sherlock", but it is a common method to organise one's mind.

Translation with "frag Caesar" and "perseus" (the [german] nerds will know it):
"Leges antiquae" - "ancient laws"
"De legis vitae et potentia magae" - "Of laws about life and magical power"

Review! :) Cya on monday with chapter three and the hearing!
"Draco! Darling, wake up!"

A female voice penetrated the sleepy state of mind Draco currently enjoyed. He grumbled a bit but relented finally and stretched his arms and his back. The ministry-provided cots weren't exactly good for his back and he really hoped he would be out as soon as possible.

The second this thought had crossed his mind he was very aware which day it was. His hearing would be today! It would determine whether or not his death sentence had been rightful. They probably would also discuss his other crimes as well.

Draco's mother had been convinced that at least for his hearing Granger would agree to plead the case for the defence and she had been right. Granger had written a few days ago and told him, that she was already writing the defence and that he shouldn't bother.

While he put on his formal robes, which a house elf had brought this morning, Draco silently prayed to the good god, Dagda, to watch over him.

When he turned to his parents his father had put an arm around the shoulders of his mother. He had never seen them show so much affection towards each other and smiled at the unexpected picture. At half past ten sharp a guard came to their cell and lead them through the Auror Office to the lifts and from there down to the Department of Mysteries. For the first time in his life Draco Malfoy felt claustrophobic. May it be because his wrists were in magical bindings or because he didn't have his wand and was going to his hearing. He felt like the walls were coming closer and closer. Suddenly he felt a small hand on his shoulder and looked down to see his mother smiling confidently up to him. He relaxed a bit before he entered the room and his parents were lead to seats on the opposite side of those of the Wizengamot.

Draco himself was lead to a chair in the middle of the floor and when he sat down iron chains snaked themselves around his wrists and ankles. He felt how they not only restrained his wrists but also his magic and the claustrophobia returned. To distract himself he analysed the Wizengamot. Most of the ancient seats were unoccupied and some would stay forever, such as the Gaunt's and Black's seats. The Gaunts were completely extinct with Tom Riddle dead and the Blacks only existed in the female line. He thought bitterly that the seats of families who were loyal to the Dark Lord but had no children should be removed as well.

Draco noted in confusion that the Minister of Magic was sitting in his familial seat and not as the Chief Warlock, but who else would take the post instead? Granted, Albus Dumbledore had been Chief Warlock without being Minister but he had also been the saviour of the wizarding world. Hopefully the father of the Weasels wouldn't take the seat. He had just entered the room with one of his sons but he went to take the familial seat he hadn't been allowed to take in the last years.
because of his position against Cornelius Fudge. The younger Weasley took the seat of the court clerk.

When Professor McGonagall entered the court room with purpose Draco shrank back in his seat. The witch never liked him, mainly because he was Slytherin and Seeker and therefore the direct opponent to her beloved Scarhead Potter. The moment she took the seat as Chief Warlock (Draco wasn't quite sure what the female title was, since he had never heard of a woman to take the position) he was sure that if he wouldn't die, he would be send to Azkaban for years. She had the right of veto and this Wizengamot wasn't paid by his family. On top of that a good half of it seemed to be from the Order or their allies, so he was pretty sure that his sentence was already set.

Ten minutes before the beginning of the hearing Hermione Granger barged in, carrying a black, leather-bound tome and parchment rolls in one arm and looking through her bag for something with the other. Her robes billowed behind her reminiscent of a certain potions teacher and Draco chuckled at the thought. Professor Snape would have never been in so much disarray in front of so many people.

Finally she pulled out a wand and conjured a table and a chair for herself next to his chair. She smiled at him in greeting and settled down, sorting through her things.
"You are lucky, the head of the prosecution was completely neutral in the war and is a Ravenclaw. He will go for the facts and will be hopefully not too prejudiced," she said quietly and Draco nodded a bit relieved.

"Who is it?" he asked after a second.

"David Arif Shafiq, he is the new head of DMLE," Hermione answered just as Professor McGonagall opened the hearing. Draco tried to remember what he knew about the Shafiqs other than that he wasn't related to them closely. When the first rumours of the rise of the Dark Lord were told they had left the country for "business" in Spain and were obviously back now. Interestingly enough he didn't remember a David Arif Shafiq from a pre-Dark Lord ministry and he had often accompanied his father to the ministry when he had been younger.

Hermione exhaled slowly when Professor McGonagall opened the hearing. She was the first witch to ever be elected to this position and it had been named Chief Sorceress - Chief Witch obviously sounded too plain for the Ministry officials. Hermione had already read the indictment but she still listened closely when Mr. Shafiq stood up and read it aloud.

"The public prosecutors of the Wizengamot hereby charge Draco Lucius Malfoy, born 5th June 1980, currently in custody at the Ministry of Magic, before the Wizengamot with the violation of the decree 616 from 1717 about the so called Unforgivable curses and evading his death sentence for that because of an unproven Life Debt claim. Participation of unknown amount in a terroristic organisation called "Death Eaters" with the aim to destroy the existing order of the British wizarding community and to install the self-titled Dark Lord Voldemort as sole leader. The voluntary participation in torture, rape and murder of prisoners at Malfoy Manor on thirty-six occasions. As well as plotting and attempting the demise of former Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore and thereby cursing and severely injuring Miss Katie Bell and Mister Ronald Bilius Weasley and using the Imperius curse on Madam Rosmerta Parocheus, owner of the Three Broomsticks."

Mr. Shafiq looked up from the indictment and took a sip from his glass of water and Hermione risked a look at the wizards and witches of the gamot. Some looked bored, some disgusted and one
rather pug-faced man looked like he didn't believe what he had just heard. The crowd of the reporters and spectators was thankfully behind a silencing charm because Hermione was rather sure, that otherwise they would call Draco names or would try to influence the Wizengamot.

The head of the Department for Magical Law Enforcement continued to read. "Spokesperson for the defendant and witness for the defence: Hermione Jean Granger. Further witnesses for the defence: Harry James Potter, Ronald Bilius Weasley." It had been difficult to convince Ron to testify. But finally she had promised him, that he only needed to testify Draco's defection in the Battle.

"Luna Lovegood," Luna had easily agreed to testify that Draco had kind of saved her from further torture when she was brought to the Manor.

"Narcissa Malfoy."

"Witnesses for the prosecution: Mike Proudfoot, Kingsley Shaklebolt, Rabastan Lestrange, Lucius Abraxas Malfoy, Garrick Olivander, Ronald Bilius Weasley, Katie Bell, Rosmerta Parocheus."

Draco shivered at the mention of the younger Lestrange brother and Hermione remembered that Narcissa had written her, that Rabastan had been intended to become first Andromeda's husband then hers. But she had already been in love with Lucius Malfoy at that point and her parents preferred the richer Malfoys over the Lestranges. Since then Rabastan tried to disgrace them at every turn and over his time in Azkaban he only got worse. Narcissa had written that Rabastan had liked to threaten her in front of Draco when Lucius had been away on occasion.

Hermione reached for Draco's arm and lightly put a hand on it to calm him down. She got a smile in return and she refocused on the Wizengamot. She bolted from her seat as she noticed that it was her turn to speak.

"I, Hermione Jean Granger will plead the defendant's cause. I will discuss every point in the indictment in the presented order," she took a calming breath and smiled at the Wizengamot. "First point. The defendant did indeed use the curses specified in the decree 616. But he used them during the Battle of Hogwarts during which the use of said curses was allowed for the Order of the Phoenix and their allies, as well as those who defected during the fight. Which he did after Vincent Crabbe cursed the Room of Requirement with Fiendfyre. Witnesses for the defection are Harry James Potter, Ronald Bilius Weasley and myself, Hermione Jean Granger. This means that the Unforgivable curses used are unpunishable."

"I rescued the defendant from the Room of Requirement and the Fiendfyre that was out of control inside it in the last second. This lead to the evasion of an unfairly given death sentence. My argumentation to the first point should make clear why the sentence was unfair. But I will explain the Life Debt situation anyway." She opened the heavy tome on her table and pulled out a roll of parchment with the translation.

I remembered reading about a law on life debts in the book "De legis vitae et potestiae magae" and looked into it after my return to the Black townhouse. The law written in Latin can be translated as: *If one saw the grim reaper amidst the horrors of war and evaded his scythe at the hands of someone else, his life and limb henceforth belong to his saviour. He alone decides about weal and woe of the debtor, whether he lives as a freeman or a slave, or dies the death of a foe."

Hermione looked up to the Wizengamot. The members of the ancient families were looking intrigued, save for Mr. Weasley. He had already known about the law as she had asked him whether evidence from illegal books was legal in this case. The pug-faced man, probably Cassius Parkinson, smiled a little and nodded. Mr. Shafiq looked torn but she couldn't say between which
emotions.

"This should prove my actions as dark, but still legal. Therefore the second point becomes irrelevant."

"The third point is especially interesting as the whole case is dependent on the fact that the defendant is supposed to be a Death Eater. Let's go back in time to the summer of 1996. Not only did Lucius Malfoy fail to bring the prophecy to Voldemort," nearly everyone in the Wizengamot flinched at the name, "he also got caught and imprisoned along with everyone else save for Bellatrix Lestrange. Voldemort couldn't punish him directly, so he chose a punishment that would hurt Mr. Malfoy differently. He brandished his son, Draco Malfoy with a Dark Mark and a seemingly unfulfillable task: to kill Albus Dumbledore. If he failed, his parents would be tortured and killed right in front of him. He had no other possibility than to try his best if he wanted to ensure their safety. The defendant was forced to join the Death Eaters under duress. In the first possible moment, during the Battle of Hogwarts, he defected. He should go unpunished, as he did not choose to be a Death Eater. Witnesses for this statement are Narcissa Malfoy and I," Hermione looked to Draco. His expression showed his distress as she explained his situation to the Wizengamot. She hoped it would help his cause. After a sip from her water glass she continued.

"Fourth point. The defendant did not participate in thirty-six occasions where people were tortured, raped or murdered. It was not even possible as he was at school for most of his time as Death Eater. He attended ten meetings over the time of his membership and had to participate in another four. The first was his initiation where he was forced to kill a muggle girl under the implication that otherwise his mother would be killed. The second time at his seventeenth birthday, he had to torture a muggleborn man or he would have been tortured himself. The third occasion was on Christmas 1997 when Luna Lovegood was brought to the Malfoy Manor after being kidnapped from the Hogwarts Express. This time he was threatened that his mother would be raped, his father tortured and he himself would have been killed. He was supposed to torture Miss Lovegood for information about Harry Potter but knocked her out "accidentally" after ten minutes. The last time was at Easter where he was supposed to identify Harry, Ronald and me. He didn't, even after his father tried to convince him. He had to watch while I was tortured but was unable to do anything to help. Main witness is again Narcissa Malfoy, but also Luna Lovegood and me." Hermione got continually used to the monologues and relaxed slightly. She had needed two Calming Draughts in the morning to be even able to apparate.

Hermione had expected to be questioned on this part but either the members of the Wizengamot really had no questions or they wanted to hear her out first. She went on to the pre-last point.

"Fifth point. The defendant did not choose of his own free will to try to murder Albus Dumbledore. He was forced to do it by Voldemort as his parent's life and sanity were at stake. Furthermore he was underage during the whole time of plotting and finally trying to murder the headmaster and should therefore not be hold accountable for these actions." Finally something to be explained easily.

"The last point. The defendant neither intended the cursing of Katie Bell nor the poisoning of Ronald Weasley, therefore it should be considered an accident. At the time when he used the Imperius curse he was in a constant life threatening situation and still underage. He can't be hold accountable for that either." Although it was extremely stupid, Hermione thought. "All witnesses are ready to testify under Veritaserum. Are there any questions left?"

Professor McGonagall checked the Wizengamot but no one seemed to have further questions. "Alright, the Wizengamot will retire for deliberation. We will continue in an hour." With her words everyone rose and the gamut left the room to a chamber which lay behind their seats. The chains around Draco's wrists and ankles slithered back into the chair and Hermione saw him relax.
Narcissa worried her lip. She had been in these courtrooms often enough to know, that the deliberation chamber could only be accessed by members of the Wizengamot and only through the door in the courtroom. She still had the nagging feeling that something would go wrong. Maybe it was only motherly instinct but she was nervous. Not being allowed to leave her seat and talk to Draco so she couldn't influence him or Hermione was only adding to her distress. It annoyed her to no end but she knew that those were the rules.

To relax herself she leaned her head on the shoulder of her husband. Over the course of the last week they had gotten more affectionate towards each other, thanks to the small space they had to share. But also because for the first time in their life no one could dictate their lives.

At first Voldemort had demanded their full attention and in his circles affection was considered weakness. After his "death" she had had a feeling that he wasn't truly gone and Lucius had been sure that he would come back as well, so they had stayed within the old Death Eater circles to protect themselves and Draco. Her husband hadn't been the only one to claim Imperius and she supported him fully.

What she said to Hermione at their first true encounter was true though. She had been too weak to keep her husband away from Voldemort and now she regretted her decision to stay in those cold hearted pureblood circles. If she had risen Draco differently would he have defied the Dark Lord earlier? It was too late.

When Lord Voldemort came back he had decided that he would live in Malfoy Manor as it was the most comfortable and Narcissa had been too weak again to grab her husband and son and defect. But she had considered it, even wrote a letter to her sister Andromeda. She did never send it though as she feared it would be intercepted. Suddenly she felt Lucius straighten beside her and became aware that the members of the Wizengamot came back in before the time was up. Not necessarily a good sign for the case.

Chapter End Notes

I am sometimes a little cruel *laughs evilly*
"The Wizengamot decided that the defence of Mister Malfoy, presented by Miss Granger is not satisfactory," the Chief Sorceress said with a stern frown.

Lucius exhaled slowly. It wouldn't do to throw a fit now. When the Malfoys had arrived at the Ministry they were questioned and he himself had to confirm some of the facts that were presented in the indictment. But he had hoped that they would be able to right that in the hearing.

Minerva McGonagall carried on. "The Wizengamot decided to stipulate testifying under Veritaserum for every testimony used in this case. If one refuses Veritaserum his testimony and the corresponding charges will be removed from the case. Please arrange a meeting with the Aurors within the next week. Hearing dismissed."

Lucius relaxed. They didn't outright dismiss the case but wanted verified testimonies and he had a feeling that Rabastan Lestrange wouldn't be able to tell the lies about thirty-six cases of participation in revels anymore. Lucius took the hand of his wife and moved to leave the spectator seats but was stopped by the Auror who had lead them here.

"The Minister of Magic wants to speak to you, Mr and Mrs Malfoy. We only wait for your son and Miss Granger as she is his defendant and has asked to be allowed to participate in this." The Malfoys nodded and looked down to their son. He was talking with the Granger girl while she got her things and she laughed about something he said. When she had everything he took the parchment rolls which nearly fell from the pile of books, for which she granted him a thankful nod and they made their way up to his parents and the Auror.

Draco smiled at Granger after the hearing was dismissed. "You are a natural in defending, aren't you?" he asked with a cheeky grin.

She laughed. "One could think so. But if I wasn't convinced of your statement I wouldn't have been half as good, I would have felt like I was lying." She continued to sort through her things but she was still smiling.

Draco controlled the smile that wanted to spread out on his face. He felt like the literal kneazle in the cream. He made her laugh and he was able to be civil if not even friendly to her. If anyone had told him that after she had punched him in his third year he probably would have dismissed them as lunatics. If someone had told him after that fateful Easter a few weeks ago he would have laughed bitterly. She had been tortured right in front of him and he hadn't done a thing to save her, to save any of them.
When Granger finally got up Draco didn't even think about taking the parchment rolls from the top of her stack of books. He was surprised himself when he held them suddenly and she gave him a thankful nod. They turned to walk up to his parents who waited for them with an Auror at their side. When they arrived Granger greeted his father coldly and his mother very friendly.

"Thank you so much for your efforts, Hermione," Narcissa smiled. "What did you think of the book I recommended to you in my last letter, the one about wizarding tradition?"

The bushy haired witch next to him got an excited gleam to her eyes and even seemed to bounce a little.

"I only managed to read a few pages this morning before I had to arrive in the Ministry. But the first chapter is already really interesting! Although you were definitely correct about the jabs at muggle culture. I really think that these books are important, but they should be updated every decade or so or otherwise they won't keep up with new developments," the girl answered and the two women walked after the Auror while chatting about a few facts in the first chapter and the Malfoy matriarch answered every question Granger came up with patiently.

Beside him his father stifled a laugh at the sight of the two excited women. Draco looked at him questioningly.

"I never thought I would see your mother chatting with someone so avidly about table manners. She seems to really like the girl," Lucius explained. "She always wished for a daughter, a sister for you, you know? But the Malfoy curse didn't allow it. One son, no other children," the older man sighed. "Thankfully Miss Granger seems just as delighted with your mother." Both men quietly laughed at the understatement, as the women talked to each other like old friends or sisters would.

But Draco also thought about what his father had said about his mother wanting a daughter. He knew about the curse and that his mother had wanted other children. As a young boy he had overheard his parents talking in his father's study. At that time he hadn't understood everything they said, only that there was a curse on the family and that his mother couldn't give him a little sister or brother. When he got older and Madam Pomfrey did her sex education class in fourth year he understood that his mother had lost every baby after him and that the curse prevented him from getting siblings. Draco hadn't been too happy about it, but neither did he care too much at that point. But when he had been younger he had wanted a sibling, someone his age to play with and confide in, someone who wasn't friends with him because their parents were friends.

Draco had been so lost in his thoughts that he didn't notice that they weren't going back to the Auror Department only when they stood in front of the office of the Minister of Magic and the Auror knocked.

Seconds later the door opened and the Auror ushered them in. The Minister stood at the window and watched them coming in. The Auror positioned himself at the door behind them.

"Please take a seat! Do you want something to drink?" Shacklebolt asked in a genial tone. They sat down and Lucius asked for a glass of water which was brought him by a ministry house-elf. While they waited Hermione next to him stuffed her books and the parchment rolls in her small beaded bag. Probably an extension charm. He remembered seeing it at the Manor but he didn't remember whether she took it with her or she left it there. Draco decided to ask her just as the house-elf with the water arrived. Interestingly enough Granger didn't as much as blink when the elf popped in. He would have to ask her later whether she changed her opinion about them and about that bag. For now the minister watched them intently.

His mother finally decided to say something. "Now Mr. Shacklebolt, why did you summon us
"I wanted to discuss your custody at the Ministry. The former government didn't grant bail, but we have decided to restore the system and are currently calculating your bail. As you turned yourselves in we are willing to let you live in a safe house for the duration of your custody."

Minister Shacklebolt watched them with a confident smile on his face.

"But aren't their accounts frozen?" Granger wondered and the minister laughed. His parents looked a bit confused but after a second his father's face lighted up with understanding.

"That is something only the muggles do, Miss Granger," Lucius explained and the Minister nodded his head in agreement. Granger blushed deeply and murmured a sorry and something that sounded like "wizarding classes".

"As we understand you are in active owl contact with Miss Granger? Especially Mrs. Malfoy?" Narcissa nodded. "Normally we don't allow owls from safe houses as their position could be betrayed by them. But many of us see it as a reconciliation effort on both sides which should be supported by us." Shacklebolt watched their every move and Granger and Narcissa exchanged a look.

"What kind of safe house do we have to expect?" Lucius asked curiously.

"You will live with a suitable family from the Order of the Phoenix. Her account will influence your sentence and she is quite adapt to find out if someone is lying, so honestly try to re-evaluate your beliefs," Shacklebolt admonished them. They nodded and Granger smiled appreciatively.

"So who is our gracious host?" Narcissa asked curiously. Draco really hoped she would be open to understand where they were coming from with their beliefs and that they needed time to accommodate them. At the minister's sly smile he gulped. Whoever this mysterious woman was, the minister had definitely an ulterior motive for putting them with her.

"You will see when you arrive. Miss Granger, as you are the defendant of Mr. Malfoy we are bound to tell you his address. But the inhabitant wants to meet you before giving you her address therefore you will take a portkey with the Malfoys," the minister smiled broadly and gave them a rectangular black case. It had two windows to look in the case but Draco only saw two white rolls, one of which had a black tape wound up. He didn't know what it was but if Grangers short laugh was any indication it was probably a muggle item.

As soon as everyone, including the Auror who had been at the door just moments before, touched the portkey the minister lowered it to the table surface and said "Portus".
conceal their real emotions and only Narcissa smiled back at her.

She turned and walked up the short gravel path to the house. It was pale blue like the summer sky with white window frames and flower boxes on the window sills. The garden was surrounded by fruit trees and meadowsweet hedges. It was the dream of any romantic novelist and she had literally no idea who from the order would live here.

She knocked on the door which was ajar and was called in by a pleasant female voice. When she entered the living room and saw the woman her wand flew into her hand and she pointed it at the woman. But the moment she took a closer look she lowered it hesitantly.

"Andromeda Tonks, no?" she asked cautiously and the woman nodded. "I am sorry, you look remarkably like Bellatrix and let's just say I don't have the best memories with her." Hermione swallowed and put her wand away.

"I heard about it from Mr. Potter when he came to visit Teddy. He actually warned me to only meet you in a well-lit room if I didn't want to be hexed into next week," Mrs. Tonks chuckled. "May I offer you something to drink? After this shock and the hearing this morning you must be exhausted. And please sit down, we have to talk about a few things."

Hermione sat down on the couch and revelled in the feeling of her back relaxing against the soft, overstuffed cushions. "A tea would be wonderful, thank you." She smiled and tried to calm her still racing heart.

Mrs. Tonks returned with a tablet of tea, biscuits and scones with clotted cream. She put it down on the coffee table and chose the armchair next to the couch to sit. With her tea in her hand she leaned back and watched her carefully.

"Why did you safe my nephew's life? I understand he was quite awful to you in school," Mrs. Tonks finally stated. Hermione sipped at her tea before she answered.

"He defected earlier in the fight, after I saved his life for the first time and therefore they had no legal justification to kill him. But at that moment, when I heard that they were killing Death Eaters without trial, I only thought how unjust and dangerous that was. Do you know why Hitler was able to take over? Because the people felt treated badly. He used their resentment for the government to rise to power. If we treat the Death Eaters unjust I fear the consequences," Hermione looked up at the other woman to see whether she understood what she meant. At Mrs. Tonks nod she continued. "I tried talking to Kingsley, but he said it was already set and that we couldn't wait for trials, that we had to reassure the public that we were taking measures against those who wronged them. Luckily I remembered a passage about life debts in a book I had read in the Black townhouse and was able to get Kingsley to agree to this."

Mrs. Tonks went silent for a moment. She put down her cup and took a biscuit. While she ate it she contemplated what Hermione had told her.

The young witch was nervous. When Kingsley had told them about the safe house she had thought everything was set, nevertheless she felt now as if her words would decide whether or not the Malfoys were allowed to stay. Still trying to formulate something to reassure Mrs. Tonks she was a little startled when the older witch spoke.

"How did my sister and her husband react? I'm sure they weren't happy that a muggleborn had saved their son's life."

"Mr. Malfoy maybe, but Narcissa," at that Mrs. Tonk's eyebrows shot up, "was very welcoming. She wanted a clean slate and I agreed to it. We have exchanged letters ever since and she
recommends books to me about wizarding tradition but also fiction. She also asked for recommendations of muggle books and I listed a few classics she might like. Draco is being civil, we only exchange a few sentences, but he did never once insult or belittle me. Mr. Malfoy didn't say anything to me but at least he doesn't sneer anymore," she finished and took another sip of her tea.

"You are on first name basis with my sister?" Mrs. Tonks asked incredulously.

Hermione laughed and nodded. "Yes, she insisted. And I have to admit that she is very pleasant to write and talk to."

Mrs. Tonks seemed to be far away in her thoughts and Hermione remembered the Malfoys waiting outside. She wasn't sure whether she should tell Mrs. Tonks what Narcissa had written in her letter earlier that week. How she missed her sister, how she had been too weak to fight her parents and later her husband. But Mrs. Tonks beat her to it.

"Did Narcissa ever mention me in your correspondence?" she asked with a hesitant voice.

"She did. She misses you and regrets that she never contacted you. I think she will try to reconcile with you. If I haven't read her completely wrong she wants a new start in her life and who could deny that to her?" Hermione answered confidently. "Maybe we should just go outside and find out?" Mrs. Tonks nodded and stood up.

Hermione followed her and when she reached the door right behind the other woman she had the Déjà vu of a white flash running towards her.

"Andy!" Narcissa cried out and stopped only inches in front of the other woman, looking suddenly unsure. "I am so, so sorry!"

The other woman smiled crookedly and wiped away a few stray tears running down her face. "I should hope so," she chuckled and pulled the blonde into a hug.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me what you thought! :) I really liked writing this chapter and would appreciate to hear your opinion about it ;)}
The scene in front of Draco was something he hadn't ever thought to be possible. The two women hugging in the open door, Granger standing behind them and everything just looking like a cheesy romance novel.

Nevertheless he was extremely happy about the two women reunited. He had known that his mother missed her siblings since his sixth birthday when he had asked about her sisters.

In the morning Draco had been taken to the family library by his father. He had told him to sit down on the couch in front of the window and went down an aisle.

Draco just started to get bored when he came back with a huge book. His father sat down next to him and put the book on his lap so Draco could read it as well. He had learned to read a year ago when his nanny got fed up with him asking for stories.

Now he read out loud: "The most A-ncient and No-ble House of Black" He looked up to his father to see him smiling proudly.

"Very good, Draco. That is the name of your mother's family," he put his finger on one of the highest branches on the tree drawn in the book. "She's here and next to her is her sister, Bellatrix," the name had another one next to it, just like Draco's mother had his father's.

"Who is Ro-dol-phus, father?"Draco asked curiously.

Lucius sighed. "That's the husband of your aunt, he is your uncle."

"Why do they never visit?" the small boy asked.

"They are in Azkaban, a prison. They were bad people."

"And who is my other aunt?" Draco asked, satisfied with the answer although he wasn't entirely sure why his aunt and uncle were bad people he knew the tone of his father's voice. It meant he wouldn't get to ask more questions or no dessert and that would be especially bad on his birthday.

Lucius lips were only a thin line when Draco looked at him again and suddenly he feared for his dessert. "We don't talk about her." The answer was in a crisp tone and Draco understood not to ask.

"Where are my grandparents?" he redirected the attention of his father.
He smiled and pointed to two names below his mother and her sisters. "Cygnus and Druella. Your grandfather was a strict man, but when you were born he was just as happy as your mother, he spoiled you rotten. Sadly he died when you were only two years old. Your grandmother was a lovely woman, who looked just like your mother when she was younger and Narcissa definitely has her talent for gardening," Lucius chuckled.

"Did she also die, father?" Draco asked sadly.

"Yes, shortly after I married your mother. She was ill and never recovered." His father seemed lost in thought. When he gathered himself he continued with the Malfoys and answered all questions Draco had.

Later that morning Lucius announced that he had to take care of some business but would be back for Draco's birthday party in the afternoon.

When the time for lunch came his mother ordered the elves to set up everything outside as it was a sunny if a little cold day. But that was nothing a warming charm over the table, that was prepared for two, wouldn't solve.

After they had finished their meal in silence and the dessert appeared Draco gathered his courage and decided to ask his mother about her sisters.

"Father showed me the family trees today!" he said excitedly.

"That sounds interesting," his mother replied with a smile. "I hope he didn't say anything bad about my family?" she asked teasingly.

"No, but he didn't tell why some names were blacked out," Draco pouted. He knew that his mother found it cute and normally gave him what he wanted if he did it.

Narcissa frowned. "They were disinherited, they are no longer part of the family. The patriarch decided that. Do you want to know something about anyone in particular?" she asked her son, dreading the answer.

"Your sister and your cousin. Father didn't even tell me their names." From the frown on his mother's face Draco knew that he had to be careful. But his curiosity nearly killed him.

"Her name is Andromeda," his mother sighed. "She married a man our family didn't approve of and was therefore disinherited."

Draco watched his mother closely. "Do you miss her, mother?"

Narcissa swallowed. "I do," she whispered. "But don't tell your father. He... he doesn't understand, he has no siblings." Draco reached over and took her hand in his and gave it a squeeze.

"Of course, mother. It's our secret," he smiled at her to cheer her up and she smiled back. "And your cousin? Did he also marry the wrong person?"

Narcissa laughed. "No, not that I know of anyway. He left when he was sixteen. Your great-aunt wasn't a pleasant person and he didn't want to stay with her any longer. She blasted him off the family in a fit of rage and that couldn't be undone," his mother still had his hand in hers and squeezed it back now. "You should get ready for your party, darling. It's already half past one."

Draco startled when he heard the time and jumped up. "Thank you for your answers, mother!" he called over his shoulder while he race towards the house.
Draco returned to the present when his father nudged his arm. "Come on, Draco. Or do you want to stay outside?"

He didn't answer but walked to the front door and into the house after Lucius. Inside it looked as cosy as it did from the outside and Draco took his time to look at every magical and muggle photograph that was hung on the hallway wall. Many showed a woman who looked terrifyingly like Aunt Bella, a man with sandy blond hair and a girl with varying bright hair. The farther he got into the house the older the girl got and then there was the wedding photo of Nymphadora and his former Professor Lupin. They looked incredibly in love and happy. But after that the husband of his aunt vanished from the photographs. Only a few were left, most of his cousin with her son and on the last one was Potter with Andromeda and his grand cousin. Draco swallowed. He knew the reason for the vanishing, he knew they were dead. But it was even harder to see it like this. To think that his aunt walked by these photos every day. It had to be terrible for her.

When he entered the living room his mother and aunt had taken a seat on the right couch, still clutching their hands tightly. Hermione sat on the armchair while his father had chosen the other couch, where he sat extremely stiff and looked like he would rather be anywhere but there.

The Auror seemed to have left and Draco was thankful for that. He preferred to keep family drama in the family. Hermione was at least good friends with his mother, she would understand what importance this moment had.

Draco sat down next to his father and watched the two sisters uncomfortably. He wasn't used to so open displays of affection from his mother, but he had a feeling that she'd only suppressed that affection for years, because the pureblood society would have used every shred of emotion she showed against her.

Finally his aunt turned to the two men in front of her and watched them with narrowed eyes.

"There are rules in this house," she stated after a few moment of close scrutiny. "Number one: You will help with the housekeeping. Whether you do it with or without magic is your decision, but I won't do your chores if you neglect them. Number two: No racism, no specieicism. If I hear the word 'mudblood' or any disparaging comment towards muggle-borns or if you denounce my guests because of their species I will not speak favourable of you at your trial or hearing respectively. Number three: You will inform yourselves about the muggle world and find out whether they really are inferior." Draco nodded and smiled at his aunt who looked proudly at him. His father next to him slumped and sighed but nodded as well.

"Will you understand that I will need time to change my rhetoric?" he asked the sister-in-law warily.

Andromeda nodded. "Of course, but I will know whether it was just a slip or not."

"Then I have no concerns. Could you please show us our rooms? The day has been very eventful and I am rather tired," Lucius asked politely.

Andromeda stood up and motioned them to follow her. Hermione stayed behind and sipped her tea. He waved her good bye because he was just as tired as his father and he looked very much forward to a real bed in a real room after staying in the holding cells in the ministry for the last few days.
Hermione finished her tea in silence. She was relieved that everyone had been so ready to accept the others. She wondered how long this peace would hold. Draco could have quite a temper and two long estranged sisters probably had many unsolved conflicts. Not to speak of Mr. Malfoy who certainly wasn't used to fixing his own breakfast or cleaning his room. But Hermione thought it would be good for Mrs. Tonks to have someone to care for after having lost nearly her whole family safe for her grandson. She smiled at the thought of Teddy. Harry had brought him over to Grimmauld Place three days ago and the small boy had kept changing his hair and eye colour every few minutes. Kreacher had been delighted to have "young Mister Black-Lupin" at the old house and had taken to prepare the nursery for the small boy. After his time at Hogwarts Kreacher's magic seemed to be fully working again as he had managed to clean and renovate the room within an hour.

The next morning the three inhabitants decided to renovate the whole house, now that the war was over. Headmistress McGonagall had sternly ordered them to not step a foot on Hogwarts ground for the next two months while the Ministry and volunteers did the main part of rebuilding. With nothing else to do renovating the old house sounded like a good idea and they would start after the hearing with planning.

Mrs. Tonks came back into the living room and sat back down on the couch.

"They are all settled in for the afternoon. I will let them sleep for now, I can't imagine the cots at the Ministry being comfortable," Mrs Tonks chuckled.

Hermione laughed. "I don't think so either. When will they meet Teddy?"

"Tonight at dinner. He is currently with Molly and she will bring him over in about an hour. As I have heard old Kreacher is completely enamoured by him?" the older witch asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

"He is indeed. He managed to clean and renovate the nursery within an hour. He even asked in which houses Remus and Tonks were. Even made a crib-mobile with tiny badgers, lions, eagles and snakes." Hermione laughed at the memory.

"I am glad that Walburga didn't completely destroy that elf's psyche." They sat a moment in silence until suddenly Mrs. Tonks jumped up and searched for paper and pen on the desk in a corner. "I promised to give you the address of this house, didn't I?" she said and gave Hermione a sheet of paper with the full address.

"Thank you, Mrs. Tonks. If you ever need any help around the house or the Malfoys I'd be glad to come over!" Hermione said and stood up to leave.

"Please, it's Andromeda. And I'd be delighted if you and the boys would join us for lunch on Saturday," the older woman smiled.

"We will be there, Mrs. - Andromeda." With that said she went to the fireplace and flooed back to Grimmauld Place.

"'Mione! Where have you been? We weren't able to find you after the hearing!"

She was greeted by the worried voices of her two best friends. Hermione stepped out of the floo
and wiped the soot from her clothes.

"I've been at Andromeda's with the Malfoys. They will stay with her for the remainder of their custody and she will report about their behaviour and willingness to accommodate at their trials and hearings," she answered calmly. She didn't know how the boys would react to these news. Especially Harry was rather protective of Andromeda and Ron still wasn't really convinced of the trustworthiness of the Malfoys.

As expected Ron exploded. "They can't be serious! She is alone with a baby and has no way to properly defend herself if they choose to attack her! Or when their old friends come-"

"Shut it, mate," Harry said calmly. "Hermione would never have left them there if she thought there was a risk. And most of their old friends are dead. Remember the Ministry rounding up every Death Eater they found in Hogwarts? I mean, of course, many escaped. But they are hiding away." Hermione was grateful that at least one of her friends stayed calm in this situation.

"Andromeda is still protected by extensive wards. Even I would need days to break through all of them. Some of them are even older than we are as either Andromeda or Ted probably set them up in the First Wizarding War." The redhead calmed down gradually.

"I still don't like this," he grumbled when he took a seat at the kitchen table.

"You don't have to. But you can believe me that Andromeda and Teddy are as safe as possible. And we are invited for lunch on Saturday."

Ron brightened up at the mention of food and Harry smiled genuinely. "That sounds really good, Hermione."

"Now that that is settled, I think I will take a nap before dinner. The hearing was more exhausting than I ever imagined." Hermione stifled a yawn and waved good bye to them as she walked out of the kitchen and up to her room.

Andromeda sat in her husband's study with a photo album open on her lap. It was rather old and only stayed in book form because of quite a bit spell-o-tape. She knew it hadn't been her best idea to try and burn it when her sisters had shunned her after her marriage. Ted had snatched it out of the fireplace just in time and had put the first pieces of tape on its corners and spine.

Ten months later, when she had told her family that she had given birth to a little daughter and had received a howler with a curse from her mother, the curse probably courtesy of her beloved sister Bellatrix, she tore at the album mind set to destroy the last memory of her childhood and her sisters. But again Ted saved the book from her wrath.

When Dora turned six she had shown her the album and the family tree, following the tradition of the old pureblood families. But she had left out the preaching about keeping the blood and the tree clean from so called Mudbloods.

Then she had understood why her husband had saved the book. He had known she would want to show her daughter her childhood and that she had had a good time, even if her family no longer talked to her.

Now she sat in his study, alone and a completely different sentiment clenched her heart tightly in its claw. Hope. Hope that she could restore her bond with her remaining sister. Hope that her
nephew would end the prejudiced that had nearly destroyed the wizarding world. Hope that the Malfoys would be the first of the old families that remained to change their opinion publicly and most importantly: genuinely.

A silent sob escaped her lips when her eyes fell on a photo, taken on Cissa's third birthday. The two older sisters had the younger on their lap and they smiled and waved happily at the camera. Then she smiled wistfully. May be that Bellatrix had turned hateful and insane, may be that Narcissa hadn't said a word to her in nearly twenty-five years, but now they had a new chance to be sisters again, even if Bella couldn't (and probably wouldn't) join.

She closed the book and put it back on the shelf. It was time to get Teddy and prepare the dinner. When the boy turned six she would get the old, battered book and the family tree, she would show him his family and hopefully Cissa would be there to tell her part of the story.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it! I know I tend to end my chapters with drama, I can't seem to help myself :D I don't know when the next chapter will be up as I am moving this weekend. However, please review and all that stuff until the next chapter, my dearest readers
*waves*
Nightmares

Chapter Notes

Moin, here we are with the next chapter! viv-heart is still betaing and coping with my germanisms. She also posted some new stories, check them out! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

... the faces of her parents going blank when she took their memories...Ron laying splinched on the forest floor, bleeding heavily...the baleful look in Ron's eyes when he left...Harry kneeling at his parent's grave...missing the hare for the tenth time because her stomach grumbled so much... scouring the trashcans behind a muggle restaurant in a tiny village for food...being caught and beaten for being hungry...Ron coming back, smiling as if nothing had happened...Harry speaking the taboo...Bellatrix' Crucio, her knife on her neck...the cold, unfeeling eyes of the Malfoys...not being able to find Harry during the battle...seeing Harry dead...being subjected to the Crucio again...

Hands on her shoulders, shaking her awake. "Hermione! 'Mione! Wake up! They are just nightmares!"

Hermione opened her eyes to see Harry, Ron and Ginny leaning over her. Still panicking because of her nightmare, really just memories, her brain struggled to understand what was happening.

"Ginny, since when are you here?" Hermione croaked out, her throat felt raw.

"I came over two hours ago as I couldn't sleep at the Burrow. It felt wrong without Fred there," the younger girl said calmly.

"How late is it?" Hermione asked, still trying to catch up with reality.

"One o'clock in the morning, 'Mione," Ron answered.

Hermione frowned. "But I went to sleep at four in the afternoon? Why didn't you wake me up for dinner?"

Ron scratched his neck. "We know that you didn't sleep much in the last, well, year probably and thought it would be better to let you sleep."

Hermione nodded her head. "Please wake me up the next time. I can't miss anymore meals." She smiled shyly up to them and Harry laughed.

"Well, don't let Kreacher hear that or he will be on your heels feeding you at every turn!"

"Do you want to eat something now?" Ginny asked kindly.

"No, I would like to go back to sleep," the other witch answered and stifled a fake yawn. She wanted to be alone, wanted to be able to breath, to think.

"Alright, sleep well, Hermione!" Harry said and gave her a kiss on her forehead, Ginny hugged her and Ron pulled her close to his side for a moment before letting go.
When they were finally gone, Hermione put up her normal privacy wards and scolded herself for forgetting them. But the adrenaline from the nightmare still coursed through her veins so she decided to write Narcissa, maybe talking would help. The older witch also had probably more experience with dealing with nightmares.

Dear Narcissa,

it's currently a bit past one o'clock in the morning, but since there is no way I am able to sleep anytime soon I decided to write you in a very personal matter. We have already discussed how bad our sleeping rhythm was, but I never mentioned the reason I sleep so badly. Although, knowing you, you probably figured it out very quickly anyway. I don't even know whether I should call them nightmares as they are memories. Bad memories, granted, but we have been at war. Of course I would have mostly dark memories of it. Still, they are haunting me every night and I can't seem to banish them from my sleep.

I tried Dreamless Sleep, but within a few days I felt the addicting influence and never took it again. I tried muggle sleeping pills, but they weren't really working. Do you know anything else? Maybe I could come over sometime this week and we could talk? I don't really feel like writing my memories down as I don't know whether our letters are intercepted.

I hope you had a more pleasant night. I will try to catch a few more hours of sleep now.

Yours
Hermione

Having finished the short letter she called for the tiny owl she had bought a few days after the battle. She was rather feisty and Hermione instantly fell in love with her and decided to name her Athene - her species was called *Athene noctua* after all. She attached the scroll to the tiny owl's leg and send her out of the window.

The next morning found the four inhabitants of Grimmauld Place pouring over plans of the floors in old house. They had written into every room what they had to do to renovate it, but had had trouble to squeeze in everything in some rooms despite Hermione's tiniest script. Kreacher had told them about house-elf charms that would help, but he was an old elf and couldn't do that much. He asked them whether he should search for an apprentice he would train and who would be much more capable to help them.

Hermione was reluctant as she still wasn't convinced of elf labour, but she finally agreed after Kreacher assured her that he would only accept a progressive elf who would understand that she didn't reject his work but thought that it should be valued more.

They also realised that they would need to learn cleaning charms if they wanted to do something as well and Hermione suggested that they should ask Mrs. Weasley whether she could teach them or at least recommend a book on it.

"It could help her with her sorrow about Fred as well," Hermione added in a tiny voice and the two boys nodded their heads.

"Alright, Harry and I have our appointment with the Aurors today, right before we have to do the acceptance test. They probably hope that we will still be under the influence of Veritaserum while they question us," Ron joked. "That means, you will have to go to the Burrow, 'Mione." She nodded her head.

"Kreacher will use the time to talk to a few house elves," the old elf stated and apparated away after they agreed to that plan.
When Hermione arrived at the Burrow she wasn't overly surprised that she didn't hear the normal buzz of the house. Even the garden gnomes were rather subdued and as she entered the kitchen the bushy-haired witch didn't see Mrs. Weasley bustling around. Hermione walked into the living room and found the matriarch of the Weasley clan. The witch sat in the armchair in front of the fire, a blanket over her shoulders and what seemed to be Firewhiskey in the glass in her hands. She stared blankly into the fire and Hermione suddenly knew why even the garden gnomes were quiet. She had always known that Mrs. Weasley was a powerful witch, but only now that she felt the older woman's magic oozing from her in waves of sorrow she truly understood that.

"Mrs. Weasley?" Hermione called out in a soft voice. The other witch didn't so much as blink and Hermione took a step forward to her and gingerly put a hand on her shoulder. "Mrs. Weasley, I wanted to ask you something." she said with a bit more vigour, hoping that being needed would pull the witch out of her stupor.

But it didn't at first. Only when Hermione already wanted to try once more Mrs. Weasley blinked slowly and looked up to her with unshed tears in her eyes. "I wasn't supposed to live longer than any of my children!" the distraught witch exclaimed and finally the tears fell from her eyes.

"Mrs. Weasley," Hermione began but was interrupted.

"Molly. No need for such formality," Mrs. Weasley said.

"Alright, Molly. I know that. I cannot possibly understand your pain. But I don't think Fred would want you to grieve him forever. He probably wants you to continue to live your life and laugh. Because that was his life goal: to make people and especially his family laugh." She put her arm around the shoulders of the older witch and sat down on the armrest.

"It just hurts so much. To know that he will never again poison himself while testing his products. That he will never again finish George's sentences or tease his siblings. Why him? Why?"

"Because he chose to fight evil instead of accepting it happening like so many others. Because he was a brave and a good man, even though he probably shouldn't have used first years to test his products." They both chuckled at that.

"Thank you, Hermione," Molly said after a while.

"Always, Mrs. - Molly," Hermione answered.

"Now, why did you come? Surely not for me to pour all my grieve over you," Molly asked sounding more like herself again. The waves of magical sorrow also subsided a bit. Not completely, it was just too soon.

"I wanted to ask you whether you could teach us household charms? We had to discover on the run that we didn't really know any and since we want to really renovate Grimmauld Place we will probably need them. Furthermore we won't always live with a house elf."

Molly nodded. "Alright. That sounds like a good plan. I will search for the book my mother gave me. Ah, don't look at me like that, child! I know you quite well by now."

Hermione grinned sheepishly and nodded her head. "Probably," she conceded.

Narcissa was very glad that she had made the elves teach her to cook while Voldemort was living at the Manor. It had been her escape from the presence of her house guests as nobody would have
searched for her in the kitchen. After some time the house elves understood that she didn't want to learn because she didn't want them anymore. But because she needed time for herself and loved cooking just as much as they did, they became more open and showed her more and harder techniques. Now she was able to surprise the family with a nicely done continental breakfast. Their faces had been priceless and she couldn't help but grin very smugly all through breakfast, which they enjoyed greatly.

That was until she received Hermione's letter. Narcissa frowned at it. She had known that the other witch had nightmares, but she also could make a decent guess of which memories she was talking.

"What has Hermione written, mother?" Draco asked when he noticed her expression. The others looked up as well and Teddy used the opportunity to pull away from his bottle.

"She wants to come over and talk to me about one or two things, I was just wondering when. We have to repeat our testimonies this week and I don't exactly know when she has to go there," Narcissa lied easily and instantly earned herself two identical frowns from her sister and husband. She fought to keep the smile from her lips, it looked too strange.

"Alright, you just looked a bit worried," Draco explained.

After the breakfast Narcissa went to hers and Lucius' room to write a reply.

Dear Hermione,

I am very sad to hear that. I luckily slept quite well tonight. Having a normal bed really helps. I wondered when you were set to make your testimony. Lucius, Draco and I have an appointment in two days and I will be probably too tired after that to talk or think much. I surely hope you don't worry about your memories too much. I am sure nearly everyone who participated or was strongly affected by this war has nightmares. Lucius, Draco and I definitely have, I think Andromeda as well, and surely your friends will report the same when you ask them. Don't fear them, it's the past, they can't hurt you anymore.

As soon as I have some time to meditate I will search my library for everything that could be useful. I will also ask Andromeda for help, she is a mother and grand-mother and didn't raise her child with the old pureblood customs. Maybe she knows more than I do. You are completely right that speaking about it would certainly help and I will gladly listen. I came to appreciate you very much and would like to know how you fared during the war. As much information as the Prophet was able to gather about your "adventures", I am sure that there is more. Things you didn't want to talk about publicly, which I understand very well. If it makes talking easier maybe I could tell you about my time as a prisoner in my own house, but only if you want that of course.

I will have to continue my day now. I certainly hope that you were able to catch a few more hours of sleep and have a pleasant day as well.

Yours,

Narcissa

When she finished and sealed the letter she turned around to Lucius. "Ask."

"What did the girl really write? You seemed worried."

"Her memories of the past year are haunting her. She asked for help," Narcissa answered calmly. She had never intended to lie to her husband about this, she just didn't want Draco to hear it. He already felt guilty enough. Her son wished that he could have done more although they knew they hadn't had a chance.
"I understand. I guess she already tried sleeping potions?"

Narcissa nodded. "Even muggle ones. But the memories were able to overpower them."

Lucius sat down on the bed. "Maybe sleeping charms for children would help? Do you remember when Draco used to sleep so badly after he had seen us arguing? You used some charm to calm his worries and soon he slept just fine."

"I will definitely suggest it, but only after researching it thoroughly," Narcissa nodded. "Thank you for your understanding." She stood up and sat down next to her husband laying her head on his shoulder.

"I know how much she means to you, darling. And she is a really nice girl," he conceded. He took her hand in his and squeezed it gently. "I am sure between the two of you, you will find a solution. And now go, tell Andromeda before she draws the wrong conclusions."

Narcissa chuckled and gave Lucius a chaste kiss before she stood up, took the letter and then left to look for her sister.

When she found her outside Athene swept down from the nearest tree branch and settled on Andromeda's shoulder offering her leg before either witch could say something. Laughing Narcissa secured the letter and send her off.

"What did Hermione really write, Cissa?" Andromeda asked sounding a little annoyed.

After a quick Muffliato Andromeda was informed about the contents of the letter and remembered having a book on charms for children's care.

"Why did you use a silencing charm for this discussion?" her older sister asked curiously.

Narcissa sighed. "Draco feels very guilty about his role in Hermione's torture and general life. If he hears that she has nightmares he will feel even worse. I am sure he suspects it, but knowing it for sure is very different."

Andromeda nodded and resumed her garden work.

"May I help you? I always enjoyed working in the gardens of Malfoy Manor, it was so peaceful and calm out there," Narcissa said.

"Of course. The hedges need grooming. I normally do them in a round shape," Andromeda explained and returned to her work while Narcissa went to groom the meadowsweet bushes.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, the next chapter will hopefully have more Dramione, after all that's still the pairing (although I sometimes wonder wether the characters think the same *sigh*). I hope you liked the glimpse in the past year and the part about Mrs. Weasley. I normally firmly deny Fred's death, but I wanted to show how all of them coped after the war therefore he sadly had to stay dead. I have a new flat, new flatmates... As we are now in the same chapter as at ffn I don't know whether I'll be able to write or post this week, but I'll try and reviews will help, a lot ;)}
Hey guys! Only one day late even though I had nearly no time to write. Thanks for betaing, viv-heart!

I want to warn you, that this story is rated M for a reason that isn't called smut! This chapter contains mentioned torture, self-harm and the first part is quite dark.

Oh and I had a interesting idea, more information at the end.

Have fun! ;)

Draco laid on his side on a big armchair in his aunt's living room. He was reading a book on healing curse scars that he had found while scouring the bookshelves. He had hoped that it might provide a way of getting rid of his Dark Mark.

Whenever he looked at it he heard the tortured screams of all the people on the revels and in the dungeons of Malfoy Manor. Even if they had been allowed to return, Draco wasn't any longer sure that he would. His last two years at home had been hell. The Dark Lord holding court in the dining room at every meal hadn't even been the worst. No, the screams of the prisoners, that had kept him awake at night, because he knew he would scream just like them, beg for mercy just like them if he ever failed the Dark Lord.

On some nights he had been tempted to go down and shut them all up. Thankfully Snape had taught him the Muffliato before he had to return for Christmas holidays in his sixth year. But the spell didn't hold indefinitely and sometimes Draco woke up in the middle of the night hearing the screams again. In the Slytherin dorm they had made fun of him because he was silencing his bed, but they didn't have to live with the constant threat of death by torture looming over them.

It was raining outside, matching Draco's currently quite gloomy mood. He was halfway through the book and still hadn't found anything useful. The fact that he wasn't allowed to go and buy books that had more information really didn't help. Maybe he could write Hermione and ask her to search the Black library but he wanted to do it himself. He hated being dependent on someone, especially someone who had hated him only weeks earlier. Draco was still quite baffled that she had actually defended him in front of the Wizengamot. He hadn't done anything to deserve her help. After all he deserted in the middle of the battle after more or less two years of being a Death Eater.

A wave of disgust hit Draco when he thought of his first weeks at school. He had been way too arrogant and proud of being a Death Eater, one of the youngest ever. Only when he was summoned after a month of school and asked how far he had come he understood. The Dark Lord only refrained from punishing him right there because he had to return to school and it was too obvious if he came back from a visit home and was twitching from the Cruciatius. But his mother and Snape had been punished for his inactivity. He had had to carry his professor back to school when they arrived at the gate. That was the moment Draco got nervous. His sleeping pattern hadn't been the best to begin with and now school work, the Dark Lord and the fear for his mother's safety made it nearly impossible for him to sleep.

The other Slytherins in his year didn't understand why he separated himself from them and
especially Pansy sulked for quite some time before giving up. Draco suspected Theo had talked to her because he was one of the few people who knew about the true extent of his situation.

"Draco, won't you come for dinner?" his aunt called from the door.

"I am not hungry."

"At least sit with us, maybe have some tea?" Andromeda asked and Draco sighed. By the tone of her voice he knew she wouldn't give up. It seemed to be a typical Black trait as both his mother and aunt Bella had it as well.

"Alright, I will only finish this paragraph," he answered.

A rustle of cloths indicated that his aunt had left, but suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder and was upright and with his wand in his hand immediately.

"I…I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you!" Andromeda said, shock evident in her wide eyes.

Draco pushed his hand through his hair and lowered his wand. "It's alright. What did you want?"

"You seem a bit crestfallen and I wanted to ask if I could be of any help."

"You are a healer, right?" Draco asked thoughtfully.

"Yes, at least I was before the war."

"Do you have another book about curse scars? I...When Granger was tortured my aunt cut her with a cursed blade and when I saw her at the hearing the scar still looked very fresh, like it didn't heal the way it should. I thought, maybe I could find something to help her…" Draco trailed of, suddenly sounding unsure. It wasn't a full blown lie, he had wanted to help Hermione. But he also still hoped to find something against the Dark Mark.

Andromeda looked at him for a second and then turned to the bookshelves.

"Here are the books about curse healing and breaking. I don't know Hermione's scar well enough, but if it doesn't heal properly I'd guess that the curse from the blade is still in the wound. If you need any further help I could ask Bill Weasley. He is a curse breaker and knows much more about that part of the healing than I do."

Draco stood up and went to the indicated shelf. There were fifteen books, some only a few pages from the looks and one big tome.

"Thank you," Draco said politely.

"Now, come on, your parents are already waiting for us."

After dinner Draco went back to his book. He hadn't eaten much, only a slice of bread at his mother's insistence. He was now very sure that this kind of stubbornness was a Black trait. He continued his with his book in the light from the fire and his wand. The chapter he was currently reading would most likely help Granger with her scar, but he doubted he was a good enough wizard to perform the spell. After all he had needed nearly all of his sixth year to repair the Vanishing Cabinet.

When he dragged himself up to his room it was nearing one in the morning but he was finally tired enough that he would sleep through the night. While undressing he avoided even looking in the
direction of his left arm. He felt the dark magic pulsing there, even though the Dark Lord was dead. This residue magic made him ill and he wanted it gone, even if it meant blasting his arm off. Sudden anger filled him. He hated feeling so hopeless! He forced himself to stare at the Mark, an ugly stain on his arm, forced himself to listen to the screams of the muggles who were tortured at the revels. He remembered all the times he had belittled people because of their muggle parents, strutted through Hogwarts like he owned it because he was a Malfoy.

All the emotion suddenly became too much and he started scratching at the Mark until he drew blood. The pain cleared his mind and he stopped, looking down at his arm. Angry red lines crisscrossed his formerly white skin and the Mark. Draco sat down on his bed, still staring at his arm. The emotional upheaval from minutes ago was gone and had left a feeling of giddy hysteria and satisfaction. A few moments later he was fast asleep, curled around his left arm as if to protect it.

Hermione woke up with a gasp, twitching and lightheaded as if the torture by Bellatrix Lestrange only ended moments before. She reached for her wand and ignited the candles in the room. She took a gulp of water from the glass on her nightstand and laid back down, trying to calm her frantic heartbeat.

It had all seemed so real, but the worst hadn't been the torture. The worst were the cold eyes of Narcissa and Draco. For a moment she had forgotten that this was only a memory. Back then she hadn't been writing to Narcissa on a daily basis and Draco wasn't civil to her. Hermione shivered and pulled her blanket tighter around her shoulders.

"It was only a dream," she chanted under her breath hoping to convince herself that there truly was no danger close by.

After a few minutes she calmed down, the twitching and lightheadedness dissolved. Hermione really hoped that talking about what happened would help her. She needed her sleep and waking from nightmares every night wasn't healthy. A sudden feeling of hunger overcame her and she decided to go down to the kitchen for a late night snack.

Arriving downstairs Hermione saw light under the kitchen door. Expecting it to be Harry or Ron she was rather surprised to see Ginny sitting at the kitchen table with blotchy eyes and Kreacher patting her back.

"Ginny? What happened?" Hermione asked softly not wanting to startle the distraught girl.

The redheaded witch and the old house-elf looked up and Ginny jumped up running to Hermione and hugging her fiercely.

"Will Miss Granger want a hot chocolate as well?" Kreacher asked and Hermione nodded over Ginny's shoulder.

"And maybe a sandwich, I am a bit hungry."

The house-elf got to work and Hermione led the younger witch back to the table were they sat down. Ginny was crying in earnest now and Hermione conjured a tissue box and gave one to her.

A watery 'thank you' was the only answer while Ginny tried to compose herself. "I…Harry and I broke up. Well, you probably shouldn't even call it a break-up, we haven't been together since last year after all…" the girl trailed of and dried her face with the tissue. "We just made it clear that neither of us was ready for a relationship. Especially not with each other. He couldn't understand what my last year has been like and the other way around. We can't support each other the way a couple should."
"Oh, Ginny, I am so sorry!" Hermione exclaimed softly and hugged her friend tighter.

"It's actually quite alright. I just... cried a little. After all I still would have liked being in a relationship with him. But then everything else I hadn't cried about came breaking down on me and I just couldn't stop," the redhead sniffled a little and blew her nose.

"Well, now it is at least out of your system," Hermione stated drily and Ginny chuckled.

"Miss needed to cry, but now Miss needs to drink her hot chocolate and eat something!" Kreacher ordered and the young witches complied.

"Thank you for listening, 'Mione," Ginny said around a bite of her sandwich.

"That's what friends are for," Hermione assured her.

"Why were you up anyway? It's half past one."

"Woke up from a nightmare and got hungry. I hadn't eaten much at dinner."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Ginny asked looking intently at the other witch.

Hermione hesitated for a moment, but then she decided that Ginny would understand or at least not reject her. "I dreamed of being tortured at Malfoy Manor again. But that wasn't the bad part. I didn't remember that it was only a memory, that I hadn't been pen friend with Narcissa and civil with Draco. I thought they truly hated me and that I never could be good enough to be friends with them because I am a lowly mudblood. It scared me senseless."

Ginny gasped and took her hand. "That sounds awful! I can only speak from what I saw at the hearing and what you told me about your letters from her. Nevertheless I think I can assure you that at least Mrs. Malfoy genuinely likes you! The ferret is at least making an effort to be civil, if not friendly to you and Mr. Malfoy didn't sneer at you. Maybe you can ask Andromeda what she thinks about the situation but I have a feeling that she will confirm my assessment."

Hermione smiled a bit crookedly at her oldest female friend. "Thank you, Ginny. I am sure you know how some dreams just linger and make you doubt everything."

"Oh, yes, absolutely! You could basically call me an expert," the other girl answered laughing.

They finished their chocolates in silence and thanked Kreacher for the late-night-snack. When they reached the landing Hermione hesitate before she turned around to Ginny.

"Want to sleep over?" she asked a bit shyly. Ginny stopped, tilted her head in thought and then nodded with a brilliant smile.

"Of course, I will get my blanket and pillow from my room!"

Smiling Hermione entered the room she had chosen when they came back to Grimmauld Place after the battle. The one she had shared with Ginny had seemed too silent without the other girl and she hadn't been able to sleep.

Harry stood in the door of Hermione's room and grinned wildly.

"Oi, what's got you grinning like mad this early in the morning?" Ron grumbled from behind him.

"Well, seems Ginny just broke up with me to switch sides," Harry chuckled looking at the two cuddling girls in Hermione's bed who now stirred feeling that someone was there.
Hermione was the first to wake up and blinked tiredly at the boys in her door while turning around in Ginny's arms to wake the younger girl. "Get your minds out of the gutter!" she exclaimed. "Boys, I swear they'll drive me crazy one day!"

"Ten more minutes, Mom," Ginny grumbled still half asleep until she noticed the body in her arms and jumped up. "Gods! What the hell did I do last night?!"
Harry and Ron guffawed ignoring the glare from Hermione.

"Seems you were right mate! Well, it could have been worse. Imagine finding her with the pug Parkinson!" Ron gasped, still laughing.

"Ronald Weasley, do I need to remind you of my Bat-Bogey-hex? I assure you that I have gotten better while you were away!" Ginny cried out. "If I wanted to sleep with Parkinson you would accept it without any big brother moves!"

The boys tried to contain their laughter at the two glaring girls and assured them that everything was just fine while vanishing downstairs.

"Boys!" Ginny exclaimed, unknowingly repeating Hermione's earlier sentiment. "Let's get up before they start fantasising again."

Chapter End Notes

Alright, I hope you liked it, tell me in the reviews! :) Here is the deal: if you create a piece of fanart for this story or the accompanying one-shot (Celebrating Easter), I will write a one-shot from the Potter-verse for you! Most pairings (save for Ronmione, sorry^^). I also have a pinterest board for this story: pinterest. de / nantai666 / arbitrary-jurisdiction / (remove the spaces! ;)) If anyone is wondering, Draco develops symptoms of PTSD. Those of you who study psychology or are psychologist and notice glaring mistakes in the characterisation should feel free to pm me so I can fix it :)
Draco woke up with his left hand clenched into a fist. He slowly opened it and hissed at the pain. Looking at his forearm he noticed the faint red lines over his Mark and smirked mirthlessly. He revelled in the memory of the sharp pain, jolting him out of his dark thoughts but then his smirk faded. He couldn't let his mother see this. His father would either understand or not even care, but his mother would fret and ask him if everything was alright and it Merlin be damned wasn't!

Startled by the sharp pain of finger nails in his hand Draco relaxed the fist he unintentionally had clenched again. His whole arm hurt from the tension, he had probably hold his hand that way for quite some time while sleeping.

The blonde turned on his back and looked up to the ceiling. He didn't want to get up, as he would have to go to the Ministry later. Repeat his testimony and see the smug faces of the Aurors when he admitted most of the crimes. Draco groaned and turned back on his side pulling his blanket up to his nose. He then realised why he was awake at all: he had forgotten to close the curtains. Stretching his arm from the blankets he felt for his wand on the night table and shut them with a flick returning the room into darkness. Before putting his wand back he cast a Tempus charm and groaned again, half past five was really too early to wake up. Especially since their appointment was in the afternoon.

A few minutes after Draco fell back into a restless slumber his mother awoke in the neighbouring room. Not woken by the sun like her son but by nightmares. She had long learned to put a silencing charm over her part of the bed as not to wake Lucius.

Now Narcissa turned to her still sleeping husband and smiled solemnly at his relaxed features. She nearly stretched out her hand to move a strand of his platinum hair from his face. But she didn't dare disturb his rest. None of them had slept peacefully through the night since that fateful day in June at the end of Draco's fourth year.

Trying to get out of the grasps of her nightmare Narcissa focused on her plans for the next few days. Today was the day of their testimony, Lucius would be the first, followed by Draco and finally herself.

She was suddenly reminded of the last time she had to make a testimony. She had woken up in the small hunting château in Sussex, Draco crying in his crib and Lucius was nowhere to be found. She thought he had made a run for it, but after she had calmed Draco down her husband came back. He had been running, something he hadn't done since school days. They had left for the Ministry and she had to wait for nearly three hours before they called her in. Hopefully today would be less
Tomorrow Narcissa was going to meet Hermione - the younger witch had confirmed the date late last night. And she had asked Narcissa to tell her of her experiences in both wars as well.

On Saturday Hermione and her friends would come over for lunch. Andromeda wanted to assure the boys that the Malfoys were on their best behaviour. Narcissa understood their worries, but felt rather offended that they thought she would let any harm come to her sister after finally reuniting with her.

Satisfied that she was able to divert her thoughts from her nightmare she started to leave her side of the bed when she felt an arm snake around her middle. Startled she turned around and found Lucius smiling sleepily at her.

"Why are you already awake?" she whispered.

"Instinct?" he answered quietly, arching his eyebrow mockingly. The gesture might have seemed arrogant and cold to everyone else, but Narcissa saw the tiniest curl of his lip in a smile and laughed softly.

"If you went for being nervous, I may have believed you," she answered with a playful smile. "Now, let me go, I need to powder my nose."
Chuckling Lucius drew his arm back and she pecked him on the cheek before leaving the bed and the room for the toilet.

Quarter to two the Malfoys and Andromeda flooed over to the Ministry. Mrs. Weasley had volunteered to look after Teddy while they did their testimonies and Andromeda ran her errands in Diagon Alley. Narcissa knew her sister loved caring for her grandson but she needed time for herself as well. She wasn't sure Andromeda had ever had the time to truly grieve for her husband, daughter and son-in-law. Maybe she should ask her about it.

For now she was standing in front of the office where their testimonies would be. Draco stood on her right side and Lucius to her left. When she looked down the corridor she saw an unruly mop of chestnut curls that could only be Hermione's. Narcissa internally arched an eyebrow. Why was she here?

"Narcissa!" Hermione called suddenly. "Draco, Mr. Malfoy, good afternoon."

The men shook her hand and Narcissa hugged the girl briefly.

"What are you doing here, Hermione? I thought you had your repeat this morning?"

"Yes, I did-"

Hermione was cut off by an Auror stepping out of the office and calling Lucius inside. He followed the woman and Narcissa turned her attention back to Hermione.

"As I said, I did. But I found out that Harry, Ron and I have to apply for a license to be allowed to have a second house-elf if he or she isn't related to our current house-elf. Can you believe it? I actually researched it and it was installed to stop house-elf trade! Some people stole house-elf children and sold them on the black-market!" the younger witch's hair was sparking by now and Narcissa saw her son hiding a chuckle behind a cough at Hermione's rant.

"But shouldn't you be happy that they tried to make sure that the elf-children stayed with their
family?" Draco asked curiously, still smiling slightly.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "They should have just forbidden the trade of house-elves all together. But then they would have had to admit that they are sentient and intelligent creatures just like us," she scoffed and crossed her arms defensively.

"Well, if you want something done, you always have to do it yourself," Draco answered teasingly and Hermione huffed but smiled. Narcissa watched the two teenagers with a smile hidden behind her hand.

"If you would excuse me, I will be in the cafeteria finding out whether they still have that heavenly raspberry tarte," the blonde witch said to the pair and drifted down the corridor out of sight. Andromeda would be fascinated by the new development.

As soon as Narcissa left Hermione grew unsure and decided to sit down on the chair on the opposite side of the hall. Draco followed her there and sat down after a few moments of awkward silence.

"Is your hair always sparking when you get angry?" he asked with a chuckle evident in his voice. Hermione started and tried to pat down her hair.

"Sometimes," she blushed and looked down at the floor. "It just annoys me terribly that elves are treated like animals although they have magic just like us, can think rationally and use logic just like us. They definitely need more rights."

"What do you mean?" Draco asked actually sounding curious. "It is their deepest wish to serve wizardkind. What good would it do to free them?"

"I am not talking about freeing them. I know now that they need the bond to their master to stay sane, as only a few are strong enough to live without it. But their owners should be forced to provide them real living quarters and some kind of pension when they get too old to work and if they aren't happy with their family it should be their right to leave them and search for a family that suits them better."

Draco nodded pensively. "I think you should be able to convince the more progressive part of the Wizengamot of this. Especially with Professor McGonagall as Chief Sorceress. She always liked you."

"The problem is that I don't know how. Furthermore I haven't even finished my education!" Hermione exclaimed. Draco looked at her incredulously and laughed loudly.

"As if anyone would care! You are a war-heroine and one third of the Golden Trio. If you asked them to jump they would only ask how high!"

"I just want to do this properly," Hermione said quietly, looking away from the blond wizard beside her. She had watched his face closely when he laughed and noticed that the mirth didn't fully reach his eyes. Of course it wouldn't. He has been through hell, just like you and he doesn't even know whether he has a future outside of Azkaban! Hermione chastised herself. When she looked back to him his mask of indifference that he had worn earlier was back in place.

"Well, I am sure the 'Brightest Witch of her Age' will manage that," he said with a hint of his old disdain in his voice. Hermione still wondered why she felt hurt about him turning cold again when Narcissa returned with a bright smile on her face that only faltered for about a second.
"Mother, Hermione, I will be back in a moment," Draco excused himself hurriedly and left.

"What was that about?" Narcissa asked, looking after her son with worry.

Hermione looked shocked. "I don't know, one moment we were speaking about me having no idea how to petition something in the Wizengamot and wanting to finish my education. The next moment he is as cold to me as he has been during our school days."

Narcissa nodded slowly. "I think I know what happened. You don't have to worry, you didn't do anything wrong. I wanted to ask you whether our date for tomorrow afternoon still stands?"

"Of course, I am looking forward to it. But…I think I am not ready to talk about what happened in the Manor. I will talk about the rest of our adventures, but not that and nothing that happened afterwards," Hermione looked up to the older witch next to her who smiled reassuringly.

"That's fine with me. I am sure we will be able to meet again later and talk some more. If I am allowed to leave the house by then we could go on a shopping trip to Muggle London and I could finally buy all the books you wrote about!"

Hermione was stunned speechless before she started to laugh, loudly.

Draco sat on the hidden stairwell, his face buried in his palms. His knuckles hurt from punching the wall, but he felt somewhat better. Why did he have to bring up the future! She would have one, and a great one on top of that. And here he was sitting, heir to one of the oldest magical families and not even living in his own house. Not to talk about not knowing whether he would live there ever again or end up in Azkaban for life.

He wiped away the tears and stared down on the split skin of his knuckles. He had been so angry, so fearful and desperate at the same time. Draco wasn't sure how much longer he could have hold onto his mask if his mother hadn't come and he could leave. He needed to get a grip on himself! But what for? After the First War his father escaped punishment due to the good contacts of his grandfather to the Ministry, but now? In this new world nobody would stand up for him. Hermione only did because he had been treated unfairly by the Ministry. It wasn't as if she cared about his fate.

Draco clenched his fist, relishing the pain from the split skin. He decided to only glamour it instead of healing it and stood up to go back to the office where he would have to repeat his testimony. He felt sick all over when he thought of the triumphant faces of the Aurors from the first time. This wouldn't be any better.

He arrived just as Hermione started to laugh about something his mother had said. He looked at the two witches curiously, but kept his distance. Draco wasn't ready to face Hermione after treating her like he did in school. It wasn't that he didn't know it to be wrong. His seventh year had made him re-evaluate most of his beliefs about blood-supremacy. It was just so much easier than being civil. He was honestly too angry about his own fate.

A few moments after he arrived the door of the office opened and his father left, looking rather ashen. Narcissa jumped up and led him to the chairs while Draco mutely followed the Auror into the office.

He sat down on the hard metal chair and as soon as he was seated completely chains snaked around his ankles. He was offered a glass of water to which three drops of Veritaserum had been added.

"Now, Mr. Malfoy would you please answer some standard questions to ensure that the
Veritaserum works properly?" the auburn haired witch asked.

Draco nodded.

"State your full name and birthday."

"Draco Lucius Malfoy, fifth of June 1980." Draco felt the pull of the Veritaserum, but he also felt his Occlumency shields letting most of it slide off.

"Alright, now try to lie to me."

"The sky is…" Draco felt the Veritaserum force his tongue. "…blue," he finished.

"Very well. We will now begin with the questions," the dark haired wizard said. His colleague nodded and continued.

"Were you a Death Eater?"

"Yes."

"When were you marked?"

"Sixth of July 1996."

"Did you want to join the Death Eaters?"

"Not really. I only wanted to protect my mother from the Dark Lord's wrath."

"Where you forced to join the Death Eaters?"

"Not in words or actions. But if I hadn't made the right decision they would have forced me."

"Did you commit crimes in the name of the Dark Lord?"

"Yes."

"What crimes?"

"On the day I was marked, I was forced to murder a muggle girl with the Avada Kedavra. Back at school I imperiused Madam Rosmerta on the nineteenth of October 1996 and kept her under the Imperius for nearly the rest of the school year," Draco hesitated shortly before continuing - lying would do no good. "I purchased a cursed necklace at Borgin and Burkes and made Madam Rosmerta imperius Katie Bell to bring it to the Headmaster. Due to an accident she touched it and was cursed.

Shortly before Christmas I purchased mead and made Madam Rosmerta add poison to it and send it to Albus Dumbledore. Somehow it ended up with Professor Slughorn who kept it until March when he served it to Ronald Weasley and Harry Potter, inadvertently poisoning Weasley." Draco coughed, his throat had gone dry from the talking. "Could I have some water?" he asked.

The Aurors exchanged a glance, the wizard shrugged and refilled the glass with a quick Aguamenti. Draco took a gulp of the water and settled back down. He felt the Veritaserum fading, but he was sure that they would soon give him more.

"Alright, where was I? Ah yes. On my seventeenth birthday I was taken out of school to 'celebrate' with the Death Eaters. I was forced to torture a muggleborn man with the Crucius curse. I let
Death Eaters into Hogwarts on the thirtieth of June 1997 which resulted in a fight and badly injured people on both sides and the death of Albus Dumbledore by the hand of Severus Snape. On Christmas 1997 I tortured Luna Lovegood with the Cruciatus curse and made her hit her head on the floor so she would pass out. That is all."

"Alright, we will take a short break and will refresh the Veritaserum after that," the female Auror said, not completely suppressing the disgusted look on her face.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it, let me know in the comments, they make may day! :) Finally some Dramione action *phew* Hermione and Narcissa will probably have their talk in chapter 10 (originally it was planned for chapter 7 but some stuff needed to happen first) Cya next week! :)
Draco drew in a laboured breath, clenching his fists and trying to get rid of the pictures in his mind. The Aurors might have been disgusted, but he had to live with the guilt of having hurt so many people. He didn't know how Granger was able to look him in the eye much less defend him in front of the Wizengamot. He should have been dead like the others. He was no better than Rowle or Dolohov.

The return of the Aurors jolted Draco out of his guilt and back into the present. He accepted the glass of water and Veritaserum and drank it in one go.

"Mr. Malfoy we will continue now. Please answer the questions as accurately as possible. How many times did you attend the meetings of the Death Eaters?"

"Fourteen times if you count the official meetings. But many Death Eaters especially those who were wanted by the Ministry stayed permanently at Malfoy Manor as the Dark Lord made it his headquarters. Therefore they were all present for most dinners but during those nobody was tortured or killed," Draco answered in an emotionless voice, taking refuge in his mask of cold indifference.

"How often did you participate in torturing, killing or raping people during those meetings?"

"Four times."

"Can you give us the dates?"


"Thank you. Now, would you please describe your actions leading to the murder of Albus Dumbledore?"

Draco took a deep breath and began to tell the story. He knew he shouldn't stop and think about it or the horror of those memories would come back and he could not break down in front of these people.

On the other side of the door Hermione paced nervously.

"Why does it take so long? They were only supposed to retake his testimony not ask completely new questions! They are at it for nearly two hours now!" Hermione ranted under her breath.

"Why are you so nervous dear? I am sure everything is fine," Narcissa tried to calm her, but the younger witch shook her head.
"They wrote down the time of the last testimony on the protocol, it was one and a half hours!"

After many more turns and worried looks from Narcissa to her ashen faced husband the door finally opened and the Aurors and Draco came out. The latter looked tired but otherwise indifferent. He smirked when he took in Hermione's flustered face.

"Anxious to see me, Granger?" Draco drawled while looking at her coldly.

"Draco!" Narcissa exclaimed.

Hermione ignored him and turned to the Aurors. "May I have the protocol? I am his defendant."

The Aurors looked at each other and shrugged and the female Auror gave the parchment roll to Hermione. She took it and looked over the questions. They seemed to be the same as in the first testimony until she came to the last one. "Were your parents ever in real danger had you not obeyed?" Hermione asked turning to the Aurors. "That wasn't in the first testimony and therefore doesn't count. You were to ask exactly the same questions and check the answers not invent new questions!"

The male Auror looked at his partner. "We were instructed to ask more questions if we thought they would make the case clearer."

Hermione huffed and read the answer 'Yes, the Dark Lord demonstrated on more than one time that he always fulfilled his threats. For example when Yaxley wasn't able to get control over Thickness fast enough he was tortured. He wasn't even able to move on his own afterwards.' At least the answer wouldn't complicate the case as they surely had hoped when asking the question.

"Any more questions Miss Granger? We would like to continue with Mrs Malfoy," the male Auror asked impatiently. Hermione looked up from the protocol, duplicated it and gave it back to the Aurors. They luckily hadn't noticed the handy jinx she had put on the parchment to prevent them from pampering with it.

"Good luck, Narcissa," she said cheerfully and went back to sit with Mr. Malfoy.

The two remaining Malfoys didn't seem too happy to have her company but neither complained openly. Hermione had the feeling that they both were quite shaken from the interview.

While Draco had made his testimony Lucius hadn't spoken a word and Narcissa hadn't pressed him. So Hermione was rather surprised when she suddenly heard a voice next to her.

"What did you say? I'm sorry I was in thought," Hermione said turning to the elder Malfoy.

"I said that it was a good idea to prevent them from pampering with the protocol," Lucius repeated, still staring ahead and looking rather haunted.

"You noticed?" Hermione asked nervously.

"Only because I trained myself to notice everything done to important documents. It's a useful skill if you are trying to influence the government."

"Probably as well if one wants to work for the government," Hermione said under her breath but Malfoy seemed to have heard her anyway and chuckled.

"Quite right, few do. Makes it too easy to exchange documents," he coughed and drew in a shaky breath. The sound caught the attention of Draco on his other side who leaned down and asked his
father something quietly.  
"I am alright, just a bit weak. You have to understand that my lung isn't what it has been since Azkaban, Miss Granger. It's a wonder no one freezes to death there."

Hermione frowned and sighed. "I can imagine. I start to think that I will need to try to get into the Wizengamot directly instead of just working in the Ministry until I am able to really change something."

Mr. Malfoy chuckled again. "How you weren't placed in Slytherin is beyond me. You would have done well there. And please see it as a compliment. Andromeda was in Slytherin as well and she was never interested in the Dark Arts."

"I'll try to, Mr. Malfoy. But the Hat never considered me for Slytherin, only Ravenclaw or Gryffindor," Hermione answered stiffly. She had spoken about it with Harry when they were on the run and he also said she would have done well there if one only saw the traits the House favoured. Hermione had to admit that she was rather ambitious and cunning. She had kept a woman in a jar for weeks and left another to the Centaurs in the Forbidden Forest after all. On top of that, she always wanted to have the best grades to validate her place in the Wizarding World and when she learned about the dire situation of some house-elves she decided she wanted to change her new world.

"Maybe you're right, Mr. Malfoy. I still doubt that I would have been welcome though," Hermione said finally. Now it was Mr. Malfoy's turn to sigh.

"Probably. I should have noticed earlier how wrong our beliefs were. I was blinded by the power I already had as a pureblood and wanted more," the wizard turned to her. "I wanted to apologise for the way I treated you and your friends during our encounters. Part of it was because I wanted to ensure that everyone knew my family to be blood-supremacists should the- Voldemort ever return. But I also still believed the rubbish about blood purity and House rivalry. I am truly sorry that I raised my son to hate you based on your blood and House affiliation." Hermione looked stunned at the older Malfoy.

"I…I will accept your apology on one condition," she looked him squarely in the eyes. "You will show your change of heart not just in your words, but also your actions. I know from Narcissa's letters that you took a liking to your great-nephew and that's the reason I accept this in the first place."

Mr. Malfoy nodded. "That is only fair. And I like Edward quite a lot indeed. He is a precious little boy."

Hermione smiled and they fell back into silence.

Draco leaned against the wall and contemplated whether his father or Hermione would notice if he left. He didn't want to push his luck, but some time alone would probably help him to calm down his raging emotions. He hated himself for mocking Hermione earlier but he didn't want her or his parents to see how bad the testimony had been for him. He always fled into mockery and hate when cornered.

Having decided to pretend to leave for the toilets Draco pushed himself from the wall and mumbled his excuse. He fled to the staircase were he had sought refuge earlier and sat down. He put his head into his hands, trying to massage the headache from his temples. Why did they have to question whether his parents had truly been in danger! Draco was furious, how dare they not believe him! Taking deep, meditative breaths Draco tried to relax. He didn't want to snap at
Granger again. He hadn't sworn to be at least civil to her to go back to his behaviour from school the first moment he was distressed! A few minutes later he finally felt himself calm down.

With a last deep breath he was back on the staircase and noticed someone standing on the entrance. In one fluid motion he had his wand out and stood aiming at the intruder who wand- and voicelessly conjured a bluebell flame. Now Draco was able to see the face of his opponent and lowered his wand when he saw that it was Hermione.

"I'm sorry, I don't take well to surprises," he went down to her and stopped one step before her. "How did you find me?"

"Your father told me about this stairwell. He thought you would be here. Narcissa is just finishing some paperwork so they can search the Black Manor that belonged to her parents."

Draco nodded and went for the door when Hermione grabbed his wrist. He looked down to it and then back to her face. She let it go immediately but the determination in her eyes kept him from leaving.

"I watched you for a moment there and…if you ever want to talk…I will listen. I probably won't understand completely but I won't judge you like the Aurors did," Hermione said quietly and Draco found himself relaxing.

"Thank you. I am sorry that I snapped at you when I left the room," he answered and smiled a little at her relieved expression.

"I read the protocol. I would have been snappy as well," Hermione smirked at him in an expression he had seen on his mother's face too many times to not know what it meant: someone would pay for the questions they had asked him. "They can't just change the questions or add some if they want a repeat of what you said without Veritaserum. I will address that in court."

Draco smiled and soon they reached his parents and Andromeda who seemed to have joined them in the meantime

"Hermione! I see you found my missing son?" Narcissa asked with a scolding look at Draco.

"Yes, he was exactly where Mr. Malfoy thought he would be," Hermione answered in a light tone that betrayed nothing of the way she had found him. At least he hadn't been crying. He would have obliviated her if she had seen that!

"Alright, if everyone is here we will head home now," Andromeda said.

They left for the foyer and the fireplaces to floo home. Shortly before they were there Hermione touched his arm lightly and they both slowed down.

"Remember what I told you. I am sure your mother would happily include any letters you wish to send to me," she looked at him pleadingly. "And if you don't want to write me I will arrange it that you can write to one of your friends."

"Thank you, H- Granger," he answered quietly and continued a bit more loudly. "See you on Saturday. Father and I are already planning the meal."

The others said good bye as well and Hermione left directly after them.

Harry stared disbelievingly at the letter in his hand. Content, sender and time were so unexpected that he wasn't sure what to say, do or feel. Pansy Parkinson had hated him for nearly all of his time
in Hogwarts and now she send an apology for what happened? Unbelievable! Another letter with
the same handwriting was addressed to Hermione and he was really curious about its contents.

Harry reread the short message.

Potter,

I am sorry. I didn't need to torment you and your friends just because Draco didn't like you. I
should have looked past house prejudices and that you declined friendship from my oldest friend.
But I didn't. Because I was a child and I was raised to stick to Slytherins and believe in blood
supremacy. I hope you know that I didn't want to see you dead. That I didn't want to give you to the
Dark Lord because I thought his ideas were great. I feared for my life. I feared for the life of my
parents, friends and the parents of my friends. I hoped, never believed, that the Dark Lord would
leave us alone if we gave you to him. Please forgive me, at least for being terrified.

Yours,
Pansy Parkinson

When Harry finished the last sentence the floo roared to live and Hermione stumbled into the
kitchen. She steadied herself and then turned to Harry.

"Hey, did you have luck with the new house-elf?" she asked while taking off her jacket and
shaking out the soot.

"Yeah, I will introduce her tomorrow, if you managed to fill out all the paperwork," Harry
answered a bit distractedly.

"All done! I met the Malfoys afterwards, that's why I am so late. Is there mail for me?"

Harry gave her a letter written in a handwriting Hermione didn't recognise.

"It's from Pansy Parkinson, she apologised," Harry said sounding somewhat confused.

Hermione opened the letter.

Granger,

I heard about the things you did for Draco. That you saved him, that you spoke in his defence at his
hearing and that you befriended Narcissa. During the battle my father found me and took me, my
mother and my younger sister to Germany to wait till everything calmed down. But only three days
later he got a letter from Kingsley Shacklebolt asking him to return to his place in the Wizengamot.
We thought about it at length and decided to come back to Great Britain.

I am sure you wonder why I am telling you all that. My father was impressed by you and told me in
detail what happened in the hearing. It isn't easy to impress him. I only managed it once when I
learned to play his favourite piece on the harpsichord (never mind that I wasn't able to move my
fingers afterwards from the pain). Father asked me what I knew about you from school and when I
thought about it I noticed how terrible I treated you from the beginning. And what for? For your
parents? Because you are supposedly weak and dirty? Because you had bug-teeth and bushy hair?
I myself didn't look too good back then.

What I want to say is that I am sorry. Prejudices like mine started the last three wizarding wars
and I don't want to live in a world that is constantly at war. I am sure we will both return to
Hogwarts to complete our education. Maybe we will be able to look past old prejudices, be it blood
or house, and show the world that we want to begin a new era.
Yours,
Pansy Parkinson

Chapter End Notes

a/n2: Alright tell me what you think! I am truly looking forward to the next chapter, mostly because it's nearly finished and if I get comments for this chapter I will post it a few days early ;)
Hey guys! I am a bit disappointed in you. Well, no early post for ao3. viv-heart betaed this and I will tell you a secret: we’ll soon start a collaboration fic! I couldn't update yesterday because my wifi and my laptop don't like each other, sorry ;) Now, on to the story!

Hermione stared at the letter in her hand. The picture of Pansy Parkinson having sore fingers from playing the harpsichord was so unrealistic she nearly laughed. Hermione doubted that she really impressed Cassius Parkinson. What she had heard about the man from Arthur Weasley matched the picture Pansy described. But Arthur had said that he was not just strict and hard to please but also against Muggleborns.

"Do you think she really means it?" Harry asked doubtfully.

"I don't know. I mean…it seems so. But Slytherins are known for their ability to lie through their teeth," Hermione answered.

They contemplated the letters in silence for a moment and then resumed their evening activities. Pansy's letter reminded Hermione that this fall she would go back to Hogwarts to finish her education which in turn reminded her that neither Ron nor Harry would come with her. They never truly cared for their exams like she did and if they passed the Auror test they would be accepted without the usually required NEWTs.

Hermione wondered whether Draco would come back before she remembered asking him to do so. The last three weeks had been so busy that she felt as if it were three months. Preparing a defence, hunting down the first protocol of Draco's testimony and those relevant to his case. Hermione wondered when she had really stopped to think and realised that she hadn't. Sitting down on her bed she tried to breathe normally, suddenly seeing black spots and feeling as if her heart was going to break out of her ribcage. When Hermione rose her hands to pull back her hair she noticed that they shook and put them under her legs to stop the shaking. Taking deep breaths she slowly moved to her night table and retrieved a Calming Draught from there. Hermione opened it with unsteady hands and downed it. She felt the potion's effect immediately. Her hands stopped shaking and her breathing normalised.

A panic attack. But what had caused it? She had only thought about her busy weeks and…that she hadn't remembered to bring her parents back from Australia! Luckily the Draught was still in her system otherwise she would have collapsed right there. She hadn't once thought about bringing her parents' memories back!

Laying back she took deep breaths, closed her eyes and thanks to the calming effect of the potion soon drifted off to sleep.
have to fear the other witch's reaction, as Narcissa had been nothing if not kind to her since they started writing. They had prepared tea downstairs and opted for mugs instead of the smaller cups. They would need the warmth from them.

Hermione took a sip from her melissa-tea and wondered where she should start.

"When Dumbledore died I understood something with glaring clarity: we were at war and the Order couldn't afford to stand guard over my family anymore. I decided that I had to send them away. After weeks of research and testing I settled on a memory charm that would tell them that they were the childless Wilkins who had a very strong wish to leave for Australia as soon as possible. In my nightmare I saw their faces, how they went blank when I used the charm. That was the moment that told me clearly that I am no longer a child, not even a teen but an adult and basically an orphan." Silent tears were falling from her eyes and Hermione tried to compose herself. Narcissa took her hand and squeezed it reassuringly.

"I was fifteen when Andromeda returned home after staying with great-aunt Cassiopeia for a month, at least that was what we thought. She had stayed with Edward. Married him the day after they were out of school, in the muggle world and told us with cold defiance, but I saw the spark of desperate fear in her eyes. Andromeda knew she would be disinherited and I never understood why she chose the family dinner were that old hag Walburga would be as well," Narcissa's voice dropped to a whisper. "She cursed Andy, a really nasty one as well. Seeing my own sister cursed by our aunt opened my eyes, but I was weak and didn't do anything against it." Now it was Hermione that squeezed Narcissa's hand gently while the older woman cried silent tears. They sat in silence for a moment before Hermione continued her story.

"I went to the Burrow, where I had to act like nothing happened. It was incredibly hard but I managed, I always do. On our Horcrux hunt we had to break into the Ministry. I witnessed two trials and had to act like that unfairness was completely normal. I didn't dare to conjure a Patronus as to not give me away so I had to sit there, as close as possible to the toad and I couldn't do a thing. On our flight I splinched Ronald. I tried to get rid of Yaxley and wasn't concentrating enough. When we landed...there was so much blood and I couldn't do anything. My charms didn't help. It was only when Harry woke up that I remembered the Dittany in my bag and was able to heal him. But he needed bed rest and that doesn't exactly work on the run." Hermione chuckled drily and took another sip from her tea.

"Would you show me your Patronus?" Narcissa asked curiously. Hermione drew her wand and conjured her little otter that floated around them before vanishing through the window.

"It's beautiful," Narcissa whispered. "I never managed one, only a shield and even that wasn't really strong. Did you see Ronald splinched in your dream?" The older woman asked after taking a sip of her tea.

"Yes, I also felt the horror of not being able to heal my best friend again. We weren't able to destroy the locket and decided to always wear it, lest we lose it. It influenced our mood very negatively. Ron always had a short temper and with the locket and his still healing injury it got even worse. We constantly argued and...in late October he left us. He was jealous of the friendship between me and Harry. I was never able to forgive him for that. He looked so, so baleful when he left after the row. He wanted me to come with him, but I could never have abandoned Harry on this mission. It probably would have killed him," Hermione joked.

Narcissa chuckled. "That's what Lucius and I thought after seeing you in the Manor. You seemed to be their driving force. But I never knew that Mr. Weasley abandoned you. I understand completely that you can't forgive him. After all there were much more important things going on!"
The blond said with a haughty sniff which made Hermione chuckle.

"I have to admit, that I cried for a week, whenever Harry wasn't paying attention. After that only occasionally.

On Christmas we visited Godric's Hollow, as you surely know. I found the grave of Ignatius Peverell and Harry knelled at his parents' headstone. He looked so lost and so, I don't know, heartbroken. That look haunted me in my dreams ever since. I think for the first time I truly understood what it meant for Harry to have no parents, only his horrible aunt and uncle. It renewed my determination to fight Voldemort so that Harry could make peace with it. I really should have known that something was wrong with Mrs. Bagshot when she didn't utter a single word. When I found the corpse..." Hermione trailed off and swallowed hard.

"It stunk, she was half-decayed and something had eaten parts of her. I ran upstairs, but I was not fast enough and Nagini had already attacked Harry. Everything happened extremely fast and then we were in some forest I had been to once, Harry was bleeding from the bite wound and his wand was broken. I set up the wards while keeping an eye on him and then used Dittany to heal him. He wasn't unconscious but screaming and trashing. It was really hard to watch, but I didn't dare stun him or something. When he woke up and I had to tell him, that his wand had been destroyed...I felt horrible," when Hermione's voice broke Narcissa put her arm around the younger girl's shoulders.

"On Christmas your friend Luna Lovegood was brought in. She was tortured by Draco as you know, but after he knocked her out 'accidentally' Dolohov asked to be allowed to take her away. I don't have to explain what that would mean, do I?" Narcissa asked quietly and Hermione shook her head no.

"But Draco spoke up. You have to know that every Death Eater gets a 'present' when he gets his mark, but he never asked for one, claiming to not know what he wanted. There in front of the Dark Lord he spoke up, asking for Miss Lovegood. It was a risk, after all a higher ranking Death Eater had already asked for her, but the Dark – Voldemort was, probably, proud that Draco finally 'embraced' being a Death Eater and gave her to him. She was woken and told that she was now property of Draco Malfoy, it terrified her but...her mask of insanity and serenity is extremely good. I was only able to see it because I trained to see the tiniest hints of emotions. Miss Lovegood was allowed to stay in my son's room during his stay at the Manor and was returned to the dungeons afterwards. But no one ever touched or tortured her again, because she was his," Narcissa finished. Hermione looked at the other woman with surprise.

"I knew that he had saved her from more torture, but I didn't know the details. That was incredibly brave!" she exclaimed. Narcissa nodded, a smile on her face.

"Indeed. What happened after Harry woke up?"

"We apparated to the Forest of Dean where he took his time to heal. One night he took the first watch, claiming to not be able to sleep anyway. I gave him my wand, so he would be able to defend us if needed and went to sleep. Sometime in the night Harry saw a doe patronus and followed it out of the wards. He found the sword of Gryffindor in a pond in the forest, but the Horcrux tried to kill him, probably feeling the danger from it. Ron turned up, pulled Harry and the sword out of the pond and then destroyed the Horcrux.

When they came back to the camp Harry woke me and told me he had found someone. It turned out to be Ron. He smiled at me like nothing happened and didn't in the least understand, why I was so upset with him. Prattled on how he had been "splinched" and lost two fingernails which were re-growing by the time he came back to us. I was so incredibly angry and neither of the boys truly cared, brushing it off like nothing happened. They treated me like I should forgive and forget after
how he left me, again! Since third year he shunned me for at least a month or so and ignored my existence completely every year. Only in fifth year we didn't have that big of a row, but he constantly ridiculed me for S.P.E.W.,” Hermione explained. "I probably should have been used to it by then. But this time was worse and not being taken seriously didn't make it any better."

"Teenage boys can be really daft about feelings," Narcissa tried to console her. "I take it that that is the reason that you aren't a happy, engaged couple by now?"

Hermione nodded. "I kissed him in the Chamber of Secrets, but it felt like I was kissing my best friend and told him that. We hadn't time to dwell on it luckily, but I'm not sure whether he has truly understood or not."

"As far as I know the next thing you did were going to Mr. Lovegood's house, but we were never informed why," Narcissa asked without asking.

"Dumbledore gave me an annotated edition of the Tales of Beedle the Bard and there I found a symbol I didn't know. Harry remembered Mr. Lovegood wearing it at the wedding of Bill and Fleur and we decided to go ask him. We didn't know that Luna had been kidnapped and thought he was on the side of the Order. He told us about the Deathly Hallows. I am sure you know the legends?" Narcissa nodded. "Well, they are, apparently, true. Dumbledore was the master of the Elder Wand. Harry had inherited the Invisibility Cloak and the Gaunts, meaning the family of Tom Riddle's mother, had unknowingly owned the Resurrection Stone. We don't know whether or not Voldemort knew, but he turned the ring into a Horcrux. We can only speculate about him wanting to become Master of Death."

"Incredible. I fear I know the next happenings too well," Narcissa said sadly.

"Yes. Maybe you could tell me what happened afterwards at the Manor. Was Draco punished for not identifying us?" Hermione asked cautiously.

"I won't lie to you. Yes, he was. Badly. He was lucky that you saved Luna as well because otherwise they would have included her in the punishment. But we were all tortured. Bella especially, for allowing you to be taken with them. For throwing you away, out of the way of the chandelier. They didn't only use the Cruciatuas of course, but other curses as well. Especially the Lestrange brothers, Dolohov and a few others were quite adept at inventing very, very cruel curses and Voldemort always liked trying them on his own Death Eaters," Narcissa's voice shook with tears and old pain.

"I am sorry that you had to go through this," Hermione said earnestly and squeezed the older witch's hand.

"Thank you. If you don't mind, would you tell me how you three survived? I know you had your bag with the undetectable extension charm, but you can't conjure lasting food," Narcissa inquired softly.

"We, well I, developed a hunting hex that worked like a muggle gun and when we were close to small muggle villages we sometimes went scouring the trashcans. One time I wasn't careful enough and got caught by the owner of the restaurant. He beat me up. It felt worse than being attacked by magic, because I wasn't able to fight back. I didn't want to draw attention to me by using magic," the young woman said with a little annoyance in her tone. "After that we tried to use other ways."

"That sounds truly terrible. Would you explain that hunting hex to me? It's fascinating!"

"Well, I based it of a stunning spell. The incantation is 'Neco venatione' translated 'I kill for the
"That means you can't misuse it like *Avada Kedavra*, very good!" Narcissa exclaimed.

Hermione nodded and re-filled her mug with tea. They fell into a comfortable silence, both of them reflecting on what they had heard today.

"Thank you for trusting me, Hermione," Narcissa finally said in a very small voice. "I know there are people out there who cannot believe that I truly changed or that my husband and son are trying to do the same. I understand their reasoning. I would understand if Lucius has to go back to Azkaban, but I am truly thankful that you fulfilled my wish for a second chance."

Hermione smiled. "Of course. Harry and Ron thought at first that I am being naïve, but I am convinced that I did the right thing in trusting you. And I think Draco and Lucius will come around as well. They are both pretty intelligent after all," the young woman answered with a wink. They both laughed.

Hermione gazed out of the window and saw the men in question being lectured by a very stern looking Andromeda. Their similarity was striking but Hermione saw the small difference between the men as well. Not only their age and their experiences, but the features of Narcissa in Draco. His eyes seemed softer and he had always had a bit more mischief in them. He was also trying very much to remedy his actions previous to the life debt and was always civil if not friendly to her.

So much had changed. They were grown up, much more experienced. They learned how fatal prejudice could be and were trying to avoid it. Some more than others, but especially those who had been in Hogwarts during the last year wanted to make sure something like that never happened again.

**Chapter End Notes**

Alright, as always I hope you liked it and hope you will tell me in the comments. It only needs two words *nudge, nudge* ;) However, I wish you a great week and (if a bit late) Ramadan Kareem to those of you who participate! :)

Draco decided that being an intimidating woman was another thing all three Black sisters had in common. While Bellatrix had been frightening in her madness and Narcissa in her coldness towards people she deemed unworthy, Andromeda was intimidating in her own way. When she had caught the Malfoy men in the middle of their planning to turn the trees in the garden in one gigantic tree house, she hadn't shouted or turned cold like her sisters. She had pursed her lips, folded her arms, and tapped her right foot on the ground. Lucius had hurried to explain that they wanted to make a tree house for little Edward.

"A tree house in three trees? For a boy who is not even a month old?" she asked in a deceptively calm voice. Both men looked down and Draco fought the urge to shuffle his feet.

"It would need some time after all and we would like to make something for him," Lucius tried to explain but the normally regal man looked like a boy under the scrutiny of Andromeda. Finally the woman relaxed and both Malfoys released a breath they hadn't noticed they were holding.

"It's a nice idea Lucius, but remember his age. I think some toys would be more appropriate for now. Maybe you could build something when he is older," she said gently. Lucius nodded curtly and returned to the house while Draco thanked Andromeda for the advice. But a weight had settled on his breast and he imagined that his father had felt the same.

How could Andromeda be so sure that they would be there to see Teddy grow up? It was much more likely that they would sit in Azkaban, slowly freezing to death. Draco shook his head in an attempt to remove the depressing thoughts and returned to the house to get the book he was currently reading.

Draco met Hermione and his mother in the living room, where they were hugging each other, saying good bye. He just wanted to turn and leave when Hermione spotted him and called his name.

"Draco! Did you think about the suggestion I made yesterday?" she asked and he had no other option than to step into the living room and answer.

"Yes, I did, actually. I saw that Theo got probation and has to return to Hogwarts as well. I would like to write to him," Draco replied, still somewhat subdued, which got him a questioning look from Hermione, but to his relief she didn't ask about it.

"Alright, I will write to Mr. Shafiq. He is in charge of every case and should know whether you are allowed to write him," Hermione smiled at him reassuringly and bid him good bye as well.

"What was the lecture from Andromeda in the garden about?" Narcissa asked curiously when the green flames of the floo died down.
"Father and I were talking about building a tree house for Teddy and we were going a bit overboard when she came. Talking about using three trees…” Draco trailed off when he saw Narcissa's amused grin. "What?"

"Well, if Andromeda is anything like me, she would never allow you to use her poor plants like that, even if Edward wasn't just a month old," his mother said with twinkling eyes. "But maybe you can think of something more practical for a toddler."

Draco sighed, got his book and left the house to sit at the pond in the backyard.

When Hermione returned to Grimmauld Place, she found Harry, Ron, Kreacher and another elf sitting at the kitchen table.

"Ah, Miss Granger returned from her talk to Miss Cissy. Can Kreacher bring you something?" the old elf asked and Hermione declined with a smile. It astounded her time and again how much the elf had changed after the burden of his failure of his master had been taken from him.

"Maybe you could introduce me to our guest, Kreacher," Hermione suggested instead.

"Oh, yes! This is Tinna, Kreacher's apprentice! Her masters were killed in the Battle, but she is a young elf and is ready to work for Messrs. Potter and Weasley and Miss Granger."

The elf nodded her head. Like every house-elf she had bat-like ears and was rather scrawny. Tinna wore a clean, rosé pillow case. Her eyes were a lovely shape of blue and bigger than Kreacher's. She had a rather short nose and was smiling broadly at Hermione as she sat down at the head of the table.

"Did Kreacher explain to you why I think house-elves should be paid and get holidays?" the witch asked cautiously.

"Yes! Tinna understands that Miss wants the elves to be valued more. Tinna thinks that it is very good idea," the elf exclaimed with a high, but pleasant voice. "Tinna's former masters weren't nice people to other people, but Mistress gave Tinna fresh pillowcases every week and Master never hit Tinna or forced her to punish herself."

Hermione smiled at the elf lady. "That is good. What kind of payment would you accept? Pillowcases would be alright I gather. Is money okay?"

Tinna thought for a moment. "A pillowcase every month should be alright. Maybe a few knuts every week? Tinna doesn't need much for herself. Room and board is part of the contract, pillowcase now as well," the elf explained.

"Alright. Harry, Ron, what do you think?" Hermione asked. After all they should be included in the decision.

"I think that is a fair deal," Harry answered and Ron nodded.

"Good, would you allow us to pay you a sickle per week?" Hermione asked Tinna who nodded her head reluctantly. "How about holidays? Do you want a contingent of days you can use whenever you want or do you want specific days only?"

"Tinna would like days to use. House elves don't celebrate Christmas or other people festivities but we have our own. They move with the moon so they are different every year. Ten days?"
Hermione nodded and conjured a parchment where she wrote down everything they had just decided.

"Now, we need to sign it all so it becomes official," she announced and everyone took the quill in turn and signed the parchment. When the last signature was on it, the parchment glowed green for a moment and produced a copy for everyone.

"We need to send the original contract to the Ministry, but everyone has to keep his or her copy. Tinna, welcome to number 12 Grimmauld Place!" Hermione reached out to shake the elf's hand and smiled.

It felt strange to be an elf-owner now, but Hermione told herself sternly, that her contract was vastly different from a normal house-elf contract. This elf was no wizard's or witch's slave. She was a servant, who got paid and would be a valued member of the household.

Tinna told them, that there were most probably house-elf quarters in the attic. Kreacher confirmed it, but cautioned that nobody had been in there since the days of Elladora Black, who had started the tradition to behead house-elves, who got too old. She had also forced every elf to live in the kitchen so they would be there whenever needed. At the end of that explanation Hermione fumed, but Tinna calmed her down by telling her that she had never heard of anything like that before.

"Miss doesn't need to worry. Elves normally live in their own quarters, not in the kitchen," she said and patted Hermione's arm reassuringly. "Kreacher and Tinna will go up there and clean the quarters till we start preparing dinner if that is alright for you?"

Harry, Ron and Hermione nodded and the elves excused themselves.

"How was your visit, Hermione?" Ron asked, turning to her.

"It was nice. We talked a lot. I understand some things about her better now. And it really helped to talk to someone who would understand," Hermione answered with a smile that showed how relieved she was. "But that reminds me, I have to answer Parkinson and write to Mr. Shafiq!" Jumping up she was half through the door before she turned around to the boys sitting at the table.

"Sorry, can we talk later?" she asked rather sheepishly and grinned when Harry nodded and Ron made a shooing gesture at her while smiling. "You are the best!"

Upstairs in her room Hermione searched for the travel slant-top desk she had bought before the Horcrux search. After finding it, a few sheets of parchment as well as a quill and an inkpot, she settled down on her bed and started writing to the head of the Death Eater investigations. He had more cases than originally anticipated since quite a few Death Eaters had fled when they noticed that Harry was still alive.

Thoros Nott had been one of them. He had grabbed his son and apparated to Ireland. A few days after the news of the executions after the Battle of Hogwarts had gotten out to the public, he had turned himself and his son in.

While both had used dark magic in the fight, neither had used the Unforgivables so they weren't executed. Mr Nott Senior had been sent to Azkaban for the rest of his life because of the crimes he committed under the Dark Lord and for fleeing the prison the year prior. But Azkaban was guarded by humans and no longer by Dementors now so he at least wouldn't suffer from them.

Theodore Nott was pardoned for using dark magic because of the situation, his upbringing and age. He was on probation for two years and they would check his wand every month for traces of dark
With that in mind, Hermione penned her letter to Mr Shafiq.

Dear Mr Shafiq,

I write to you on behalf of Mr Draco Malfoy. As the Malfoys are currently residing in a safe-house no owl contact is allowed. For Mrs Narcissa Malfoy an exception was made to further the reconciliation effort between her and me. Mr Malfoy would like to contact Mr Theodore Nott, a childhood friend of his, to rebuild their friendship that was severed after the war. Mr Malfoy knows of the trial of Mr Nott and wanted to make sure that he is allowed to contact another former Death Eater. I would allow Mr Malfoy to use my owl, who is already allowed to cross the wards so there doesn't need to be a further security risk. I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Hermione Granger

She set the letter to dry and re-read Pansy Parkinson's letter, this time actually chuckling about the image the other witch drew with her words.

Hermione thought back to the Pansy she knew in school. Always sneering, not the most intelligent and a bully. She wore fine cloths and her Yule ball dress had surely been expensive. But how had she looked like in the Great Hall after Voldemort's announcement? Fearful, actually shaking from terror. Clutching a girl, not older than twelve to her side, maybe the mentioned sister? She had left the hall without arguing, her back straight and her head held high. So very different from the younger Pansy. Hermione sighed and decided to accept the apology. If she wanted to promote house unity it wouldn't do when they continued to hold their grudge against each other.

Parkinson,

I accept your apology. I know that writing to me is already a sign for your change of thought, but I want to be sure of it. Maybe we could meet for coffee next week and talk about it some more? I know that Diagon Alley is still under reconstruction so maybe in the Three Broomsticks? Or do you have a better idea? Three Broomsticks isn't exactly suited for a talk over coffee, is it? I am not sure whether I can truly believe that I impressed your father. What I heard about him indicates he is as hard to impress as you described him to be. I only defended someone worth defending from a ridiculous sentence, that's not much.
I am looking forward to your response,

Yours,
Hermione Granger

While preparing her letter to Mr Shafiq so Athena could deliver it when she returned from hunting, Hermione re-read her letter to Parkinson. Was it too much to request a meeting? She just had a feeling that it would make understanding easier. The written word came without the connotations of the spoken word and could be misinterpreted quite thoroughly.

After the two letters were ready for delivery, Hermione sat down with a book on curse-scars she had gotten from Bill and read in it until dinner time came around and Tinna asked her to come down.

Lucius had just settled in when Narcissa came from the bathroom and sat down on her side of the
bed. She started brushing her hair while looking into space. He wasn't sure why, but somehow this action grabbed his attention.

"What is it, dear?" Lucius asked calmly to not startle his wife.

"I was just thinking about what Andy said to you and Draco this afternoon, about building a tree house when Edward is older." They had talked about it during dinner again. "I saw your face. You fear that you won't be there to build one when he is older, right?" Narcissa asked softly, putting away her hairbrush and turning around to face him.

"I do. I want to do something good for him, so he doesn't remember both of his great-uncles as Azkaban inmates. He should know how much I like him, in that short time we stayed here," Lucius said with a grave voice. Narcissa shuffled closer and took his hand.

"Even though his parents and grandparents were blood traitors? Even though his father was a werewolf?"

"Yes," Lucius answered after a few minutes of silence. "It's time to move past that. I am not blind, I can see how the pureblood families struggle to bear children. Andromeda explained to me, that it is because of the inbreeding between the families. After she explained it, it was rather logical, but I wouldn't have guessed it."

Narcissa chuckled. "I am sure that was a rather…interesting conversation." Lucius scowled at that and she poked him gently in the arm. "It wasn't easy for me either, when I first noticed these things and at least Andromeda is happy to answer. Books tend to keep their mouths shut."

Lucius arched an eyebrow at his wife. "Those in the Malfoy library actually talk sometimes. But which books did you read? I assume none from said library?"

"No, when I was pregnant I liked to go to Flourish and Blots and there I got some books about the human anatomy. Rather fascinating, actually. But they also wrote about the consequences of inbreeding and after I had read about it, I saw the signs all around us. Only those of our friends who hadn't married a pureblood, but a halfblood had more than one child and no squib children," Narcissa explained. "I was shocked and refused to believe it at first. But after the third stillborn child I started to accept it. The famed purebloods would go extinct in a few generations."

"So we are really dependant on the muggleborns, isn't it ironic?" Lucius asked drily.

"Indeed. Now, let's sleep. You need to wake up early if you want to cook that meal you planned with Draco," Narcissa said and laid down.

Lucius sighed and laid down as well, giving her a good night kiss. He voicelessly set up the wards so she wouldn't wake up from his nightmares and finally extinguished the light.

Chapter End Notes

I am really curious what you think of Tinna :) If I am as motivated to write as I have been in the last few days the chapter may be up by monday, I wish you a nice week! :)
New beginnings and making amends

Chapter Notes

a/n1: Hi there, do you still know me? I know I have been gone for a bit, sorry :/ I had quite a lot to do and my psyche was a b*tch. But here is the new chapter and the next one is already drafted and will be up in a few days, promise! viv-heart continues to put up with my germanisms and just posted an awesome one-shot about Hermione and Pansy being friends, check it out! ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry shot out of his bed, his wand in his hand and ready to fight anyone in the room. But there was no one, not even Ginny because they decided that they needed a clean break. Harry sat back on his bed and tried to remember what woke him. When something rapped on his window he jumped up and realized why he was awake, but he also knew why he had reacted with drawing his wand. The rapping had sounded like aunt Petunia when she had woken him up when he still lived in the cupboard under the stairs.

Sighing Harry opened the window to let in a regal looking great grey owl. He recognised it as the Parkinson family owl which confused him. Having answered Pansy rather curtly on her note, he hadn't expected her to write him again. He offered the owl a few owl treats and took the two letters from its leg. One was for Hermione, the other for him.

Potter,

Thank you for forgiving me, many don't. I wrote to those who were at Hogwarts and in the DA in the last year and only Longbottom forgave me, so it really means a great deal to me that you do. Aside from you I only wrote to Weasley and Granger, who were with you and not at Hogwarts as well. Weasley didn't even answer. I am not even sure why I care so much about it, it's like an itch I can't truly reach.

Are you returning to Hogwarts for your last year? I know Shacklebolt offered Auror positions to all seventeen-year-olds who fought on his side of the war. To be honest I wouldn't join even if I could. I will definitely need one quiet year at Hogwarts and I wouldn't be sad if I never again had to encounter dark wizards and witches.

(I don't even know why I am telling you this stuff)

Yours,

Pansy

Harry read the letter three times, only then noticing that the owl had perched on his chair, waiting for him to write an answer. He couldn't believe it! Parkinson, who had opposed him all through school, was writing to him as if they were friends! But on the other hand what she wrote about the Auror training had struck something in him. Harry sat on his bed, the letter still in his hands.

Why did he want to join the Aurors? Sure, he had said so when he was in fifth year, preparing for his OWL's, but now? After he had fought a war, fought so many dark wizards and witches he couldn't count them anymore? Harry suddenly wasn't so sure anymore. He hadn't gotten the results
of his test at the Auror office back yet, but he was convinced that he managed just fine.

Falling back and staring at the ceiling Harry thought about his reasons to join the Aurors. He had wanted to hunt dark wizards and save people from them. It was expected of him. After all he had skipped his last school year to hunt the darkest wizard Great Britain had seen for centuries.

Ron would join for sure, he was looking forward to it.

But what did Harry want? He wanted to grieve. He hadn't truly had a chance to grieve properly yet. There had always been something else that had needed his attention. If they were accepted, the Auror training would start on the first of July, giving him only a month and a half to come to terms with this new world before the hunting and being needed started anew.

Harry was sick of it. He had sacrificed his youth to the hunt of Voldemort. Ever since the wizard had returned Harry's thoughts had been weighted down by his presence. Always waiting for his scar to hurt, always waiting to hear of more murders and vanishings in the news.

Standing back up Harry decided that he would take his last year and decide on his career afterwards. If he still wanted to be an Auror they surely would allow him that and if he chose another career he would at least have the NEWT's to do so. Only being the "Boy who lived" wouldn't get him too far.

Parkinson,

I don't think I will join the Aurors just yet. You are right (don't get used to it), I think I would enjoy a quiet year at Hogwarts as well, getting used to this new world and all.
I think I understand why so many people didn't accept your apology. You tormented most of them since their first year and those who were at Hogwarts in our fifth year surely remember your behaviour back then. I heard that you were one of the Carrows' favourites. That probably makes it even worse.
Why are you writing me in the middle of the night? It is one a.m. and normal people sleep at that time! And what is your owl's name?

Harry

Lucius woke up early. He had dreamt of Azkaban and while he lay in bed, trying to calm down, he wasn't sure whether it was a memory or a vision. Then he remembered having read that the Dementors had been banned from Azkaban forever. The Prophet claimed that the Department of Mysteries had worked on finding out what they truly were for years. Finally they had concluded that they were the tortured and bound bodies of the sailors Ekrizdis had lured to Azkaban centuries ago and nobody was sure what happened to their souls. After more years of studying old cuneiform writings, the Unspeakables found a Sumerian ritual to get soul-sucking creatures that were used as punishment from the gods. Lucius thought that something like that would have to be magic as dark as Horcruxes, if not worse. They would have definitely needed human sacrifices for it.
The Prophet didn't answer the question of how the Dementors had been banned, just that they were gone…*

Shaking these dark thoughts off, Lucius got up and prepared his things for his morning run. He had remembered how good it had felt in his youth and decided to start again while he was still able to.

When Lucius returned inside he was exhausted. He felt all of his forty-five years and no training
aside from duelling in the last seventeen years. He got his everyday clothes and went to take a
shower, passing his wife and her sister in the upper floor corridor. They were discussing something
quietly and Andromeda balanced Edward on her hip.

Stepping out of the shower he found Narcissa waiting for him, sitting on the closed toilet lid. She
smiled and got up while he towelled himself dry.

"How do you feel after your first run since Draco was a baby?" Narcissa asked casually while
seemingly checking her make-up in the rather fogged mirror.

"Exhausted and I think I will have sore muscles tomorrow, but after the shower I feel much more
alive," he answered pulling on his underpants.

Narcissa chuckled. "Well, I may have a cure for you."

Lucius raised an eyebrow and stopped dressing to try and read his wife's face. Groaning he asked
"What is the catch?"

"You will be on your best behaviour towards Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley and Hermione all day. One
slip and you get the ointment, but you will have to apply it yourself. Two slips only half of the
bottle and so on," Narcissa said frowning at him sternly.

"You are a true Slytherin, my dear. Lucky for you I already decided to be my most charming to all
of them," Lucius answered and put an arm around his wife, hugging her to his side. "I understand
why you are concerned, but I think I can reign in my temper."

"I hope so. The cooking will tire you and you are so easily angered when you are tired. I just…I
really like having you here with me and not in Azkaban," Narcissa said while hiding her face in his
side, sniffing quietly.

"I know, I will do everything I can to stay with you and Draco," he said putting the other arm
around her as well and holding her tight. After a while Lucius released her. "I actually wanted to
ask you something. With most of our stuff either confiscated due to Dark magic residue or
destroyed thanks to our gracious guests I don't think I would feel much at home in the Manor.
Maybe we could start anew in a bigger city? A nice townhouse would still be big enough for
everything and we would be free of the history in the Manor and I am sure we could-

Lucius was interrupted by Narcissa's lips on his, kissing him fiercely.

"Oh yes, please Lucius! We could keep the Manor and reconstruct so Draco can live there one day
if he wants to. But I won't cry one tear for leaving that dreadful house behind! I think between the
two of us we should have enough money for everything," Narcissa beamed at him looking ten
years younger and as enthusiastic as she was back in school.

"Alright, we will have to discuss this with Draco of course, but I have an inking that he will have
no objections. Now, may I continue to dress? I don't think cooking basically naked would be
healthy."

Narcissa chuckled and gave him a last quick kiss, before leaving him to his clothes and thoughts.
Lucius tried to remember how often he had seen her so happy in the years since Voldemort's return.
He could count the moments on one hand and vowed to change that. She looked so young and
stunning when she smiled like that. Of course Lucius always thought her to be the most beautiful
woman alive, but this was different. Narcissa had seemed to glow from the inside as well and he just loved that.

Coming down to the kitchen he heard Draco fretting about his cooking charms skills and smiled. He stepped inside and did only attract Edward's attention, who sat unwatched in his grand-mother's arms, as the two women and his son were bend over a book on the kitchen table.

Picking up little Edward Lucius watched the scene with barely noticeable mirth in his eyes.

"They seem to have forgotten us, don't you think Edward?" he whispered into the baby's ear. It made baby-sounds and Lucius wasn't entirely sure whether they were positive. He had gotten better at interpreting Edward's moods but when Draco had been his age he hadn't been there much. The Dark Lord had sent him to missions rather often back then.

"Well, will poor Edward here have to wait forever for his meal or are we going to start making breakfast?" Lucius drawled in his best detached voice and raised his eyebrow at the two women looking up rather startled.

"Oh, Lucius, I didn't hear you coming in! When did you get Teddy?" Andromeda inquired rather baffled.

"He looked rather lost, so I gently pried him out of your arms," Lucius said with an honest smile. He had learned that Andromeda reacted rather badly on his normally more subtle showing of feelings.

"Alright, may I have him back?" Andromeda asked, smiling as well, and Lucius tried to give the baby back to her, but Edward protest loudly and took hold of Lucius' hair. Narcissa tried to hide her smile behind her hand when Edward changed his hair into the platinum blonde of the Malfoy family. Sighing Andromeda gave up and just went to the table were Edward's already prepared bottle stood.

While feeding the baby Lucius thought about the milk he was feeding him. Like many purebloods he had never had any biology lessons aside from Herbology, but he was rather sure that human milk surely was different from animal milk. Different species and all.

"Andromeda, what am I actually feeding Edward?" Lucius asked the woman bustling through the kitchen, preparing breakfast.

"Hm? Oh, Narcissa didn't tell you? It's a substitute for breast milk the muggles invented for women who weren't able or not willing to breast feed their children," Andromeda answered not stopping in her actions.

Lucius looked up abruptly. "Is there nothing magical? I imagine it would be more advanced than the muggle stuff."

"Actually there isn't," Andromeda explained while setting the table. "The stuff potion companies sell is comparable to the substitutes the muggles used up to the 1930s. It isn't balanced enough for only feeding that and especially not for a one month old infant. There are potions St. Mungo's uses for the orphans, but their ingredients are too expensive for me. If a child is orphaned this young the family normally searches a wet nurse. I probably could find one even in these troubled times, but honestly, who would take the child of a werewolf, even if it was tested negatively on
“Lycanthropy.”

Lucius looked on pensively.

“What are you thinking, father?” Draco inquired, sitting down next to him and putting down the last plate with sausages.

“Well, we have an apothecary, don't we? And I have a feeling the Death Eaters orphaned not just Edward really young. Later on we could export the potion to countries were war is currently a problem,” Lucius explained accepting a towel from Andromeda to put over his shoulder so Edward could burp. "It would be a good way to make amends and strengthen our finances.”

When the infant had finished Narcissa helped Lucius vanishing the mess and laying the baby down in his crib so they could eat. Andromeda turned down the radio so they could talk better and looked curiously at Lucius.

“You know inventing a potion is a lot of work? Even if you have similar potions at hand?” she asked with interest.

“I do. Severus Snape was a good friend of mine and the youngest potions master to ever achieve his mastery. But I don't want to do it myself,” Andromeda frowned at that. "Don't misunderstand me, I am not bad at Potions, but this needs a master with fresh ideas. I was thinking of a potions master who had a basic grasp of muggle science and could study the muggle substitute. After all it is obviously much better than the magical thing."

Draco sniggered at that. "I could have never imagined I would hear these words from your mouth, father," he commented drily. "But I actually think that it is a good idea. Maybe you could approach Professor Slughorn on the subject. I am sure he knows the right people."

Andromeda chewed slowly, obviously thinking about the idea. "Maybe I should bring you in contact with some healers as well. They know more about what is good for an infant than a potions master. I actually think I know just the right person. She is the mother of a recent Hogwarts graduate, Cho Chang? Hsiao-Ying Chang, the mother, mainly works as a midwife now."

"I remember her working for the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes some time ago. When did she change profession?” Lucius inquired.

"After Madam Umbridge threatened Cho to sack her mother if she didn't cooperate and she saw Voldemort in the atrium she didn't want to work for a Ministry that ignored such a threat for so long,” Andromeda explained. "She trained as a healer and midwife alongside me shortly before the First War and St. Mungo's gladly accepted her."

"I am sure a healer is a good addition to any team at the DMAC,” Narcissa said sipping her tea.

They finished their breakfast talking about other candidates for such a project and the facilities they would need.

Chapter End Notes
a/n2: As always I hope you liked it! Lucius POV actually was planned to be A LOT shorter, that's also the reason the next chapter is already drafted, but he didn't want to shut up and this is the result *sighs dramatically*

*If you want to know more about the Dementors creation and vanishing read my story "On the subject of Dementors", but be warned that is no nice stuff (Dementors aren't nice after all)

Well, I will be working on a presentation for university tomorrow, but I think I will have time to write anyway. See ya soon and Eid Mubarak! :)
Narcissa watched Lucius thoughtfully all through breakfast. Something didn't sit right with her about this. She knew that her husband was able to be thoughtful and kind, but remembering the fuss he had made after learning that a werewolf had taught his son for a year (and had been admittedly the best teacher in DADA Draco had ever had), she couldn't imagine him supporting a half-werewolf. He had just started to change his views on muggleborns, still sometimes slipping up and saying thoughtlessly derogatory.

The witch decided that she would ask him that evening after she had massaged the lotion for his muscles in, as he would be relaxed and unguarded then. Narcissa really hoped that he was genuine about wanting to develop infant formula. The wizarding world definitely needed it and Malfoy Industries had the finances to achieve it.

For now Narcissa resumed dusting the living room magically. One really could think generations of house-witches would have developed a charm that removed all dust with one swish, but no, one had to go over every inch of the surface manually. The only advantage to using a cloth was that you didn't need to shake the dust from your wand afterwards. Narcissa wondered idly whether she should breach the topic with Hermione, the young witch was brilliant and had already shown the capability to invent new spells if she needed them.

Suddenly, Narcissa heard a crash and a yell from the kitchen. Years of living in a house full of Death Eaters kicked in and she gripped her wand more tightly before walking towards the kitchen. When she opened the door Narcissa didn't know how to react. She stood in the doorway gaping until she heard Andromeda heading inside through the back door.

"What happened here?" Narcissa asked sternly, crossing her arms, tapping her foot and raising her eyebrow. She knew full well that Andromeda assumed a similar stance next to her. After all they had been raised by the same mother.

"Just a little accident, two charms colliding," Lucius explained picking himself up from the floor.

"Sorry for startling you, mother, Andromeda," Draco said in a rather timid voice, looking just as guilty as his father.

Andromeda sighed. "It's alright. Accidents happen. Just be more careful and clean this mess up. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," they chorused and Narcissa had to hide a grin behind her hand. Her sister had the talent to reduce the proudest men to meek little boys if she wanted to. Only Ted had been able to stand up to her, which was probably the reason she married him.
Satisfied that the men were starting to clean Andromeda turned on her heel and left for the garden. A few days ago she had confided to Narcissa that working in the garden was the only way of shutting her thoughts up. Clutching her wand to her chest Narcissa returned to the living room and sat down on one of the couches. She hadn't dusted the whole room yet, but somehow all energy had left her and she just wanted to remain where she was.

Scolding herself for giving in to such a foolish impulse Narcissa stood back up and continued her cleaning.

Granger,

Thank you for accepting my apology. Coffee sounds good. Maybe in Muggle London? I don't know a café there but I think I wouldn't be very welcome in the wizarding world anyway. Next Wednesday I will be in London. Maybe you know something close to Diagon Alley? I don't think I trust muggle transportation just yet. Well, my father is a complicated man. Just watch him at Draco's trial and you will see that you have his approval. I hope you have a nice weekend.

Pansy

Hermione read the short letter again and smiled. She had planned to support the Slytherin in her choice to embrace this new world, but she had never expected that the other would want to meet in Muggle London. Hermione completely understood Parkinson's qualms about muggle transportation. If she only knew the Knight Bus and wizarding cars she would be wary as well. But would she be able to find something nice and not too swamped with tourists near Charing Cross Road? Maybe she should ask her parents…

Hermione caught herself. No, she couldn't ask them just yet. She had to go to Australia first. Heaving a sigh Hermione took a sip from her tea and thought about who else she might ask when the floo flared up and someone stumbled through.

Harry, Ron and Hermione were up and with wands trained on the newcomer before the green flames died down.

"Who are you and how did you get the address of this place?" Harry asked with a tight voice, his wand calmly pointed at the other person's heart.

"Wai', wai'...Jus' have 'o find my wand," the man slurred while frantically searching his robes. "Ah, there we have y'." And with a swish of it George Weasley was more or less standing in front of them.

"Huh, why have your wands ou'? 'S no war anymore, is't?" he swayed where he stood and laughed hysterically. "Nothing 'errible 'o happen anymore, righ'?" he asked bitterly before answering his own question: "Then why will the damn demons no' leave?"

"Tinna? Prepare the first room on the next floor and put a bucket next to the bed." Hermione said. The elf-lady nodded and popped away.

"Kreacher, there is a sobering potion in my potions cupboard. Could you bring it to me?" Seconds later the old elf was back and gave Hermione the bottle, which she had brewed and labelled neatly
in the first days after the war ended. She had had a feeling that someone would get severely drunk.

"George, please sit down," Hermione approached him and gently pressed him into a chair at the table. "How long have you been drinking?"

"Don' know, wha' day 's t?'" he slurred.

"Saturday. About eight o' clock"

"Thursday," he replied after thinking for a bit.

"Well, bottoms up," Hermione said with false cheer when she gave him the uncorked potion.

"Awful stuff. Seriously Granger, don't you know Firewhis-," George looked up and seemed much clearer suddenly. "Granger? Why are you here? Thought you were hunting Horcruxes?"

"George, the war is over for three weeks now," Hermione answered as gently as possible and looked up to Harry and Ron for help.

"Nah, I was just on a mission and got smashed with Lee and Angie and Fred, where is Fred?" George said looking around in confusion.

"Don't you remember?" Ron asked, horror evident in his voice.

"Remember what?" George looked suspiciously from one to the other.

"We won the war, and I defeated Voldemort," Harry said his voice nearly as gentle as Hermione's. "But Fred died."

"No, that can't be! He was just behind me, when I flooed over," George exclaimed and turned around as if to look for him.

Tinna appeared at the door and announced that the room was ready for Mister Weasley. Hermione tried to lift him up but she had no chance against the man who was much bigger than her and had been a Beater all through his school years.

"Bu' Freddie 's always there!" he said in a wail and looked up to Hermione with tear-filled eyes, gripping her hands.

"I know, darling. And he will always be here, but for now you just can't see him," she reassured him calmly while he clung to her hands almost painfully. "Now, why don't you take a nap? You look like you have been awake all night and could use some sleep."

"I miss him, you know?" George said calmly while standing up. His brother and Harry came around the table to support him upstairs.

"Of course you do. Let Harry and Ron show you were you can sleep. Will you do that for me?" Hermione asked and smiled up at him. Suddenly she was enveloped in a strong hug.

"You are so kind, 'Mione. Always thinking of others. Don't forget yourself, alright?" George asked with tears evident in his voice and Hermione hugged him back.
"I won't, I promise. Now, go with Harry and Ron."

When the men had left the kitchen Hermione fell onto a chair and put her head in her hands. He had made himself forget his twin's death, drunk so much that he forgot where and, most importantly, when he was. This was bad, really bad. Being an only child Hermione couldn't imagine his pain, but she had an inkling that the pain inflicted upon her by Bellatrix didn't even come close.

Rubbing her face she got up and walked over to the fire to floo Molly and tell her that George was extremely drunk and at Grimmauld Place. Hopefully the witch could come over and help them, because they only had so much time before they had to get ready for lunch at Andromeda's.

Having called the Burrow and informed Molly Hermione sat down and made a list of things they would need to do in the next weeks to renovate the ancient house. She really hoped they could manage without professionals because they tended to be costly and she would need all her money for the flight to Australia.

Suddenly she remembered that the next date for Draco's case was in the next week. She would need to go through all the statements that had been made again to make sure nothing had changed in a bad way. Groaning she let her head fall on the table.

"Oi, everything alright with you, 'Mione?" Ron called as he entered the kitchen followed by Harry.

"Yes, just so much to do. How is George?" she asked sitting up.

"Sleeping. He vomited once and looked a lot better afterwards," Ron answered. "Tinna decided to keep an eye on him while inspecting the rooms on that floor. She wants to find out what she can do on her own and where she would need help from either us or Kreacher."

Hermione nodded and looked over to Harry who was chuckling.

"Care to share?" she asked amused.

"No, I don't think so," Harry answered crisply folding a letter and putting it in his pocket. "I wanted to sort through Sirius' room today before we head over to Andromeda. I think I will start now."

"Alright, Ron, did you have a plan?"

"Yup, I will go through Regulus' things and sort them. I think maybe Kreacher would like to keep a few things to remind him of his former master," he said with a smile to the old elf who was currently levitating their dishes into the sink where they were washing themselves.

"Kreacher would appreciate that. Thank you Mister Weasley," he answered with a small bow to Ron.

"Good. I think I will start on the study next to the library. I don't think Mrs Weasley did more than clean the doxies out of it," Hermione stated satisfied with the boys' independence. "But remember we have to be at Andromeda's half past twelve!"

"Yes, ma'am!" the boys answered in unison and left the kitchen.
Draco looked at the mashed potatoes in the pot. There was a lot of them. To be honest one probably could feed an army with that amount of mashed potatoes.

"How is the meat proceeding?" he asked his father gingerly.

"Good. I think," Lucius answered and glanced at his son a bit unsure. "The beans?"

"They are ready and taste good," Draco said and popped one in his mouth.

"Well, that's at least something," his father replied and looked at the meat that was cooking in the pan.

They exchanged a look and started to laugh until the famous Malfoy self-control caught up and they calmed down again. But a keen observer could see the corners of their mouths twitching.

Draco cast a heating charm over the food, so it would be as warm as it had been when it was finished when they served it and turned to their next problem: dessert. They had thought to make an easy chocolate cake but soon Lucius had found out that he had no talent what so ever for baking charms and Draco had never tried them before.

"Do you think I could ask mother to help us?" he asked his father cheerfully.

Lucius looked up from the meat and saw what his son meant. "I actually think you should if you want that cake to be edible."

Draco sighed. "She won't let us hear the last of it," he announced in a grave voice and his father nodded with a sombre face.

Nevertheless Draco dusted his hands of and went to the living room in search of his mother. She had settled down on the couch and was reading a book. When he came in she marked the page and looked up with an eyebrow raised in question.

"Father and I need your help," Draco admitted grudgingly.

"What kind of help?" Narcissa asked with a smile tugging at her lips.

"We know that we said that we would prepare the whole meal on our own. But neither of us is able to manage the baking spells and we don't want to waste more ingredients. Would you please prepare the chocolate cake?" he asked with his best pleading look, and even though the war had changed him he was sure that he still was very good at it.

"Alright," Narcissa said now smiling openly. "But I will teach you two the spells for the next time, because I won't always be around to help you."

"Thank you, mother!" Draco beamed at her and she chuckled.

"I see a huge burden has been lifted from your shoulders," Narcissa said teasingly. She stood up, put the book back on the shelf and followed him into the kitchen. "Let's do this!"

Around noon Andromeda came in from the garden and got Teddy his lunch. She fed him in Ted's office where no Malfoy tried to finish the last things for the meal or to set the table. When she returned with a sleepy but happy baby that was put into the crib in the living room, the table had been set and the steaming dishes were arranged on it.
"Seems to me that we are ready for our guests," Andromeda said and smiled proudly at the two Malfoy men.

Chapter End Notes

What did you think of my attempt on drunken speech? I hope it wasn't too bad, I only ever heard German drunks^^" What do you think how good the food prepared by Draco and Lucius will be? Tell me in the reviews! :) Cya (hopefully) soon! :)
"Harry! Ron! We need to go now!" Hermione called up the stairs impatiently.

"I can't find my shirt!" Harry shouted back and Tinna who just closed the door to George's room looked at Hermione with the universal female exasperation concerning any males of any species.

"Shall Tinna go upstairs and help Master Potter?" she asked and Hermione nodded vigorously. They weren't running late just yet but she wanted to be sure they wouldn't.

A minute later an annoyed Ron and a startled Harry were apparated in front of Hermione.

"Tinna made sure Masters are dressed properly and on time," the elf-lady said and smiled brightly up to Hermione.

"Thank you Tinna, you are a great help! How is George doing?" Hermione asked while they went into the kitchen.

"Mister Weasley is still asleep. Tinna will tell Mrs. Weasley when he wakes up," Tinna reassured her. "You must go now, it is half past twelve."

The three teenagers waved good-bye and flooed over to Andromeda's house. Of course flooing wasn't an exactly clean way of travelling but they wouldn't have to walk to the house.

At Tonks Cottage they were welcomed by Narcissa and Andromeda with Teddy who sat on the couch by the fire.

"Hello Andromeda!" Harry said as soon as they had dusted themselves of and walked over to give the grand-mother of his god-son a hug. "How are the Malfoys behaving? You can tell me the truth, I went to school with the ferret for six years!" he said with a good natured smile.

"Mr Potter, is that a way to speak of my son in front of his mother?" Narcissa chastised him with a mock glare.

"I am sorry Mrs Malfoy, but he has yet to convince me of his good qualities," Harry answered truthfully albeit smiling.

Narcissa sniffed haughtily and turned to Hermione and Ron. "Welcome Hermione, Mr Weasley! I hope you had a productive week. I heard of your plans to renovate the Black townhouse. I am sure it is a lot of work," she said in an attempt to diffuse the tension that had come over them after
Harry's remark.

"We only made plans this week. But you are right, it will probably occupy our whole summer or even longer, even with the help from Tinna and Kreacher," Hermione answered. Ron nodded stiffly, still unused to the Malfoys being civil or friendly.

"Well, I will tell the men that we are ready to eat," Andromeda said into the uncomfortable silence and vanished into the hall while the others moved to the dining table in a corner of the room.

"Now, Hermione tells me that both of you tried out for Auror training this week. Did you get your results yet?" Narcissa asked after they sat down trying to start a conversation.

"No, not yet," Harry answered glancing at Ron.

Hermione frowned slightly. Something was odd, but she didn't get a chance to ask. Draco, Mr Malfoy and Andromeda came into the living room and settled down around the table after Andromeda had put Teddy into his crib.

"Lucius, would you do us the honour to serve the meal you and Draco cooked?" Andromeda inquired and Mr. Malfoy obliged without question.

Everyone got a slice of roast veal, green beans and mashed potatoes with a brown sauce. They started eating and after a few bites Hermione had to admit that the Malfoys had done well, especially since it was their first big meal.

"I really like the roast," Harry said with a polite smile and Mr Malfoy accepted the compliment with a slight smile and a nod. Ron asked whether he could have another slice and winked at Hermione when she looked at him.

"Harry is right, it is really good. Although it can't hope to compete with Mum's," he said with a grin.

"I imagine Mrs Weasley had got more time to practice hers," Narcissa said a bit stiffly.

"Probably," Hermione agreed. "But I can tell you that my first try to do a roast was much worse."

Harry and Ron chuckled and the Malfoys relaxed a bit and smiled.

"No offence, but didn't Harry tell me that your cooking was one of the reasons you three argued so much?" Andromeda asked teasingly.

"You can only do so much with mushrooms and the odd rabbit or fish," Hermione defended herself. "And at that point I had doubled the spices so often that they barely tasted like anything."

"Considering that it was definitely haute cuisine," Harry admitted drily and Ron chuckled.

"Let's talk about something less depressing," Narcissa suggested.

Everyone fell silent in contemplation. Hermione looked at the others and saw that they were just as unable to think of anything cheerful and safe to speak about as she was.

"Oh, Hermione, there was something I wanted to ask you," Narcissa finally said.

"What about?" the younger witch asked glad to be able to break the silence around the table.

"You mentioned something in your letters I didn't completely understand. I guessed from the
context that it is a place where children go, but what is a 'kindergarten'?

Harry looked up surprised. "It is a place where parents sent their kids while they are at work. Most muggle kids go there," he answered.

"What Harry said. Also they prepare the kids for school, which starts at age six," Hermione added and looked at the faces of the baffled Malfoys and Ron. Andromeda just smiled.

"Ted actually wanted to send Nymphadora there but I wanted to have my daughter with me. We did send her to a primary school though," Andromeda said. "Everyone finished?"

They nodded and Andromeda levitated the plates to the kitchen. When she came back everyone had settled on the couches.

"Is it alright if I turn on the radio? The silences would be less awkward," she said with a wink and everyone chuckled or at least smiled ruefully.

As Andromeda turned on the radio, Hermione recognised a muggle station and smiled. It was probably better, they wouldn't comment on the aftermath of the war. A silence stretched out until the next song began and both she and Harry began to hum along instantly.

Andromeda smiled but the Malfoys and Ron seemed a little confused and she explained. "It's Queen. They are a famous muggle band and this song is one of their best ones."

Harry and Hermione had gone over to mouthing the text along and grinned at each other when they noticed it. Not wanting to shock the Malfoys or Ron, or wake up Teddy they refrained from singing out loud, but just barely. Bohemian Rhapsody was just too awesome to not get carried away and by the end of the song they were quietly singing along and Andromeda had joined in with a grin on her face as well.

"They seem rather talented," Narcissa conceded stiffly after the song ended and Hermione suddenly realised that their behaviour must have bewildered the Malfoys. The wizarding world of course knew pop and rock music but they seemed to be far less enthusiastic about it than the muggles. Ron at least heard his mother singing along to Celestina Warbeck regularly, so he probably understood.

"How did you manage to receive a muggle station in such a heavily warded house?" Harry asked curiously, trying to diffuse the tension once again.

Andromeda smiled sadly. "Ted always liked muggle music more and he wanted to hear some positive news, even if they were from the muggle world, during the war. Now the wards will admit any radio station frequency. He was working on a TV when he chose to run to keep his family safe," Andromeda sniffed heavily and Narcissa rested a hand on her sister's shoulder.

"I am so sorry you had to go through this, Andy," she said softly, comfortingly and Andromeda smiled at her shakily.

"Thank you, Cissa."

"If it is no bother, maybe you could tell us how you and Ted met," Harry inquired gently and Ron nodded his assent.

"In detention actually," Andromeda chuckled. "It was the first and only time I ever had detention. I was out late and running close to curfew when a furious Gryffindor prefect saw me and decided that my running late was worthy of point-loss."
"You have to admit that Ignatius Weasley took a certain pleasure in punishing Slytherins," Mr Malfoy said with the faintest trace of a smile.

Andromeda snorted in an unladylike fashion. "That he did. Especially from the famous Black sisters. I can't exactly blame him after Bella, but talking back to him and telling him that it wasn't curfew yet landed me in detention with Professor Carcer. He was the DADA professor at that time and even Severus Snape was civil compared to him," at that she trailed off a bit and Mr Malfoy continued.

"He was an utter arse and loved Gryffindors as much as Severus loved his Slytherins. His detentions were not exactly bodily punishment, but he made students duel against each other for hours," he told them and Hermione was nearly sure that they all heard the sharp etch to his voice and that she wasn't the only one wondering what had happened during those duels.

Andromeda had caught herself and nodded at Mr Malfoy in gratitude. "Ted tended to use Transfiguration while duelling and I was completely intrigued. I had never once seen someone duel with nearly no dark magic at all and still he bested me four times in a row. When Carcer finally allowed us to leave I stopped him in the hall and asked him whether he would teach me," the witch chuckled obviously lost in memories. "He stared at me incredulously and asked me whether I was feeling well and had not lost my mind as he was a muggleborn and all.

"As if you ever cared about that," Narcissa said laughing and Andromeda joined her sister in her mirth.

"Indeed, I didn't. At least mother accepted it, unlike Walburga," she said solemnly. "Like that our weekly meetings started and one thing led to another. When we married we actually sent a 'Thank you'-card to Carcer. After all his detention had brought us together."

Harry smiled and Ron inquired whether the former professor had taken it well.

"Not at all," Andromeda said with a twinkle in her eyes. "He actually send a howler back, mostly complaining why we dared to write him."

"That man really was terrible," Narcissa conceded. "But at least he didn't try to get in your good graces whatever it took like Slughorn." Everyone but Draco and Ron shuddered. The two of them glanced at each other, remembering that neither of them had been invited.

"Do you think, you can stomach desert already?" Narcissa asked with a wink and everyone nodded.

When she returned with a chocolate cake in her hands Harry and Ron peaked up a bit. Andromeda set the table quickly and send Mr Malfoy to prepare the tea. Finally the ever-present tension seemed to subside and when they were all seated again they managed to chat in quite a friendly manner about the upcoming task of renovating Grimmauld Place.

"I would really love to help, as soon as I am free to do so," Narcissa told them earnestly. "It's either burning that house down or transforming it completely and the latter seems more appropriate."

Harry and Ron laughed outright at that and Hermione huffed an annoyed breath. It was just what they had said since the beginning of fifth year. Narcissa looked at her quizzically but Hermione just shook her head and smiled.

"Do you plan to renovate the Manor?" she asked instead.

"We indeed do. The presence of the Dark Lord and the subsequent Dark magic has tainted the house and it will take quite an amount of work to undo that," Mr Malfoy answered readily and
Narcissa nodded. "We thought about some redecorating as well. I am nearly sure that the Manor will look much more welcoming with a fresh rendering and paint. Especially after we disposed of that dreadful spell that makes sure nobody feels confident or welcome on the doorstep."

"I tell you that it has to be a rune in the floor or ceiling, not a spell per say, as it would terminate too quickly otherwise," Narcissa argued. Her husband rolled his eyes at her.

"Whose ancestral family home is it we are talking about?" he drawled with all his Malfoy charm and Harry and Ron immediately scowled. Narcissa only huffed and smiled but was interrupted by Draco.

"It actually is a combination of both," he said quietly. It was the first thing he had said during the whole time so it had everyone turning to face him while he blushed. "I took the freedom to investigate after I turned seventeen. It was Domitian Malfoy who installed it in the seventeenth century. He wanted the people to be properly intimidated before they even came in. In his diary he wrote about a warding spell which he combined with runes for fear and doubt, putting one of each in the ceiling and in the floor. The runes are heavily warded as well."

"Maybe you could ask Bill Weasley?" Hermione suggested. "He is an amazing curse-breaker and would probably be glad to help you."

The Malfoys nodded their thanks.

"Oh, talking about stubborn charms," Harry began. "You don't happen to know which spell the old hag used to stick her portrait to the wall?" He didn't need to clarify whom he was talking about.

"I think I do actually," Narcissa said thoughtfully. "But I will look it up again just to be sure."

Harry thanked her and they resumed talking about their renovation plans. But Hermione felt slowly but surely like there wasn't enough air in the room. She excused herself and went outside and sat down on the doorstep.

She didn't know how long she had sat there when she heard the door open and mentally prepared herself for Harry's or Ron's concern. But it was neither of them.

"They are still discussing whether painting with actual colour or transfiguration lasts longer," Draco informed her somewhat stiffly and Hermione snorted in response.

"How interesting. Why are you here, Mal- Draco?" she asked catching herself before using his last name.

"I didn't have anything to say and you gave me the perfect excuse to leave," he said sounding amused.

"I don't want to talk."

"Me neither," he replied and they settled into silence.

Chapter End Notes

I think we are all relieved that the cooking wasn't too bad ;) I thought quite a lot about which Queen song to use and finally chose my current favourite. If anybody who has
read the Discworld novels thought he recognised the name Carcer, congrats! I really
hate-love the character. On to the next chapter.
Harry grew worried for Hermione as she had been alone with Draco for nearly thirty minutes now. Of course he had seen them being civil to each other in the last week, but he still didn't trust the Slytherin. He had just decided to stand up and go looking for them when the door opened and they returned inside.

He noticed that both of them looked pale, but less tense than when they had left. Harry decided not to ask them about it and soon they readied themselves to leave. Both he and Ron relaxed, now that they had seen with how much care Narcissa treated her sister and how all the Malfoys were trying to be more open minded. They said good-bye and left through the floo.

Harry hastily made his excuses, wanting to reply to Pansy's letter which had come in the morning. In his room he pulled it out of his pocket and smoothed it out.

_Potter (or should I use Harry?),_

It seems I will have to endure you at school. Well, I am sure I will survive. (Harry scoffed at that. After all it had been her who had asked.) Although I am not sure whether we will be able to have a quiet year, it just seems unlikely after all this time. The owl is called Medusa (don't ask me) and I wrote you so late because I couldn't sleep and needed to take my mind off of things. (Again I am questioning myself why am I telling you this. I should probably just accept it as fact.)

_Did Granger tell you that we will be meeting for coffee next week? I really would have liked to see her face when she read that I suggest a muggle place. But seriously? First of all, many Wizarding places won't serve me, although we didn't even have Death Eater relations. Being pureblood and Slytherin is enough to be discriminated these days. Secondly as long as the coffee is good I don't care how it is made._

_Yours,_

_Pansy_

Harry smiled sadly at the last paragraph. Just weeks ago he would have been one of those who denied pureblood Slytherins service. But the last battle changed his mind. When he sat in the Great Hall afterwards and watched families who had lost each other in the fight reunite he understood. The Slytherins would have had to fight against their own parents, siblings and friends. Nobody would want that, even if they didn't support Tom.

When after the execution the list of the dead had been published, Harry recognised a few names from former encounters with the Slytherins. Montague, Crabbe and Pucey were amongst them, but also a few older Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs. Harry had wondered about their reasons for joining.
at first, until he noticed what he did. He had assumed that only Slytherins were prejudiced and hateful. Not once had he thought that blood-supremacism could also be present in other houses. Harry had been rather startled to notice his own prejudice against Slytherins. He had tried to talk about it with Ron, but he didn't understand what Harry tried to say. For him Slytherins were bad, but not because they were Death Eaters. He thought so because they supposedly only accepted half- and purebloods. It didn't matter that Hermione had dug up students records from the last seven years that showed clearly that Slytherin did indeed accept muggleborns.

Parkinson (Pansy?),

I think you should use the name you feel most comfortable with. Medusa startled me out of a nightmare tonight, so maybe it wasn't too bad that you send a letter. I am questioning my reasons for writing to you as well, but maybe we should just follow Hermione's and Mrs Malfoy's example and start anew. You know, before the last battle I would have supported those who wouldn't serve you, because all Slytherins are evil Death Eaters, right? However seeing who we were up against I realised that many of you would have had to fight against their own family and friends. Even if you didn't follow Voldemort, fighting against your own people? Who would want that? Today we had lunch with the Malfoys and Andromeda. Draco and Mr Malfoy cooked roast veal, beans and mashed potatoes. We weren't poisoned and it was actually edible! I have to admit that Mrs Malfoy is a very nice person. We hadn't much chance to talk before but she offered her help for the renovation of the Black house I am currently living in.

Harry

PS: Why is Medusa outside my window?!

And indeed the regal looking owl was waiting on the window sill. Harry was sure that she hadn't been there when he started writing and was rather curious how she had known that he had a letter for her. Now at least he didn't need to ask Hermione for her owl.

He still hadn't bought a new one, with the loss of Hedwig being too fresh. Shaking his head Harry opened the window and let Medusa in. He vowed to ask Hermione about the legend of Medusa soon. He remembered something with snakes but not much more. Additionally the Wizarding legends tended to differ from the muggle ones who where rid of all mentions of wizards and witches after the Statue of Secrecy had been established.

In the library Hermione re-read all the protocols she had gathered for Draco's hearing. She had made notes in the margins whether or not she though the statement was a lie. The protocol of Rabastan Lestrange was nearly completely filled with red annotations which sometimes cross-referenced with the other protocols to either unveil lies or arranged stories. She had found out that Mike Proudfoot was rather crooked this way. Rabastan's stories matched his and the other way around even though Hermione knew at least some of them to be wrong. Did Kingsley know that?

Hermione had to admit that she rather liked analysing the statements, maybe she would actually like being a lawyer, even though she still had the feeling that she could be more successful if she entered the Wizengamot and did political work. Nevertheless an essential knowledge of the Wizarding Laws wouldn't be too bad, especially since she planned changing quite a few of them. Hermione chuckled at the memory of Draco Malfoy of all people telling her that she might be able to convince the less conservative part of the Wizengamot. Surely it had pained him to admit that to his former school nemesis. After all he had been one of the first to mock her campaign for House Elf rights, along with Ron.
At that Hermione sighed. She still hadn't talked to him about not being in a relationship, at all. He was watching her, she felt it. But she hadn't had the courage to actually tell him off yet. A fine Gryffindor she was. Sighing again Hermione was startled when she noticed the subject of her thoughts standing in the door frame.

"Why are you sighing, 'Mione?" he asked gently.

"Did you check in on George?" Hermione asked instead of answering right away. Ron frowned at her evading the answer.

"I did. He says mum has been here and took care of him some more but he didn't feel up to changing his location so she left him in Tinna's care until he feels better," he replied casually and sat down on the couch across from her.

"Good," Hermione said, steeling herself for what was to come. "I- I thought about our kiss."

Ron's face scrunched up in confusion and she hurried to explain. "I already told you that it felt like I was kissing my best friend, not the boy I am in love with. But we never really got a chance to talk about it."

Ron looked at her strangely and leant back into the couch. "You think I will be a prat about it, don't you?"

Hermione looked up sharply. "How-?"

"'Mione, I know I have been an utter prat to you for major parts of the last two years. But the time I was away from you and Harry... I had a lot to think about. How I loved you both and our friendship. How I had treated you in sixth year just for not asking me out first. I realised that as loud and open you are about your knowledge, you don't tend to speak about your feelings much."

Hermione cocked her head at this and started to object but Ron hold up a hand to silence her. "Please let me finish first. The first week I missed you terribly. But then I examined the feeling closer, can you imagine? I must have started going crazy. However I noticed that I didn't miss you like I missed Lavender before she became too much. I missed talking to you, laughing with you. But I didn't miss your closeness, your scent or something like that.

When I returned and saw you again I was happy. I thought you might be just as happy, but you weren't. And I had to think again. What if you hadn't realised that we were just really good friends? When you kissed me in the Chamber of Secrets I was shocked, but not really surprised. You telling me it felt like kissing you best friend though? I had no bloody idea how to react, so I just carried on."

Hermione stared at Ron for a long time that felt like hours. That was probably the first time she had heard him talk so much about something other than Quidditch. But suddenly she was moving and hugging him and sitting beside him grinning widely.

"We really should learn to just talk to each other," she conceded and Ron laughed and nodded.

"I am glad this is clear now. We can be friends, right?" he asked suddenly cautious.

"Of course! It's much more fun to punch you on the arm than Harry," Hermione said with a wicked grin and Ron stared at her with mock indignation for a moment.

"You terrible woman!" he exclaimed. After a minute of comfortable silence he continued. "Did I see new letters from Parkinson this morning?"
"Yes! Right, she wrote me about meeting for coffee in muggle London," Hermione said sitting up and rummaging through her papers for the letter. Having found it she sat it on top of her other documents for later.

"So you accepted her apology?" Ron asked curiously, but Hermione could see a frown forming on his face.

"Yes, at least partly. I want to talk to her first, hence the meeting for coffee. The old Pansy would have never written to me in the first place," Hermione answered calmly knowing that Ron was normally rather prejudiced against Slytherins.

"You are probably right," Ron said shrugging. "Maybe you could tell me what she is like during that meeting and whether you forgive her or not."

"That sounds good. You should ask Harry as well, he has accepted her apology fully. I understand they are writing quite civilly."

Ron chuckled.

"If someone had told us that earlier this year we probably would have checked him for a mean Confundus charm," he joked and Hermione had to agree that it was true.

"What did you think of the Malfoys today?" she asked tentatively.

"They really seem to try. Especially Mrs Malfoy seems to want to be more open-minded. She had her moments though. Did you see how stiff she was during the meal?" He chuckled and Hermione frowned.

"Well, it was the first time that her husband cooked something that advanced. The same is probably true for Draco and she was nervous how you two would react. Draco surely told her of your antics during school and Harry was a bit hostile at first. She really wanted to make the best impression and she is eager to start anew with all of us," Hermione explained, stopping herself from ranting just barely.

"I guess it is a case of emotional range of a teaspoon then," Ron said winking and making Hermione blush.

"So you think they deserve a chance?" she asked cautiously watching him closely for his reaction. He seemed to actually think about it before answering.

"Mrs Malfoy most definitely. The ferret maybe as well. Don't misunderstand me, I don't like him. But I don't think he should go to prison. They should have run away before committing any crimes," Ron shrugged. "Mr Malfoy though…I don't know. He certainly makes an effort and from what you told me it seems like he has re-evaluated his beliefs. Maybe they can put him on probation for the rest of his life and let him actively help the rebuilding."

Hermione grinned at him. "Who would have thought you would ever say something in favour of a Malfoy."

Ron laughed and nodded. They fell silent again and just enjoyed sitting there together until Hermione remembered that she had wanted to write to Pansy.

_Parkinson_,

_I don't know any place close to Diagon Alley, but maybe we could just venture out and explore a_
Do you have by any chance contact to Theodor Nott? Draco would like to write him and I wondered whether he was allowed to. (Former Death Eater and all that.) I also wanted to thank you for making Harry smile. Since he and Ginny broke up he has been a bit too quiet for my liking.

Yours,
Hermione

When she closed the letter and went to look for Athena, who was probably in the cage in her room, Ron chose to check on George again.

Hermione met Ron and George when they left the guest room on the first floor. The older boy looked much better and was able to walk on his own again. But like Molly he oozed sadness and there were lines around his mouth and eyes that hadn't been there last year. He came over to hug her and she gently patted his back.

"Sorry, for the mess I made," George whispered into her ear.

"It's alright," Hermione answered just as quietly. "Maybe you should talk about it with someone who will understand."

He let go of her and nodded imperceptibly.

"Ron, are you going to the Burrow with him?" Hermione asked aloud.

"Yes," the younger red-head answered. "I think I will stay over for dinner. I haven't seen all of them for a while."

"Tell Tinna on your way out, will you?" Ron nodded and they waved good-bye.

Hermione went back to the library but she found she couldn't concentrate on her documents again so she decided to go back to cleaning the adjoining study. In the morning she had removed most of the dust and now she would be able to sort through the books and documents there.

Starting with the desk she discovered that the documents were in astoundingly good condition. There must have been a spell on parchment and ink so it wouldn't crumble to pieces and fade. She read of business relationships with other European pureblood families and political machinations to further Voldemort in Great Britain and Europe. Other documents were about scientific researches founded by Black money, which she set aside to read thoroughly later.

While she read about all this Hermione wondered whether the family business was still active and if it was who managed it. Maybe Narcissa would know. Theoretically it could have gone to her and to her husband with Sirius and Bellatrix imprisoned, Regulus dead and Andromeda disowned.

Hermione worked at the table until dinner and had cleared its surface by then. The scientific documents were in one box, politics in another and business in a third, all sat next to the door. There were drawers still and the rest of the study, including two walls with shelves of books up to the ceiling and another desk overflowing with documents.

Sighing Hermione stood up, stretched and went down for dinner. She was the first to arrive, but Harry followed soon and was informed that Ron would eat at the Burrow. They had a quiet dinner, chatting about their correspondence with Pansy and where to go for coffee on Tuesday. Since Ron wasn't back by the time they had finished they decided to retire to the drawing room, each with a
book in hand.

"Say, 'Mione, did Ron finally talk with you?" Harry asked after some time and Hermione looked up rather startled.

"I initiated the conversation basically, but yes, we talked."

"Good. It was about time you stopped dancing around each other," Harry said with a grin worthy of the son of a Marauder. "When do you plan to go to Australia for your parents?"

Hermione sighed. She had dreaded that question since she had noticed that she hadn't thought about her parents since they had won.

"I don't know exactly, but definitely before school starts again and after the trials where I have to give testimony," Hermione said. "Would you come with me?"

"Of course, but why?"

"They will be angry that I decided for them. Maybe if you are there to back my story up they will be more forgiving."

"I do understand them, you know?" Harry replied quietly. "It's something Dumbledore did to me and I didn't like it one bit. Now imagine your own daughter does that to you. I would be really mad. Hell, I was really mad at Dumbledore for keeping me in the dark."

Hermione sniffled. Knowing what she had done was pretty bad was one thing, hearing it from your best friend a completely different one. Of course he was right. She should have talked to them, asked them to move away, included them in the decision. But she had gone and acted like they wouldn't understand. Maybe it would have taken quite a bit of convincing, but it would have been the better way.

She felt the tears fall down on her arms as she sat there and berated herself for being as patronising as some magical conservatives were towards muggles. Her parents would hate her when they learned the truth! Hermione choked on a sob.

"'Mione? Whatever you are thinking right now, stop it!" Harry said gently. He squatted in front of her and took her hands in his.

"But I treated them like these pureblood bigots would! Like they wouldn't make the right decision if I asked them first! They will hate me!" Hermione put her head in her hands and let her tears flow freely.

"That was certainly wrong, but it happened. You know just as well as I do what would have happened to them if they had stayed. They wiped out the Bones family safe for Susan. " Harry said while petting her back awkwardly, he was no good in comforting. "You spared them a fate worse than death. They will understand and forgive you, but only if you give them a chance."

Hermione leant against her best friend and mulled that over. He was right of course and she needed to pull herself together. She wiped away her tears and took a deep breath.

"You know that nobody is infallible, right 'Mione?" Harry asked sitting down next to her.

"Yes," she nodded. "But sometimes it is hard to remember."

"Good, then I will remind you from time to time," the raven-haired boy said teasingly.
"Me as well, if that's alright," a voice from the door said and they looked up to see Ron standing in the door frame.

Chapter End Notes

So, Ron and Hermione finally had the big talk. What did you think? Were you surprised by Ron? Tell me! :) On to the next chapter!
"Of course," Hermione smiled. "How was dinner with your family?"

"Sombre. George and mum are still grieving. Ginny didn't talk at all and everyone else tried to ignore the erumpent in the room," Ron answered truthfully and came over to sit on the couch with them. "We're invited to join tomorrow. Bill and Fleur will be there as well."

"I think it is about time we visit," Harry answered the unspoken question and Hermione nodded her assent.

"Mum will be happy, well, happier," Ron said with a frown.

"How is Percy doing?" Hermione asked tentatively which caused Ron to sigh heavily.

"He blames himself, you know? That he didn't notice the stray spell, that he didn't cast a shield fast enough, stuff like that." Ron looked grim.

"Oh, no," Hermione whispered. "That's horrible. What about your dad and Charlie?"

"Shaken, grieving of course. They are at Hogwarts everyday, helping them rebuild. Charlie thinks about coming back to Great Britain to help mum and dad, at least for a while."

"That is good, I am sure they will be happy to have him there," Hermione said and put an arm around Ron's shoulders.

"What were you on about when I came in?" Ron asked after a moment of silence.

Hermione and Harry explained and soon they were all yawning. It had been an eventful day for everyone.

Two hundred and fifty miles to the west Narcissa Malfoy was massaging her husband. He hadn't slipped even once during lunch and she was extremely proud of him. He really deserved this and Narcissa enjoyed it greatly.

Even though he was in his mid-forties now he was still very attractive and his body rather well defined, probably a side effect of the long life wizards normally had. The damage Azkaban had done to his body and mind was nearly gone after a year in freedom and a few weeks since Voldemort fell. Regular meals helped as well.

"Now, tell me what you plan with the infant formula," Narcissa said when she had finished the massage and cleaned her hands.

"I told you already, I want to reinstate the good name of the Malfoy family. I doubt that the muggle
formula has everything a magical child needs," Lucius answered calmly. Narcissa rolled her eyes at the last sentence but didn't say anything.

"It's just hard to believe that you would do something like that out of the goodness of your heart," she answered and watched her husband's face closely. A slight frown appeared for a second and vanished just as fast.

"I just think it is a good way of repaying our debts to the public. I will announce it at my trial, if that's alright for you," Lucius answered smoothly and smiled at his wife. He lounged on the bed like a big cat and Narcissa decided that it was as good an answer as any.

She stripped and lay down next to him. He kissed her gently and she melted into him like she hadn't for quite some time now.

The next morning found the two elder Malfoys spooning in their sleep for the first time in over a decade. Neither had cast a silencing charm that night and although they hadn't had a completely undisturbed sleep they had still slept better than either had in years.

Once again a memory overcame Narcissa. The first morning in the Manor after she had married Lucius. Barely out of school she had never felt so free, her beloved husband next to her and the sun shining through the windows. Narcissa had felt as if she could do anything if she just put her mind into it.

Now the memory of that feeling warmed her heart and she smiled sleepily, turning to give Lucius a soft kiss.

They lived with Andromeda for a week now. No major problems had arisen and Andy didn't seem to mind hosting them as long as they did their chores and helped with the care for Edward. The little boy had taken a liking to Lucius and had only calmed down enough to sleep in the evening when his great-uncle had hold him.

Lucius had been enamoured. Back when Draco was born he had been too busy with missions for the- Voldemort and hadn't had much time with him. Now their hearings only had to be successful and he could have as much time with Edward as he wanted. But Narcissa feared that publicly changing sides wouldn't be enough. He had lied to and manipulated the Ministry to walk free after the last war, he had broken out of prison and he had been part of a terrorist group. In the First War and in the first year of the Second War he had acted as Voldemort's right hand and Narcissa would be very surprised if they didn't sentence him to life in prison, much less let him walk free-

Kisses on her neck brought the train of thought to a grinding halt. It seemed that Lucius had picked up her tension and decided to distract her. It worked well.

"What is on your mind, princess?" Lucius asked sleepily, using a nickname she hadn't heard since her early school days. Nobody dared to call her that later - nobody except her sleepy husband obviously.

"Don't call me that," Narcissa said calmly. "I thought about the future, I shouldn't have."

"I am sorry, love. Lets take a shower together, everything will look better afterwards," Lucius whispered and planted a kiss on her cheek.

"I thought you wanted to go running first?" Narcissa inquired pointedly and her husband grimaced.

"I said I would, didn't I?" But he stood up and readied himself, while she turned around. "See you later, princess," he called and was through the door before she could protest again.
Stupid husband. Stupid nickname. Why did he have to sound so happy when he called her that?

Sunday promised to be a quiet day at Grimmauld Place. Only Mrs Black's portray disturbed the silence in which the household worked to restore the house enough to comfortably live in it. Nobody knew how to remove her, but Tinna said she would experiment as soon as she was done with the first floor guestrooms.

Hermione continued to work in the study by the library. By now she had found some truly captivating books about spells and potions, but also enough supremacist rubbish to fill a library with it. Still she wouldn't be herself if she just destroyed the books one way or another. Casting an Undetectable Extension Charm on one of the boxes she filed them away neatly and labelled the box appropriately, silently contemplating to put a Notice Me Not charm on it as soon as she was done.

At the end of the day one particular book caught her attention. It was written in Latin but didn't look too old. Hermione cast a preservation charm first anyway and opened it carefully. The title read 'Anathemati Cicatrix' (Curse Scars) and it was written by a certain Boreas Fawley and published in 1894. She had read about this book when she researched curse scars because she had been worried about Harry's scar in sixth year. Now she admitted she had secretly hoped to find something against the one across her ribs from Dolohov's curse. Hermione wasn't vain, but the scar hurt and she had to cast a cushioning charm between it and some of her bras so the scar tissue wouldn't get irritated.

When she had asked Bill whether it was possible that the pain and the sensitivity were a by-product from curse remnants he had said that it was most likely. He had examined her wound after her healing from the Cruciatus and confirmed her fear. There were curse remnants Madam Pomfrey hadn't been able to remove. And now she had two other cursed scars. One at her neck when Bellatrix had pressed the knife against it, the other...Hermione still hesitated to think about it. She wore long-sleeved shirts even though it was becoming warmer and she tried to keep from pushing the sleeves up and double checked the lock at the bathroom door whenever she showered.

The scars Bellatrix had given her didn't truly heal. They always looked as if the fresh scar tissue would rip open any second. The small one at her neck wasn't a problem as nobody really noticed it. But the one on her arm had drawn more than one shocked look during the aftermath of the battle when she hadn't anything long-sleeved to wear. She never told Harry or Ron, but even under disguise of Polyjuice Potion the scar shimmered through.

Now Hermione skimmed the chapter titles and was pleasantly surprised. At least two chapters sounded promising. One was about cursed weapons and the other about fire curses. Since Dolohov had used a silent spell Hermione hadn't heard the actual incantation and now that the Ministry had him killed after the battle she couldn't even ask. She put the book on the desk closest to her and returned to investigating the shelves.

A few minutes later she pulled a hand-written book out. By the looks of it a diary, and Hermione wondered whether she wanted to read the diary of any Black who had occupied this room. When she read the name on the first page of the book she changed her mind though. Alphard Black's diary could indeed be rather interesting.

He was the one family member who had supported Sirius and had made him his heir. Harry had told her the story when they had been on the run and he had tried to distract her from her dark thoughts about a certain redhead.

Hermione had to admit that she was rather surprised that Walburga Black hadn't removed any trace
her brother left in her home after he died. But she hadn't touched Sirius' room when he had run
either.

Hermione settled down at the desk to read the first few pages of the diary and determine whether
she would keep it or not. She soon discovered that it wasn't exactly a diary but a protocol about
Wizengamot meetings during the First Wizarding War. Mr Black had written down everything and
sometimes included explanations as if he had intended to give this book to someone. Hermione
opened the last page and found her suspicion confirmed. The last sentences read:

'I hope you found this helpful, Sirius. I know you never cared much about politics but as the
future Head of the House you need to know how to navigate the Wizengamot if you want to change
the world.'

Hermione thought about what she had read on the first few pages. Mr Black had described the
bonds between the family seats and the importance of the elected seats because they acted for the
people who weren't represented by the families. They tended to go with the public opinion and
could therefore be swayed by the public.

At first she had been only mildly curious about this fact, only when she remembered that she
wanted to change laws and customs for many creatures she realised that this would help her. On
Thursday she had told Draco that she didn't know how to petition anything in the Wizengamot.
Now she could find out and get useful tips how to be successful. Hermione only needed a seat and
then she could help magical beings!

Shortly before dinner Hermione was forcefully pulled out of her sorting of books by Ron who
knocked over some boxes close to the door and swore like an old sailor. Luckily she had sealed the
boxes otherwise books would have flooded the floor.

"Merlin, Hermione! Did you have to put those boxes so close to the door?" Ron asked through
clenched teeth, hopping around on one foot, holding the other.

"Oh, you just have to be more careful! Now, let me see your foot," she said walking over to him
and narrowly missing two boxes on her own. She ignored Ron's smug look when she had to stop a
third box from falling over before she reached him.

"You know the time, don't you?" the red-head asked while she cast a small healing charm on his
foot.

"Um, around half past three I think?" Hermione asked hesitantly, suddenly not entirely sure.

"It's nearly six. Mum will have our heads if we come any later," Ron answered. He didn't sound too
surprised, as everyone knew that she could easily get lost between books.

"I didn't realise!" Hermione said with big eyes. Surveying the room she noticed that there were
only a few books left that she hadn't categorised yet. Casting a look down her body she noticed that
she was coated in dust and definitely should change before going to the Burrow.

"Wait in the kitchen for me, I'll just change out of these clothes!" Ron laughed and shooed her out
of the room.

Minutes later Hermione arrived in the kitchen, hair freshly combed, new clothes and ready to go.
Harry looked a bit absent, but Ron smiled at her broadly.

"Shall we?" Hermione said breathlessly and they flooed over to the Burrow.
The first to greet them was George, who sat next to the fire and had obviously stared at it before they arrived because he blinked at them owlishly. "Hello Harry, Hermione, Ron," he said in an almost mechanical voice and Hermione gestured for Harry and Ron to go on without her.

"Hi George," she said gently sitting down next to him. "Do you know what my favourite memory of Fred is?" George only mutely shook his head and continued to stare into the flames.

"The way he comforted the younger students after detentions with Umbridge. Everyone only ever saw him as the rambunctious Weasley twin who didn't really care whether people were injured in his pranks. But he did care, didn't he?"

"He was better in healing charms," George whispered, still unmoving.

"Exactly. I realised only then that he wouldn't endanger younger students unduly. You always healed the results from your first tests yourselves, right?" Hermione asked gently.

"Only since fourth year. We weren't good enough at first. On the other hand Madam Pomfrey became quite good in healing prank wounds during our first years," the broken twin said quietly and with only the slightest happy inclination of his voice.

"I am sure after you two she can heal anything from your products," Hermione chuckled quietly.

"I guess," was the monotone answer.

"I am sure Fred would want you to try and make something really wicked that she can't heal easily," she kept trying to get a real emotion out of him. She was rewarded with a slight smile.

"You think?"

"I am positive. Of course you would be able to heal it with a swish of your wand, but Madam Pomfrey would have to be really creative to manage it." Again George smiled slightly.

"Thank you, 'Mione." He hugged her briefly to his side and she leaned into it.

"I think Molly has the food ready, sounds good?"

"Since when do you call mum 'Molly'?" George asked surprised and looked at her for the first time properly.

"Since Tuesday," Hermione answered standing up and pulling George with her.

"You know it took her long enough, after all she all but adopted you just like Harry," a new voice said from the door frame. Looking up Hermione discovered Bill standing there.

"You coming little brother?" he asked gently and George nodded. When he was at the door Bill gave him a short, but strong hug and stepped aside to let him through.

"Hermione, I wanted to ask you something before we join the others," Bill said quietly and she motioned for him to go on. "How are your scars?"

Hermione swallowed heavily before she could answer. "They haven't changed since Easter."

"Any new ones?" Bill asked carefully and watched her closely as if he was trying to catch her lying.

"A few, but nothing the healers couldn't manage," Hermione answered truthfully.
"Good," Bill said with a smile. "Let us join the others!"

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the triple update! Hopefully next chapter will have some more Draco POV but the dinner with the Weasleys comes first. What do you think about the books Hermione found? Will they help her and possibly Draco? Tell me in the comments! Cya soon :)
The evening

Hello again! I am really writing a lot these days, but viv-heart will be in Ireland next week, so who knows if I can keep the flow ;) She continues to be my ever-patient beta and remember the collab between the two of us I announced (quite) some time ago? We got the first chapters ready and will start posting after she is back. Enjoy the chapter! :)

Hermione entered the kitchen after Bill, somehow expecting it to be as boisterous as it had been before the War. But of course it wasn't. Ginny and George were mutely levitating the plates outside, where the table was standing. Harry and Ron were quietly talking to Charlie and Percy was leaning against the shed, smoking a cigarette. Hermione watched Ginny walk over, taking a drag of the cigarette and passing it back to Percy before coming back inside.

The two young women greeted each other with a short fierce hug.

"Can I talk to you later?" Ginny whispered into Hermione's ear and the latter nodded.

"Ermione!" Fleur came over, sheathing her wand in the arm wand holder she still wore.

"Fleur, it's good to see you," Hermione smiled and let go of Ginny, who took the last plates outside, followed by Molly who was levitating the roast.

"Et toi. 'ow is zhe 'ouse progressing?" the older witch asked in a friendly manner.

Hermione explained everything they had done so far while they walked over to the table in the garden.

When Percy joined them Molly didn't so much as scrunch up her nose at the smell of cigarette smoke. She only ushered him to the table.

"Mum, when will dad join us?" Ron asked sitting down.

"I am right here. Sorry, that I am late," Mr Weasley said and gave his wife a kiss on the cheek before sitting down as well.

They tucked in, but unlike nearly every Weasley dinner before this one was eerily silent. Only Bill, Fleur, Charlie and Mr Weasley were talking. Ginny only picked at her food, George was eating like he wasn't even noticing what he was doing and Percy tapped his goblet and the fluid turned amber, like Firewhiskey.

"Well, Ginny, what are you up to these days?" Hermione asked in the worst possible way to start a conversation.
"Not much," Ginny answered quietly. "I have been in muggle London yesterday evening, that was nice."

"Sounds brilliant! Where did you go?" Hermione tried to keep the conversation going.

Ginny glanced at her mother for a second. "Why don't we take a walk and I tell you?"

Hermione hadn't finished her plate yet, but the look on the younger girl's face told her that she needed a friend to talk to.

"Of course," she replied. "Molly? Ginny and I will take a walk for a bit!" Hermione called to the other side of the table and then they were of towards the orchard.

As soon as they had left the circle of light surrounding the table they noticed that the sky had started to darken. They walked around the pond to the small stream that led from it into the fields behind the orchard.

"What happened in London?" Hermione asked gently when Ginny settled on a rock just past the border of the premises of the Weasleys.

"I- um…You know Blaise Zabini?" the red-head asked in a small voice.

"All three of us were in the Slug Club and he is in my year, so, yes, I do," Hermione replied settling on the soil next to the rock. There was just enough light left to see the look of shame that crossed Ginny features.

"What did he do?"

"Nothing I didn't want," Ginny replied slowly, as if she had to force herself to talk about it. "We met on Thursday night in a muggle bar. We talked and somehow…we ended up having sex. I- I know his reputation and especially in the last year he was known to sleep around. So I was rather surprised to meet him at the bar on Friday and yesterday again. I didn't want to talk on Friday so we just sat there, drinking together. Never mind that I am not even allowed to drink just yet. Used a light Confundus on the bartender. But yesterday…we did it again. And I…"

Hermione took Ginny's hand. "It's alright to talk about it, you know?"

"When I woke up today, I felt good for the first time since Fleur's and Bill's wedding," Ginny whispered. "He made breakfast for me and he was so nice, but then he told me that he would go to Beauxbatons for his last year and…I just crumbled. I managed not to cry in front of him. But he is a Slytherin, I am sure he noticed."

"Well, safe for him not being at Hogwarts next year it sounds rather good," Hermione said tentatively. "What is the catch?"

Ginny smiled a little. "I think I have a crush on him and when my brothers or mum find out …I don't want to be told not to like him just because he is Slytherin."

"I will make sure Ron behaves. As for your mother, I am sure she would only worry whether you are happy or not," Hermione said trying not to think too much about her fourth year and the Rita Skeeter disaster.
"Thank you, 'Mione. But do you know what worries me most?" Ginny fiddled with the hem of her shirt, opening and closing her mouth multiple times. "I fear that I am just another notch on his bed post!"

"I don't know. You know that I am not exactly the most experienced person ever," Hermione joked. "But I think you should just ask him the next time you see him. And...the question may be a tad inappropriate...But are you ready for a relationship?"

Ginny looked up at her in surprise. "N-no, I don't think so. But I'd like to get the chance to date him, you know?"

"Well, then meet him again and find out more," Hermione smiled and Ginny returned it.

"Alright. I wanted to ask...How are you and Ron doing?"

Hermione snorted. "Not at all, thank you very much. We talked and came to the conclusion that we are way better of as friends."

"I have to admit that I am relieved," Ginny said smiling a bit impishly. "Having you officially as a part of the family would have been nice, but you and Ron would have killed each other within the first year of your relationship."

"Why thank you for having so much faith in me!" Hermione exclaimed indignantly.

Ginny replied with shoving her into the stream. It wasn't deep but cold and Hermione gasped and pulled the youngest Weasley in as well. They both sat there, gasping for breath and slowly dissolving into laughter.

It felt good. Hermione felt free and light for the first time in ages. She suddenly realised that she hadn't felt so free since the Yule Ball in fourth year. After a few minutes they started to shiver and climbed back onto the bank and Hermione cast a wandless drying charm over them. She had had much time to exercise that one on the run.

"You are terrible, you know," Ginny said with a smile when they both sat back down on the rock.

"Right back at you," Hermione replied and looked up at the starry sky. "I think you are actually my best female friend."

"Not that there is any hard competition," Ginny remarked drily which made Hermione snort.

"It's not my fault that I never got along with Lavender and Parvati," she tried to defend herself.

Ginny laughed. "I would have been surprised if you actually did! They were awful gossips."

"I don't want to talk badly about Lavender," Hermione admitted in a small voice.

"I understand. I feel the same way about some of my classmates," Ginny said more subdued and Hermione had begun scolding herself for ruining the mood when the other girl continued. "But I think we also shouldn't lie about them. Lavender could be awful, but remember how she readily helped you with your hair in fourth year for the Yule Ball? She also joined the D. A. and fought in the Battle. She could have fled, like Zacharias Smith, but she didn't. She stayed and fought."
Hermione had to admit that Ginny was right. Veiling their deeds would be wrong, but they should remember the whole person and not just some parts. As much as Lavender had teased her about her hair, when she had nearly given up before the Yule Ball her roommate had sat aside her own preparations and helped her. In sixth year she had been awful about being in a relationship with Ron but she had apologised at the end of the year.

Ginny pulled her legs up and rested her chin on her knees. "You know, sometimes I wonder what would have happened if Tom just had an accident with the basilisk for example and died. How would our world be different? Would there have been another Dark Lord or even a Dark Lady?"

Hermione didn't reply for a long time, just staring off into the approaching night. She had had these thoughts as well. Everyone in wizarding Britain probably had at one point or another. What would have happened? Would they be where they were now? Would they even exist?

"He influenced our world for so long. It's nearly impossible to tell," Hermione finally said.

They sat there until they started shivering from the night cold and then they got up and went back to the house.

Draco was sitting under the tree in the backyard at Tonks Cottage. His parents and Andromeda were in the sitting room, Andromeda and Lucius playing a game of wizarding chess and Narcissa reading to Teddy.

The night air was cool on his too hot skin. Draco had to go outside because inside he felt as if he couldn't breathe anymore, just like he had when Hermione and the Demented Duo had been over for lunch the previous day. They had managed to stay civil but Draco knew Potter and the Weasel. He had anticipated at least one cutting remark but it never came. The suspension had nearly cost him his temper.

When Hermione had left the room he had seen the perfect opening. He went after her and had been just too happy not to talk. Around her he turned back into the Slytherin Death Eater git he had been for too long. First because he was a dumb teenager boy, then because he had to and finally because everyone thought of him that way anyway.

With every cutting remark, every hex he had felt more in control and safer from the Dark Lord's wrath. But it had only lasted so long. At night everything he said and did haunted him. After he had saved Lovegood on Christmas he hadn't slept through the night anymore. Always fearing that they would do something to her while he was away. Saving her had been the only good and right thing he had done in all that time and he hated himself for that.

He should have been stronger, should have gotten his mother to leave their home with him and never look back. But the Dark Lord would have found him with the tracking spell in the Mark, he had demonstrated that on more than one occasion. The refugee would be dragged back to the Manor by Snatchers and tortured with everything the cruel minds of the Death Eaters could think of. That process sometimes lasted days.

Shuddering Draco returned to the present, relaxing the fists his hands formed on their own and looking detachedly at the red crescents in his palms. Wallowing in the past wouldn't help him. He really hoped he would be allowed to write to Theo. He was the only living friend of Draco's who
Draco swallowed hard. Theo hadn't been the only one who had been offered by his own father. The same happened to Adrian Pucey, who had been marked shortly after his graduation. He had been executed for using Unforgivables.

Cursing Draco got up and started boxing the tree. It hurt. But he felt the pain in his chest receding. After a minute or two he stopped and leant against the tree, chest heaving and choking on sobs.

Slowly he lowered himself to the ground and slung his arms around his legs.

"Gods damned buggering shit," he whispered under his breath, again and again. It was so unfair! They had been children! Yes, they had been awful to their classmates. Draco knew he had been a little shit in his first years at Hogwarts. But if this was some kind of punishment for his sins he felt it was way too much.

Realising that he was crying, again, Draco defiantly swiped away the tears and sniffed forcefully. He sat more upright and tried to breathe more regularly. He brushed back the long sleeve of his pullover and looked at the ugly scar that was his Dark Mark. Suddenly Draco remembered something he had overheard in the library once. There were muggle tattoo artists! Of course those tattoos weren't moving, but Draco had really enough of moving tattoos. Maybe he could ask Hermione where to find them. Maybe they would be able to cover the scar with ink. Hopefully it wasn't cursed so it wouldn't change.

Draco looked up to the sky and wondered which motive he would choose. Something happy most certainly, something beautiful. If only he knew what his Patronus looked like. But he was never able to produce one.

It was nearing midnight when Draco noticed someone coming over from the house. At first he thought Bellatrix had been resurrected. He shook his head. His aunt Andromeda was as far away from being Bellatrix as Harry Potter was of casting an Unforgivable (little did Draco know that it wasn't actually not that far).

"Enjoying the night sky?" Andromeda asked quietly when she came closer.

"Who wouldn't?" Draco answered while she sat down next to him.

"You are doing great, you know?"

Draco snorted, he doubted that.

"Others would have reacted much worse than you did, having their arch-nemeses over for lunch. More so in the first safe haven they have known for years," Andromeda said gazing up into the sky. "I know Cissy tried to protect you from the worst of it, but I don't think school was easy. It wasn't for me back then anyway."

"But you managed to turn them down and run away," Draco said bitterly, looking down.

Andromeda looked at him for a moment and then shifted her gaze back to the sky. She didn't say
anything for some time.

"I was in love. I had someone to assure me that what I did was right. And even then I only managed to do so after I graduated. If I hadn't agreed to open my house as a safehouse I never would have found the strength to talk to Cissy," Andromeda admitted to Draco.

He wondered whether it would have been different for him as well, had he fallen in love with say Granger. Draco frowned at that thought. Where had that come from?
"Say, Andromeda, how well do you know the muggles?" he asked his aunt tentatively.

"Pretty well I guess," she answered turning to look at him. "Why?"

"I overheard something about muggle tattoo artists and I wondered…” he trailed of, suddenly unsure how to continue.

"Whether they could cover your Mark?" Andromeda asked and he nodded. "I don't know. But you could try. Ted's brother has a son a bit older than you, maybe he knows more."

"Ted had a brother?" Draco repeated. He hadn't known that.

"Yes, a sister as well, but she lives in Australia," Andromeda smiled as if remembering something. "I will have to visit them soon and tell them about Ted and Nymphadora and Remus and-"

Andromeda choked and Draco had to watch helplessly as his aunt, the strong woman who had defied her family for her husband, crumbled. He awkwardly patted her back and she smiled at him through her tears.

"I am so, so sorry," she finally said with a thick voice. "You shouldn't have to see me like this."

Draco sat there feeling strangely calm having realised something. Even the strongest adults cried sometimes and crumbled in the face of death of their loved ones.

"It's alright," he said now, putting an arm around her shoulders and hugging his aunt for the first time. "It's normal to grieve."

It sounded strange in his own ears but Andromeda smiled and put an arm around his shoulders as well.

"Cissa would be so proud seeing you like this," she said and gazed across the yard to the sitting room window where they could see Narcissa and Lucius sitting on the couch together.

"Come on, let's go inside. It's getting chilly."

They were nearly at the door when Draco spoke up. "Thank you for coming outside."

Andromeda smiled sadly at him, the smile barely visible in the light of the half moon.

Chapter End Notes
So what did you think? Andromeda has been holding it together for way too long in my opinion. And Draco needed to see it. I hope you enjoyed it :) Till next time! :)

Tea with the Malfoys

Chapter Notes

I am really spoiling you with updates right now. But fear not I think the flow will flow on ;) Since I quoted from the fifth book in this chapter: I own nothing, save for Tinna and the plot. As always viv-heart betaed the chapter. Enjoy! ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Hermione stepped into the kitchen on Monday morning she saw three official looking letters sitting on a silver tray. Even though they weren't eating in the dining room Kreacher insisted on presenting the letters the old way. They humoured him since it was innocent enough.

Beneath those official letters Hermione found another two from Pansy, one for herself and another for Harry. Hermione smiled, glad that Harry had someone else to talk to besides her and Ron. Beneath those there was a last letter. It was from Narcissa.

Hermione frowned. Since the hearing the two women hadn't written as much, each having a lot to do now. She opened the letter from Narcissa first. It was only a short message.

Dear Hermione,

I hope this letter finds you well. This is rather last-minute, but would you like to come over for tea? I think Draco could use more company his own age. Especially since the trial is coming closer and he is growing more restless. I hope you will join us today.

Yours,
Narcissa

Hermione folded the letter and thought about it. Of course asking her was the logical thing to do, even if Draco seemed to be a little uncomfortable around her on Saturday. It was understandable that he was scared because of the trial. Maybe she could spare some time from her other tasks for tea at Andromeda's.

Foregoing Pansy's letter for now, Hermione grabbed one of the official letters. Two were for Harry and Ron, probably their results of the entrance exam for the Auror training. The last one was addressed to her, with Mr Shafiq's office as the return address.

Hermione opened the letter and found yet another short note.

Dear Miss Granger,

Mr Malfoy is allowed to contact Mr Nott. But he has to be aware that Mr Nott's mail is checked upon arrival to guarantee the security of Mr Nott. (Hermione snorted. Security - as if.) Any violation of the law will be followed up as such.

Sincerely,
Annie Pierce
Secretary of the Head of the DMLE

Smiling Hermione folded the letter up. She would announce it at tea this afternoon, that should cheer Draco up. The letter from Pansy was next. The Slytherin girl only wanted to make sure that their meeting at half past two in the Leaky Cauldron on the next day was still standing.

Having read all her mail Hermione sat down for breakfast. She was used to eating alone since it was rare that the boys were awake at eight o'clock in the morning. Hermione actually savoured the silence, at least a bit.

When she had finished her breakfast she went up to the library. She would probably use the morning to go over her defence strategy once again. This time the Wizengamot was more likely to ask questions and she wanted to be prepared for everything.

-H-0-H-

Hermione was roused from contemplating her documents by her alarm charm going of. She had set it for two o'clock so she would have enough time to clean up for the Malfoys. Tapping her wand to her palm ended the alarm and Hermione started to file away the parchment scrolls. There were so many she had needed all morning to read through them once again. She had missed lunch but she wasn't particularly hungry so Hermione decided to eat something at Andromeda's.

Going up to her room Hermione contemplated what she should wear. It was getting warmer and she struggled coming up with good explanations for her long sleeves. Maybe a light jumper over a tank top would work. It looked more like 'I would like to wear summer clothes, but it is too cold' than 'I am hiding gruesome scars so you won't stare at me'.

Hermione decided to apparate and walk up to the house from the wards. It was a lovely summer day and Andromeda's garden was beautiful. When she arrived at the house she wondered whether she and Pansy should just get a coffee to go and take a walk in a park. That would be nice.

Upon entering the house she was greeted with the sweet scent of freshly baked scones. A smile appeared on Hermione's face and she entered the kitchen to compliment whoever produced those heavenly scents.

She did not expect to see Lucius Malfoy powdered with flour and whistling while casting spells to decorate the muffins before him. Neither did she expect to see Narcissa Malfoy, ice-queen extraordinaire, sitting on a chair, her legs pulled up to her chest and singing along quietly. Hermione was flabbergasted.

She was indeed so shocked that she actually squeaked when someone touched her shoulder. Whirling around she came face to face with an amused Draco who looked down at her, mirth dancing in his grey eyes.

"Jumpy, are we?" he asked teasingly. "Or were you just shocked that my father can actually hold a tune?"

An errant raisin barely missed Draco's head who moved to the side just in time. He watched it fall down just behind him and vanished it with a snap of his fingers. Hermione's eyes were by now as big as saucers.
When they turned back to the elder Malfoys, both were studiously occupied with decorating the muffins. Draco looked indignant at first, but his expression soon softened a little.

Hermione and Draco exchanged a look and looked away at the same time, both trying to contain their laughter. It was just too ridiculous to see the normally so controlled Malfoy's acting like normal people.

Andromeda entered the room just when they were finished and they levitated everything to the living room. They settled on the couches and started the conversation with a bit of small talk.

The conversation flowed much more freely than it had on Saturday when the boys had been there as well. Hermione started to relax a bit. She leant back on the couch and nearly forgot not to brush up her sleeves.

Narcissa caught the movement. "You know we won't treat you differently because of it, don't you?"

"I-" Hermione looked up startled. She wasn't sure what to say.

"Every last one of us has scars. You don't need to hide them around us," Narcissa said gently and Andromeda nodded along. Neither Draco nor Mr Malfoy said anything but they watched her with interest.

Slowly Hermione rolled up her sleeves, glad to be able to since she was rather warm by now. No one gasped or said anything, but Lucius raised an eyebrow and Draco stiffened for a moment.

"Sometimes I wish I could have gotten Bella for all the damage she did," Narcissa said calmly, sipping from her cup. Mr Malfoy nodded and Andromeda exchanged a glance with her remaining sister.

After that the conversation turned back to happier subjects. Suddenly Hermione remembered the letter in her pocket.

"Draco, do you remember that I wrote to Mr Shafiq about you being allowed to write to Theo?" The blond nodded and Hermione pulled out the letter with a smile. "This is the answer."

Draco looked up at her in disbelief after reading it. "Really?" he whispered and when she nodded he smiled brightly and hugged her. He let go immediately but the smile stayed.

"Thank you so much," Draco said and gave the letter to his mother who looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

She snorted while reading it and Hermione had the sneaking suspicion that she knew which sentence had called for that reaction. Narcissa didn't hug Hermione but she beamed at her.

"This is wonderful. Thank you. Draco and Theo have always been great friends," she said and Hermione knew she had fulfilled Narcissa's wish from the letter.

Mr Malfoy reacted just like his wife while reading the letter, as did Andromeda. He also thanked Hermione.

"Do they really think you would believe the nonsense about keeping the Nott heir safe?"
Andromeda asked when she had finished reading.

Hermione laughed. "Probably. The Ministry tends to underestimate me."

"There is something I always wanted to ask you, Hermione. How did you get rid of Miss Skeeter in your fourth year?" Narcissa asked curiously and Hermione blushed crimson.

"I don't know if Draco told you, but she is a beetle animagus. So I just caught her like any other beetle – in a jar," she answered truthfully.

Mr Malfoy narrowed his eyes a little. "For how long, if you don't mind me asking, Miss Granger?" he asked in a silky voice in which even Hermione could recognise the amusement.

"A month. I let her out during the holidays, threatening to inform the Ministry about her being an unregistered animagus if she wrote anything within a year," the young witch whispered.

Mr Malfoy whistled and Narcissa smiled. "Told you she is devilish," the blonde witch said to her husband who chuckled.

"I would love to know what she would have achieved in Slytherin," Mr Malfoy said.

"Probably defeated the Dark Lord on her own," Draco said quietly, and looked up to her self-consciously but she only smiled.

"Maybe, but I would still have needed Harry to ultimately defeat him," Hermione said with a wink.

"Ah, right, the famous prophecy," Mr Malfoy drawled. But in the sunny room and the picture of him covered in flour fresh in mind it wasn't as frightening as it had been in the Ministry.

"Do you want to hear it? After all you went to Azkaban for it," Hermione asked him.

The Malfoy patriarch had visibly stiffened at the mention of Azkaban but he finally nodded. "That would be interesting, Miss Granger."

"Alright." Hermione cleared her throat and recited: "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches. Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies. And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not. And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives."

Silence settled over the room as the Malfoys contemplated the prophecy. Hermione wasn't sure whether Andromeda had heard it before, but she doubted it.

"So he really died for a moment in the woods?" Narcissa asked finally, her hand shaking as she lifted a scone from the platter.

"Yes, but instead of him, the horcrux within him died and Harry returned," Hermione answered reaching for her third muffin. They were heavenly and she hadn't eaten since eight in the morning.

The Malfoys and Andromeda gasped and looked at her in shock. Mr Malfoy was the first to find his voice again.

"He made the boy a horcrux?" he asked, shock and disgust in his eyes.
"No, Harry was an accidental horcrux. I haven't found too much about the process, but I am sure that a body-less Voldemort couldn't have made him a real horcrux," Hermione answered matter-of-factly.

"How is that even possible?" Narcissa asked, the shock still evident in her voice.

"Lily Potter was given the choice to step aside, to let her son be killed. She didn't and that sacrifice invoked ancient magic that protected Harry from the Killing Curse. It rebounded, hit Voldemort, split of a part of his soul, evaporated his body and caused an explosion. The soul fragment clung to the only living thing in the vicinity, which happened to be Harry. That's why he was able to speak Parseltongue and had a connection to Voldemort," Hermione explained.

"That's why the Dark Lord used Harry for his resurrection. The protection of Mrs Potter would be useless, if he was resurrected with blood of the boy," Mr Malfoy whispered. He looked even paler than normal and Hermione nodded.

"But that's also why it had to be Harry who finally defeated him," Hermione said and reached for a fourth muffin.

"Don't they feed you where you live?" Draco asked teasingly, snatching up a crumb that had fallen from her muffin and popping it into his mouth.

"They do," Hermione said after swallowing. "I just forgot to eat lunch and these are delicious. Congratulations to whoever made them."

"Thank you, Miss Granger," Mr Malfoy said with a sly smile. Hermione wondered whether he thought she would retract her compliment when she knew that he had made them.

"Please call me Hermione, Miss Granger sounds so horribly formal," Hermione answered before realising what she had just done. That man had hated her from the moment she appeared in the wizarding world!

"It would be a pleasure, Hermione. Would you be so kind as to return the favour?" the older wizard asked smoothly, probably years of social training kicking in. For some reason Narcissa smiled proudly at the both of them.

Hermione swallowed. "Of course, Lucius." The name felt so wrong on her tongue, especially without an added Malfoy.

"Pay up, Andy. I told you she would do it," Narcissa said stretching her hand out towards her sister.

Andromeda rolled her eyes. "Yes, you did. Now stop to gloat," she said while summoning a package of Glacial Snow Flakes. They were big snowflakes of (cleaned) glacial snow and spun sugar. You had to levitate them on your tongue since they melted at skin contact.

Narcissa did just that. Somehow she managed to look elegant and regal all the while.

"I am not sure whether I should be outraged or amused that you betted on me, princess," Mr-, no, Lucius drawled. Hermione noted in surprise that Narcissa shot him an annoyed look at the nickname.
"I think I should be appalled but amused, since I seem to have been the main interest of the bet," Hermione said with a raised eyebrow towards Andromeda and Narcissa. The latter had the decency to blush.

"We wondered whether you would accept the invitation to call Lucius by his first name. We were both sure you would ask him to call you Hermione before he did. Narcissa thought it would be fun to bet. And since we both love Glacial Snow Flakes," Andromeda trailed off, shrugging as if to say 'what could I do?'

"Why wasn't I informed?" Draco asked in fake indignation.

The two sisters looked at each other and shrugged.

"We didn't think you'd be interested," Andromeda admitted.

"Betting on Granger? I'd be in the second I heard of it!" Draco exclaimed, glancing at Hermione as if to make sure she understood he was joking.

"We will remember the next time," Narcissa promised and Draco grumbled good-naturedly.

"Oh, Narcissa, I wanted to ask you something," Hermione said after a moment of companionable silence. "I was cleaning the study adjoining the library in the Black townhouse over the weekend. I found many documents about business deals the Blacks made. After reading most of them I started to wonder who inherited the business?"

"I- Actually that is a good question," Narcissa answered. "Since Sirius was disinherited and Regulus died, they didn't have a male heir. Andy, what do you think who would be the next male descendant?"

Andromeda contemplated the question for a while. "Probably the Burkes, Walburga would have never accepted the Weasleys or the Longbottoms as heirs of Black business. No woman could inherit, the Potters were dead at that point, just like the Prewett brothers and Walburga never liked the Crouches."

"Please don't remind me that I am related to all those people," Draco moaned and Hermione laughed.

"Don't worry, they are all a few times removed," Andromeda teased him.

But Hermione didn't really listen, as she pondered how different the Weasley children could have grown up if they had inherited the Black business. Mr Weasley would have been a bit overwhelmed at first, but as soon as Ginny was a bit older Molly surely would have taken over.

They finished the muffins and Hermione complimented Lucius once again on them. Soon after she left, hugging Draco good-bye as well this time. It was still a bit awkward, but he tried to mask it with thanking her again for writing to Mr Shafiq. He promised he would write Theo as soon as they had eaten dinner and Hermione said she would send Athena to get the letter.

Chapter End Notes
Someone asked for fluffiness and I was delighted to deliver fluffiness ;) Next up: Pansy and Hermione have coffee! I hope you have a wonderful September 1st and let's all wish Albus Potter a great Welcoming Feast! :)
Hello my dear readers! I finally managed to break through my writer's block, yeah!
Also: mine and viv-heart's collab story is online. The story is called 'Queens' and it's about Pansy and Hermione teaming up against Dumbledore and Voldemort. Maybe some of you lovely people would give us some feedback on it? ;) viv-heart is my beta.
After all this time? Always.

Draco tapped on the table in a fast rhythm. The previous evening he had written Theo for the first time, giving the letter to Athena and hoping that the owl would find his friend. Now he was anxious for an answer. He hadn't written much. Just that they were allowed to write and that he would like to do just that. Draco doubted that he was allowed to tell Theo where he was staying but he told him about the reunion of his aunt and his mother anyway. The other probably could use a nice and happy story if he had to live alone in that old manor.

Draco had been at Nott Manor many times over the years. In the last summer holidays he had visited Theo as often as possible. They would go 'flying' and visit Theo's secret stash of alcohol getting pissed in the woods. Sometimes Blaise had joined them and they started destroying the hunting lodge where Theo kept the Firewhiskey.

They always repaired everything the next morning. It wouldn't do for Nott Senior to find out what his son got up to when he was 'flying' with his best friends.

Draco wondered what Blaise did these days. Probably sleep around and throw out the money of his eighth stepfather. The poor lad probably wouldn't survive much longer - Blaise's mother never kept a guy more than three years. It was an open secret that she was a black widow, but the double entendre amused you only until the mismatched stare of Blaise gave you the creeps. While his right eye was a startling dark blue, Blaise's left eye was a light brown. Draco had never met anyone who could hold his cold gaze longer than a minute, he and Theo being the best since they were friends with Blaise and had training.

A rap on the kitchen window startled Draco out of his musings. He jumped up, opened the window and let Athena in. The regal owl settled on the perch next to the window obviously waiting for his answer.

Draco opened the letter.

Good morning,

it is wonderfully nice to see your terrible handwriting once again. I was already afeard you had forgotten good ol' me! No, but seriously, I am happy about any communication. Haven't heard from Blaise yet but he is probably a bit too busy 'meeting' women.
I read about your hearing in the paper. Say, who came up with the utter nonsense about you attending thirty-six revels? They had to drag you to those things! Well since Rabastan is on the list
of witnesses I probably know who, but still. Thirty-six?
And whose owl is this? It's entirely too persistent for my taste!

Hope you are well,
Theo

The blond wizard smiled. He could almost hear his best friend's voice while reading and he could picture his indignation at Athena very well. Knowing the owl she probably woke Theo and hadn't let him sleep until he had replied to the letter.

Draco smirked, the owl was a menace just like its owner. Theo would probably get a heart-attack if he read whose owl had kept him from sleeping in. Either that or he would roll around laughing - one couldn't be too sure with Theo.

Hermione cast the Tempus charm for the fourth time in just as many minutes. She wanted to be exactly on point and was ready to go. Pacing in front of the kitchen fireplace she started to get nervous. What if Pansy had only been pleasant while writing? What if she was awful in person?

Hermione rolled her eyes at herself and grabbed the Floo Powder. Who cared if she was a bit early? It wasn't as if it wouldn't fit her character.

With a 'whoosh' she arrived in the Leaky Cauldron. The pub looked worse than it had ever before and Hermione wondered whether the old bartender was still up to the work. Of course wizards could easily reach a much higher age than most muggles, but two wars had taken their toll.

Sitting down at the bar Hermione wondered if she should order something. Her question became irrelevant when the door opened and Pansy entered the pub.

Suddenly everyone fell silent and turned towards the door. Some glared, some scowled but at least nobody said anything. Hermione frowned at that display of intolerance. They had just fought two wars because of it, for Merlin's sake!

The bushy haired witch stood up and walked over to Pansy. "Hello, how are you?" Hermione greeted her, smiling brightly.

Pansy understood the plan immediately and kissed her on both cheeks in greeting. "Fine, and you?"

Hermione linked arms with her former arch-nemesis and they strolled out of the Leaky Cauldron into muggle London.

"Do you reckon we will make the headline tomorrow?" Pansy asked when they were a few blocks down the street.

"It's either that or Draco's trial and I would prefer keeping him out of the limelight as much as possible," Hermione answered calmly. They unlinked their arms and kept walking as if nothing had happened.

"It's a beautiful day," Pansy remarked while holding her face towards the sun.

"Indeed. What do you think, should we get some coffee to go and take a walk?" Hermione proposed and the other girl nodded.
They got their coffee from a street vendor and Hermione was starting to feel a bit uncomfortable walking in silence with Pansy.

"You know what I always wanted to see?" the girl asked just when Hermione wanted to open her mouth.

"Tell me," she encouraged her companion.

"The Buckingham Palace," Pansy said taking a sip from her coffee. "My parents wouldn't take me when I was younger. They said it was too dangerous in the muggle world. And in the last years it was indeed not really safe."

"We can walk there if you want to," Hermione offered with a smile. "I have only ever seen it on photographs and on the television as well, even though I lived in the suburbs of London my whole life."

"Really?" Pansy asked surprised. "I guess I am too used to people who live in small villages or manors."

Hermione laughed. "I never imagined I would know people who lived in manors."

In the next moment she had to grab Pansy and pull her back from the street. The witch obviously hadn't noticed the traffic light changing to red.

"What did they teach us in school?" Hermione asked teasingly, looking intently at the witch so she understood she had to play along. "Stop at red, go at green!"

"I know, 'Mione," Pansy answered blushing. "I'm not a child anymore!"

Hermione laughed and Pansy elbowed her good-naturedly. She was glad that they got along this well. Actually just as well as they did in the letters.

It was obvious that the pureblooded witch made an effort. So far she had adapted really fast. It was only when they had started talking that she had slipped and forgotten about traffic lights. Well, not everyone could be as unobservant as Ron and Harry. Hermione chuckled at that thought.

When an ambulance raced past them they both flinched at the light and the loud noise but tried to act unfazed. The light looked entirely too much like spell fire for Hermione's liking.

When they reached Buckingham Palace Pansy's mouth fell open. "It's huge! It's even bigger than Nott Manor!"

"Exactly right for the royals then," Hermione answered with a grin. She had to admit that it was amazing up close and live. Even with the masses of tourists.

"Probably! Who are the guys with the fuzzy hats?" Pansy asked pointing at the guards.

"That's the Queen's Guard. Their 'fuzzy hats' have actually a name which I don't remember at the moment," Hermione answered.

"Oh Merlin, the almighty Granger has forgotten something!" Pansy exclaimed theatrically.
"I'm far from almighty, Pansy," Hermione said quietly remembering all those people she couldn't save. Why did these thoughts come up so randomly? She had been fine a moment ago!

The Slytherin looked up startled. "I know, nobody is. Not Dumbledore, not You-Know-Who and not you. You did everything you could, just like everybody else."

"Thank you," Hermione smiled. "What was it like for you?"

A dark cloud seemed to shadow Pansy's face. "Please don't ask me. The others probably won't talk about it either. It's too fresh, at least for me."

Hermione nodded. "Alright, then another question: You mentioned a sister. I never knew you had siblings. How old is she?"

"Viola just turned twelve. It was her first year. Now mother and father think about sending her to Beauxbatons," Pansy answered with a strained voice.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Hermione said smiling sadly. "Seems I'm unable to avoid the subject of the last year."

"It's alright," Pansy answered returning Hermione's smile looking just as sad. "Could we go down to the Thames?"

"Of course!" she answered enthusiastically.

While they walked down to the river they chatted about their childhoods. Pansy asked many questions about the things she saw. Somewhere between explaining cabs and walkmans Hermione decided that she needed to brush up her knowledge about current technological developments.

But she asked just as many questions about the magical world. How did magical children learn the basics like English or maths? Could you apparate with kids or did you have to use brooms and floo? Pansy answered in as much detail as possible.

When they were nearly at the Thames Pansy remarked upon the beauty of Westminster Abbey, but they didn't go there because of all the tourists. Neither was really comfortable with crowds.

When the two girls reached the river they were laughing and chatting as if they had never been enemies. Hermione had to admit that she enjoyed it very much. Pansy was intelligent, witty and even though it hadn't seemed so at school she actually loved reading as much as Hermione did.

They walked along the Thames and back to Charing Cross Road and the Leaky Cauldron.

"I never thought I would say that one day, but it was nice to see you Hermione," Pansy said when they arrived at the floo in the shabby pub.

"Likewise, Pansy. I actually think we should repeat it, don't you?"

Pansy nodded. "Absolutely. I'll write you!"

They both flooed home hoping to have found a new friend.
Ginny nibbled on the side of her thumb. She sat on the same barstool she had chosen last Thursday. Her knee bobbed up and down in nervous energy. What if he didn't come? She hadn't been here the last two days because her mother had paid attention to her for once. What if he thought she didn't want to see him again?

Suddenly she was enveloped in two strong arms and a kiss was planted on her right cheek.

"I knew you wouldn't abandon me," Blaise whispered in that deep and rich voice of his.

Ginny turned around to face him. "So sure about yourself, Zabini?" she said teasingly while she leant in for a kiss.

"I missed you," he murmured against her lips and Ginny smiled.

"I missed you too."

"Did you have dinner?" Blaise asked while stepping out of the embrace, but keeping her hands in his.

"Not much, I was too nervous," Ginny admitted.

"How about we go and get something somewhere?" Blaise said with a wink and Ginny was once again enraptured by his different eyes.

"That sounds perfect," she said and downed her Whiskey in one, not even grimacing at the burn of the alcohol. She took Blaise's offered hand and they went out onto the busy street.

"A pub or something more…romantic?" Blaise asked teasingly and Ginny slapped him lightly on the arm.

"You know I don't care about that romance stuff," she answered tartly and he laughed.

"And that's exactly why I like you."

"Blaise?"

"Yes, cara mia?"

"I want to make this work for as long as possible."

Blaise pulled her closer. "That would be very, very nice. But I am terrible at this relationship thing."

"That's alright," Ginny answered earnestly. "Let's just take this as it comes."

Thousands of miles away Monica Wilkins fell down the stairs in her house. Lying on the lowest step she had one thought 'Last time Hermione caught me.'

Monica shook her head, where had that come from? She didn't know any girl by the name of Hermione. She had wanted to call her baby after a character in Winter's Tale, but the little girl had been a miscarriage, just like the three others. The doctors had told her then to stop trying.
Finally her husband Wendell found her clutching her most likely broken ankle. He drove her to the hospital quickly.

The nurse at the reception desk had bushy brown hair and Monica thought she looked exceptionally like Hermione.

Wait. How could she know which traits the little girl would have inherited? Monica shook her head, she must have hit it harder than she thought. But something kept nudging her to think about this and at last Monica turned to Wendell while they were waiting for her x-ray results.

"Wendell, do you remember a Hermione from Great Britain?" she asked quietly to not disturb the other patients.

"Hermione?" Wendell said in confusion. "Didn't you want to name our girl like that?"

"Yes, but I think I remember something about a little, bushy-haired girl called Hermione back in Britain," Monica told him.

"Now that you are mentioning it," Wendell frowned. "I did as well, just today."

"Really?" That couldn't be a coincidence.

"Yes, when I saw you lying at the bottom of the stairs. I thought 'Last time Hermione caught her.'"

"I thought the same thing!" They exchanged a baffled look. But before they could discuss it further the nurse called them up.

When they returned they had nearly forgotten about their conversation in the hospital. Monica wasn't happy about the broken ankle since it meant that she couldn't go to work. And she loved her work.

Sighing she sat down in an armchair in the living room. She had always loved reading and for some reason she now chose a children's book of which she wasn't even sure how it came to be in her possession. 'Matilda' was a wonderful book and Monica had to admit that she enjoyed it greatly.

That night she dreamed of a little bushy haired girl with adorable buck-teeth who frowned in concentration while levitating a pencil. How odd.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, I hope you liked it! Next up: the day of Draco's trial. That chapter will be probably a lot longer than this one. And I am currently open for prompts of nearly every pairing, pm me or write it in your comment if you have an idea! :) Cya soon ;)
Hello my dear readers! I proudly present to you the first part of the trial. Betaed as always by viv-heart who just posted the second chapter to her amazing kinda Muggle AU 'Question of Mortality', check it out! :)

Upon entering the Ministry of Magic on Wednesday morning Hermione bought her first Daily Prophet in ages. They didn't have a subscription at Grimmauld Place and she herself had ended her subscription in sixth year. But she wanted to see what they had to say about Draco's trial and whether someone had captured a picture of her an Pansy.

When Hermione saw the front page she very nearly shredded the paper to bits. Who had allowed that terrible vermin of a woman to write again! And most importantly, who had allowed her to make front page while slandering a war heroine!

"Oi, 'Mione, what's up? You look downright murderous," Ron said looking over her shoulder. She turned to him and saw him going white with rage. "I thought you taught that bug a lesson?"

"Obviously it didn't stick," Hermione answered venomously. She cast a Tempus charm -there were still two hours until the start of the trial. She had wanted to do some things at the Ministry, but they would have to wait.

She went over to the reception desk and smiled at the witch there. "Good morning, I was wondering whether it would be possible to inquire if a person is a registered Animagus or not."

"Miss Granger," the reception desk lady exclaimed when she saw who was asking. "Of course, please go up to the Office of the Secretary for Magical Law Enforcement. They will direct you to the Animagus Registry."

"Thank you," Hermione smiled and turned to the lifts.

"You know you sounded a lot like Mrs Malfoy there," Ron remarked catching up to her.

"Well, she nearly always gets what she wants," Hermione remarked coolly while entering the lift. She looked down on the newspaper again. "War heroine fraternizing with the enemy? Golden Girl seen with Pansy Parkinson!" She had hoped to make a head-line, but not like that! There were pictures of her talking to the Malfoys after Draco's hearing, Pansy and Hermione leaving the Leaky Cauldron and saying goodbye at the floo.

"Should I come with you and make sure that you don't kill her?" Ron asked cautiously but she could see he was smiling.

"No, go and visit Percy. He could need some positive feedback," Hermione said sounding much calmer again.

"Alright. Do you think Harry already decided when he wants to start Auror training?"
Hermione looked up. "No, I don't think so. But…Pansy mentioned something yesterday. You probably should ask him yourself."

"Will do," Ron said and left the lift at International Cooperation. "See you later!"

Soon after Hermione entered the Animagus Registry. She had been here once, back then Skeeter hadn't been registered and Hermione hoped she had failed to do so since. The wizard who worked here didn't seem to recognise her and Hermione was rather happy about that. It wouldn't do for gossip to get out that she had consulted the registry after that article.

There were three new names on the parchment. One of them was Penelope Clearwater who was able to turn into a snowy owl with three black dots over each eye. Hermione didn't know who the two others were but she was certain that Rita Skeeter wasn't a pen name.

The Ministry official flinched when he saw her smile but she didn't care. She still had her leverage and she would not hesitate to use it.

But maybe…Hermione stopped her train of thought. Charging in there, threatening Skeeter would be awfully obvious and dangerous. She was a war heroine and had a reputation to lose. Maybe she should consult the older Malfoys first. Nobody would question her arriving with them, especially not after that article. Hermione snorted, they would be delighted.

-0-0-0-

Minutes later Hermione stumbled out of the living room fireplace at Tonks Cottage. Andromeda appeared at the door seconds later, her wand drawn.

"I am sorry, Andromeda, I didn't have time to announce my visit," Hermione said breathlessly. "I need to talk to the Malfoys."

"Is it about the article in the Prophet?" Andromeda asked, concern evident in her voice.

"Partially," Hermione answered while brushing the soot from her robes.

Andromeda stepped back into the hall and the younger witch followed her into the kitchen. The Malfoys sat at the table, their backs ramrod straight and expressions tight. A pile of paper shreds laid on the table next to Narcissa.

"I see you read the article as well," Hermione said while sitting down on the free chair.

"Indeed," Lucius drawled while Narcissa vanished the pile of paper. "Narcissa got a bit...enthusiastic."

Draco snorted. "I hope you will sue the Prophet, Hermione. Denouncing the girl who saved their arses on the first page like that…"

"Language, Draco," Narcissa reprimanded. "Do you still have leverage on Miss Skeeter?"

Hermione watched the Malfoys closely. This was the pureblood family that had housed Voldemort and his Death Eaters, these were the people that had watched her being tortured. Not the happy family she had met on Monday, baking scones and singing. These were politicians, or to be precise, lobbyists who directed the politicians.

Looking over to Andromeda Hermione realised that even if the woman had married a muggle-born and didn't go into politics she had been raised to do this as well. Seeing her sitting next to her sister,
Hermione saw the politician's daughter she had been. The politician's wife she could have been but chose not to be - even a blue-haired baby on her arm couldn't hide that.

"I found out about this garbage when I arrived at the Ministry. I went straight to the Animagus Registry and looked it up. She isn't registered. At first I wanted to apparate right into her office at the Prophet and threaten her into obedience. But then I thought, what would the Malfoys do?" Hermione confessed sitting just as straight as they did.

"We are compromising you, 'Mione," Draco smirked.

"Probably," Hermione admitted. "But if I just threaten her, especially now and at the Prophet it would attract too much attention."

"You thought 'Let's ask the Slytherins how they would do it'," Lucius said coolly, his eyes watching her every movement.

"No, I thought 'Let's ask my politically well versed friends for advice'," Hermione answered calmly and was rewarded with a barely concealed expression of shock. "You were all raised either by politicians or lobbyists and I wasn't. I did my best to learn it over the years, but there is still so much I don't know. And let's face it, you are probably the best at this game."

"So what can we work with?" Narcissa asked trying to diffuse the tension a bit.

Hermione got out the article and they started analysing it for possible openings they could exploit. Andromeda was reluctant to participate at first, but everything she had learned as a child kicked in somewhere along the way and she participated in the discussion.

One and a half hour later they had a plan and had to hurry to be punctual for the trial.

At exactly eleven o'clock Percy Weasley stood up and announced the entrance of the Chief Sorceress. Professor McGonagall entered the courtroom while everyone stood up. She commanded silence and opened the hearing.

"Last week we heard the indictment and defence presented by Miss Granger," McGonagall announced. "Mr Shafiq, if you would repeat the indictment to refresh our memory?"

The Head of the DMLE did just that and Hermione was happy that there was a Silencing Charm between the spectator's places and the rest of the courtroom once again. The difference was that this time the witnesses were sitting at the side where they would be able to step forward and answer questions from the Wizengamot.

"Miss Granger, we would like to begin our further questioning of the witnesses with you," Mr Shafiq said finally and she stood up from her seat next to Draco.

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" McGonagall asked the formal question.

"I swear," Hermione answered easily.

Cassius Parkinson was the first one to ask a question. "Miss Granger, how was your relationship with the defendant prior to the events during and after the Battle of Hogwarts?"

"To be totally honest: horrible. We were from rivalling houses and he was taught to hate me early on. Furthermore I was friends with a Weasley, so there was also family rivalry involved. I
surpassed him in every subject - without me he would have been the best in our year. All this resulted into many arguments that sometimes even turned into violence," Hermione answered calmly.

"So why did you decide to defend your bully?" Mr Parkinson asked with glittering eyes. His posture and voice completely relaxed he could have fooled some into thinking he didn't care. But he asked what nearly everyone in the room thought.

"Because he was sentenced to death with the other Death Eaters even though he defected. Because I remembered Sirius Black being sent to Azkaban without trial despite being innocent just because of the lack of evidence. I didn't want that to happen again," Hermione said defiantly.

Many in the Wizengamot raised their eyebrows at the mentioning of Sirius but those who had been in the Order nodded in thought.

"I would like to ask a question," a nearly bald, but young looking man said. "How did you come across the Life Debt law? It has been declared darkest magic in the fifties and therefore isn't found even in the Restricted Section of the library in Hogwarts."

Hermione nearly laughed. Did they really think she didn't have access to any other library?

"When Dumbledore told Harry about the horcruxes Voldemort made, I started researching about them in every book about dark magic I found. Including those still in the Black townhouse library. 'De leges vitae and potentiae magae' is written in Latin but I learned to read the language as fluently as English in my first two school years so that wasn't a problem. The book didn't say much about horcruxes but I have eidetic memory, therefore I remembered the part about the life debts anyway."

"So you admit to accessing forbidden material? Normally one would need a license for reading these books," the man said.

"I know and I plan on acquiring one as soon as the Ministry is back to normal," Hermione said with a nearly innocent smile. She heard Narcissa snort at that and she saw Mr Parkinson hide a smile behind his hand.

"Are there any other questions relating more directly to the testimony of Miss Granger?"
McGonagall asked.

"Yes, Chief Sorceress," Mr Weasley spoke up. "Would you please tell us how the defection of Mr Malfoy happened? In the testimony you only told us that it happened during the evacuation."

"There was so much I had to tell, I probably forgot to go into detail," Hermione said a bit embarrassed and indeed she had talked for nearly three hours recounting her encounters with quite a number of Death Eaters and suspects. "Well, during the evacuation Harry, Ron and I entered the Room of Requirement to destroy the horcrux located there. We were followed by Draco Malfoy, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle. After a short argument we started duelling.

Crabbe cast the Fiendfyre curse but was unable to control it. The fire quickly devoured the piles of furniture and other stuff. We all ran to save our lives. Harry, Ron and I were able to find three brooms but the others didn't have as much luck." Hermione swallowed. The memory of the roaring fire and the stench of burning furniture tried to take over her consciousness.

"They were climbing the piles in the hope to save themselves from the flames. Harry decided to turn back and get them out as well. I grabbed Draco and Ron managed to pull Goyle on his broom.
But Harry lost his grip on Crabbe and he fell into the flames." Hermione stopped talking and took a sip from her water. Her hands were shaking. "We barely got out after that. The first words Draco said were 'I want to defect.' We had other things on our minds in that moment but accepted it. We left him there with Goyle who didn't say anything."

The members of the Wizengamot seemed shocked by her tale and Hermione glanced at Draco. He was sweating and breathing extremely fast. She put a hand on his arm and he flinched violently but seemed to calm down.

"Miss Granger, a question," Madam Longbottom said with a clear voice. "Did I understand correctly that Mr Malfoy didn't intervene when you were tortured by Bellatrix Lestrange in front of him?"

Hermione looked up to the old woman who had been Neville's second biggest fear in third year. She obviously wanted to remind the Wizengamot that he hadn't helped the muggleborn, but the pureblooded Luna. Hermione suppressed a snort.

"He didn't have another option if he didn't want to risk his own death," she answered calmly.

Madam Longbottom didn't seem exactly satisfied with the answer, but she didn't continue asking.

"I would like to ask something else," a man next to Kingsley said. He looked a lot like Marcus Flint, meaning he was probably his father Anton. "Which points of the indictment did you witness directly?"

Hermione raised her eyebrows at the question. She hadn't expected anyone from the more racist part of the Wizengamot questioning her about that. "I-," she stopped talking and frowned in thought. What had she really witnessed from the points in the indictment? "I only witnessed him evading his death sentence, because I was the one who helped him evade it. I witnessed Katie Bell being cursed by the necklace and visited Ron in the Hospital Wing after he drank the poisoned mead."

"So you never witnessed Mr Malfoy using an Unforgivable Curse, participating in any actions of the Death Eaters and only them, not their associates. You never saw his Dark Mark, you never saw or heard him plotting the demise of Professor Dumbledore," Mr Flint specified.

"That is correct," Hermione answered, realising what he was saying.

"No further questions," Mr Flint said with a tight smile.

"Wonderful, anyone else?" McGonagall asked looking around. Nobody raised their hand or said anything. "Questioning closed. Next witness for the defence: Mr Harry James Potter."

Hermione sat back down and listened while the Wizengamot questioned Harry about his testimony. They asked him about the duel in the bathroom in sixth year and the scene he had witnessed on the Astronomy Tower at the end of the same year. Hermione thought that it wasn't exactly fortunate for Draco that he had admitted to five of the six points in the indictment in front of Harry. But he did his best to answer the questions in Draco's favour.

When the Wizengamot called Ron up Hermione hoped that the redhead would keep his dislike for Draco in check. But he stayed calm and they only asked one question.

"Why are you only a witness for the defection of Mr Malfoy?" Mr Shafiq asked.

A lopsided grin appeared on Ron's face. "The rivalry and dislike between us and our families goes
very deep. I only witnessed him defect and I was injured during his second attempt to murder Dumbledore. It would be hard to find many positive words for him."

With that he was allowed to sit back down. Luna was called up next and Hermione realised that she didn't need to worry about the blonde drifting from the subject when she saw her determined look.

"Miss Lovegood, you said in your testimony that you stayed at Mr Malfoy's room for most of the Christmas holidays. What did you do there?" someone asked and Hermione bristled at the implication that Luna and Draco had had a sexual relationship.

"I mostly read. Draco brought me every book I asked for. I didn't want to leave the room and didn't need to. The food was delivered to the room and the bathroom was adjoining. I missed going outside but it was safer that way," Luna answered in her dreamy voice. But her sentences were much more straightforward than Hermione was used to and she had to admit that she would need to revise her opinion of Luna.

"Where did you sleep?"

"In the bed of course, Draco was polite enough to sleep on the transfigured couch," Luna said emphatically.

The questioner refrained from asking further and Hermione was pretty sure she was glowering at the man by now.

Narcissa was the last witness for the defence and the Wizengamot had only a few questions for her. They were ascertaining once again that if Draco had refused to obey there would have been dire consequences for him and his family.

"After hearing the witnesses for the defence the witnesses for the prosecution will be next. We will take a thirty minutes break before that. Court dismissed," McGonagall said when Narcissa had settled down again.

The spectators left the room along with most of the Wizengamot, only Kingsley Shacklebolt and Mr Ollivander staying behind.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it! :) What do you think the plan for Skeeter is? We won't see in action for a few chapters, since the second part of the trial has to come first, but tell me your guesses! ;) On another note, I added my tumblr name to my profile so you can follow me there as well. Have a nice week! :)
Chapter Notes

Here we go again! :) Betalove to viv-heart. I will try to post a cookie on my tumblr for every future chapter so if you are interested: follow me at evolutionsbedingt! Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"We will continue now," Professor McGonagall banged the gavel and everyone fell silent. "We will question the witnesses for prosecution starting with Mister Rabastan Lestrange."

A hidden door on the left of the courtroom opened and a cage was levitated in. Inside the younger Lestrange brother stood with a scowl marring his features. Hermione felt Draco stiffen beside her but she didn't take her eyes off the criminal.

Normally she would condone the measures taken, but she had to admit that Rabastan was more likely to attack her or Draco than most of the other witnesses.

"Mr Lestrange," Kingsley spoke up when the Aurors had returned to where they came from. "In your first testimony you told us that Mr Draco Malfoy participated in thirty-six cases of rape, torture and murder. During your Veritaserum testimony you said he participated on fourteen occasions. Please tell us which occasions that would be, including date and place."

Hermione exhaled. She had cross and double checked that nobody could attest to more than four meetings in which Draco had played an active role. And that was if you counted him not identifying the boys and her at Malfoy Manor. It was true that he had attended fourteen meetings, but well, attending wasn't the same as participating.

Meanwhile Rabastan had told the Wizengamot about all the occasions Draco had attended. But he didn't look as convinced as he had before.

"If you could elaborate what Mr Malfoy did in each of those meetings, Mr Lestrange?" Kingsley asked with a broad smile and Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe he hadn't argued strongly enough against the executions, but at least he treated Draco fairly now.

Rabastan spluttered and after a few failed attempts to come up with a story he was brought back out. The charge of lying to the court was added to his rather long list of crimes.

The next person who was called up was Lucius. He was questioned about Draco's participation as well and told them the truth easily. As far as Hermione could tell he didn't try to mask the truth and soon they were done.

When Lucius stepped back Mr Ollivander staggered to his feet. Lucius offered him his arm but the elder pushed him away. Hermione smiled. She was suitably sure that Lucius hadn't only done that to help his elder. The continuous clicking of the photographers had sped up at the scene.

"Mr Ollivander, you were much longer at the Malfoy Manor than any other prisoner. Can you name any specific incident where Mr Malfoy lay hand on you?" a female Wizengamot member asked and Hermione recognised her immediately. It was Mafalda Hopkirk. She probably should
write an apology letter to the woman for knocking her out and stealing her clothes.

"No, Madam Hopkirk, but he didn't help me either," Mr Ollivander said in a cold voice. Many in the Wizengamot raised their eyebrows at his open hostility but Hermione understood him. They really should have helped the old man at least a little.

The wand-maker was allowed to sit back down and an Auror Hermione recognised as Mike Proudfoot was called up.

"Auror Proudfoot, can you tell us why you checked Mr Malfoy for a Dark Mark?" Cassius Parkinson asked.

"I had order to check every known Death Eater for a Mark and his wand for Unforgivables. Everyone knows the Malfoys were in deep," the Auror answered with a self-assured smile. Hermione pondered that he was rather dashing looking in his Auror robes. But he hadn't bothered to remember that the Malfoys hadn't fought during the battle.

"But weren't you informed about those you had defected? That they weren't to be checked?" Kingsley asked in his most amicable voice.

The Auror started to sweat. If he admitted to having known he would get into trouble for targeting defectors. But if he told the Wizengamot he hadn't known they would know he lied. Every Auror had been given a list of the defectors along with the execution warrant. Hermione smiled smugly. Mike Proudfoot wouldn't be an Auror much longer either way.

"I- I admit," Proudfoot started and swallowed before starting again. "I admit that I targeted the Malfoys although I knew they were defectors. But Draco Malfoy's name wasn't on the list. Only his parents were."

Hermione froze. Draco's name hadn't been on the list? She had to restrain herself from looking at Harry and Ron. She had been too busy but they should have reported the defection! Returning her attention to the Wizengamot she had to admit that saying the truth was probably the better solution for Proudfoot. But she nearly felt the roar of the crowd of journalists behind the silencing charm. The members of the Wizengamot whispered with each other and Professor McGonagall had to bang her gavel quite a few times before everyone fell silent again.

"Mr Weasley junior please note that there will be a follow-up trial for Mike Proudfoot. Mr Proudfoot you're suspended from duty until the date of the trial where we will decide your fate," Mr Shafiq declared standing up from his place.

While everyone settled down again Professor McGonagall called up Kingsley who stood up and walked to the witness box.

"Minister, you were the one organising the execution. Did nobody tell you that Mr Malfoy defected before the battle really started?" Mr Flint asked leaning forward on his seat.

"No, I only learned of his defection after he was brought to the Ministry and questioned," Kingsley admitted and a few people on the Wizengamot actually gasped.

"So Miss Granger calling a life debt would have been unnecessary if she had told you that Mr Malfoy defected?" Mr Parkinson asked curiously.

Kingsley nodded. "Yes, it would have been. But since she didn't know about the list at that time it must have seemed like the only possibility."
Hermione was seething in her seat beside Draco. So that was the reason why she hadn't gotten her hands on the list. It probably wasn't really top-secret but someone had noticed that they had messed up and tried to hide it.

"And if Mr Malfoy's name had been on that list," Parkinson continued with glittering eyes, "he wouldn't have been tried for three of the six points on the indictment?"

The whispers started up again and Kingsley waited to let them subside. "Yes, that is true."

"No more questions, Chief Sorceress," Parkinson said, a satisfied smile on his lips.

"That can't be true," Draco muttered next to Hermione and they exchanged a flabbergasted look.

"Now we will hear Mr Weasley again, as a witness for the prosecution this time," McGonagall announced with a sharp look at the Wizengamot which silenced everyone.

At first nobody spoke up, but finally Kingsley himself asked a very important question. "Mr Weasley, I am sure you expected to be questioned on your poisoning from the mead that was intended for Albus Dumbledore. But I would like to ask something else. Why didn't you report the defection of Mr Malfoy to me or Mr Shafiq?"

Ron turned red and Hermione prayed that he wouldn't incriminate himself with his answer. "I'm sure everyone here knows that I lost my brother only a few hours earlier that night. I admit that I wasn't thinking entirely straight. I probably thought Hermione told you, because she is the one who normally thinks of these things. But she was busy with helping to heal the wounded. Harry couldn't make a step without being herded by people so he had no chance to say a thing. And it honestly just slipped my mind," he admitted quietly and turned to Draco. "I'm sorry, Malfoy."

Hermione beamed up at her best friend and Malfoy nodded, a tiny smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Ron was allowed to sit back down. The next person swearing to tell the truth in front of the court was Madam Rosmerta. Draco turned pale and his expression became pained.

"We all know that Mr Malfoy used the Imperius Curse on you, but did you have any indication, that he didn't do so in his own will?" Arthur Weasley asked gently and Hermione watched the matron of the Three Broomsticks closely.

Madam Rosmerta smiled sadly. "It was clear that he didn't want to do it at all and he definitely didn't enjoy it," she said quietly.

"This might be a rather strange question," the bald, young man, who had asked the question about the sleeping situation for Luna, said. "But do you forgive Mr Malfoy?"

"Do I forgive him for keeping me under the Imperius, Mr Fawley? Yes, I do. He was a frightened child and didn't mean any true harm to me. Do I forgive him for making me try to kill the Headmaster? No, I don't. Albus was a dear friend of mine and I'm sad to hear that others got hurt in these misguided attempts," Madam Rosmerta stood straight and spoke clearly at this.

"Thank you, Madam," Mr Fawley said.

Madam Rosmerta sat back down and Katie Bell was called up and asked whether she had had any contact with Draco at all prior to being given the necklace. She denied it and was allowed to sit back down.
"Now, we have heard all witnesses whose testimonies influenced the indictment," McGonagall announced. "But there is one last witness of a kind. Mr Malfoy has stayed with his aunt for the last week and her report about his behaviour shall influence our decision as well."

Andromeda stood up and stepped forward into the witness box. "Draco Malfoy has presented himself as a kind and intelligent young man in the last week. At least to the son of Remus and Nymphadora Lupin, my grandson he has been a wonderful great-cousin. In discussions about muggle life and literature he showed interest and much more open-mindedness than I expected. I would like to take him to my muggle family-in-law this weekend, if the Wizengamot decides against sending him to Azkaban, which I would strongly recommend. Draco Malfoy deserves a second chance."

Hermione could nearly feel the agitation of the reporters once again and the Wizengamot broke out in startled gasps and whispers.

Professor McGonagall banged her gavel again and everyone fell silent. "The Wizengamot will now retire for deliberation. We will continue in an hour."

Everyone stood up and Hermione watched them leave through the door at the back of the chamber.

Cassius Parkinson scanned the room. As per usual the more conservative part of the Wizengamot had settled on the right side of the door and the more liberal part on the left side. But he noted with interest that Anton Flint, normally rather conservative, had settled quite close to the middle next to Mr Greengrass and Professor Slughorn.

Taking his cue from his partners in politics he settled down opposite them. They nodded to each other and waited for everyone to file in.

"Now, I think we all agree that Azkaban is out of question," Mr Fawley, one of the few truly neutral people, stated. Cassius frowned. He hadn't expected him to say that after his line of questioning in the courtroom.

"I think he should walk free. He should get a completely new start," Harris Macmillan said. But as soon as the words had left his mouth multiple voices told him that he was insane.

"If we let him walk free the public will skin him alive," Cassius said when most of the members had calmed down. Many nodded.

"Maybe a probation?" Anton Flint suggested.

"But for how long and forbidding him to do what?" William Abbot asked stroking his rather impressive beard.

"Maybe like the Nott boy? Two years and the trace on his wand for dark magic?" Mr Weasley suggested. Cassius was surprised that he didn't rally against the young Malfoy. There was a long history of rivalry between the two families after all.

"But Nott didn't try to kill Dumbledore and didn't injure two other people!" Madam Longbottom exclaimed.

"Well, it's not like he wanted to do it, is it?" Flint asked sarcastically.

"And nearly every student had to hurt others at Hogwarts in the last year," Professor Slughorn said quietly and Professor McGonagall nodded. "The Gryffindors and Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs hid,
but they didn't hide any Slytherin students. Wouldn't have even if one of them asked."

The room grew quiet. They knew it was the truth. Even now they tended to organise themselves according to House loyalty and the former Gryffindor students seldom sided with the Slytherins.

"How many for letting the Death Eater related charges fall?" McGonagall asked into the silence.

Nearly everyone raised his hand, save for Mr Ollivander and Madam Longbottom. Well, he had personal reasons and Augusta hated Narcissa because of Bellatrix. Never mind that Mrs Malfoy was much more like Andromeda Tonks.

"Wonderful," McGonagall remarked drily. "Now, how many for a probation and the trace for four years to accommodate his crimes in relation to the crimes of Theodore Nott?"

There were less hands in the air, but still enough to let the notion pass. Cassius was intrigued to notice that mostly the conservative wing voted for this sentence. But also convinced liberals like Arthur Weasley and William Abbot, fascinating.

"Good...Should we add anything else?" the Chief Sorceress asked.

At first nobody said a thing, but finally Mr Greengrass raised his hand.

"I think we should add another four year ban to apply for a dark magic license. I doubt the boy would want to be an Auror or curse-breaker anyway," he said.

"I second that notion," Fawley exclaimed.

"Everyone in favour?" McGonagall asked and this time even Madam Longbottom and Ollivander nodded. "Well then, perfectly punctual back to the chamber."

Draco hated waiting. Even more so when he wasn't able to move his arms or legs. He had tried to talk to Hermione but she seemed to be just as much on edge as he was. Finally he had resigned himself to counting things. It didn't work too well and his mind constantly wandered.

He was extremely relieved when the Wizengamot re-entered the courtroom. They settled down on their seats and Cassius winked at him. That meant he was probably safe from Azkaban, what a relief.

Leaning back in his chair he waited for McGonagall to speak his sentence. No Azkaban, maybe probation like Theo? Or, what did Hermione call it, social service?

"Mr Draco Malfoy will be sentenced to four years on probation and a trace on his wand to make sure he doesn't cast any dark magic. And another four years where he won't be allowed to apply for a dark magic license. Court dismissed."

With these words the Silencing Charm fell and the crowd of journalists started shouting questions. But Draco barely noticed them. He only felt the shackles slither away. He had never felt more free in his whole live.

He barely noticed the tears falling from his eyes. Only when Hermione touched his arm, he looked up. She had already vanished her chair and table and had put away her scrolls and books into her bag.

In the next moment Draco was on his feet, just barely refraining from hugging her he grabbed her
hand and kissed it like he was taught to.

"Thank you Hermione, thank you so, so much," he whispered and smiled at her stunned face.

"You're welcome," she stammered.

They turned to leave the courtroom. At the door his parents waited, the faces alight with happiness and love. Draco knew that in the moment they stepped outside they wouldn't display any emotion until they arrived at Andromeda's.

His mother clasped his right hand tightly with both of hers and Father patted him on the back, eyes shining brightly.

"So, shall we get going?" Hermione asked with a smile and they nodded.

They had to fight their way through journalists and other people, but they finally reached the floo. But Andromeda was nowhere in sight.

"Where is Andy?" Narcissa asked looking around.

"Oh, she already went home," Hermione said matter-of-factly but Draco saw a small smile before she turned to the floo and called their destination.

His parents went next and he followed them. He dreaded the other end. There could be waiting felicitators or worse: a party!

When Draco stepped out of the floo he only caught a glimpse of red hair before he was showered in green and silver glitter.

"SURPRISE!"

Chapter End Notes

Oh, no! A surprise, what could it be? *irony off* I hope you liked my trial. I worked nearly completely blind since I don't know much about senat courts, but I think this could be their way of handling things. I started writing the next chapter already and it should be up soon! ;)


Hermione smiled brightly. She loved that everyone had come. Theo and Pansy had been delighted at the idea and Molly had insisted on cooking dinner. The whole Weasley clan was at Andromeda's.

At first Hermione hadn't been sure whether it was really a good idea to invite them, but as soon as Ron had mentioned the idea to his mother she had insisted to come. To 'make the poor boy feel welcome' she had said and proceeded to floo Andromeda to ask for Draco's favourite foods. And since she had also insisted on preparing the meal at Tonks Cottage she had been happy to take care of Teddy while the others were at the trial.

Directly after the sentence was announced Mr Weasley had sent a Patronus to Molly that they would be there soon. Molly had contacted Bill, Charlie and George who had come immediately. Ginny had already been there, forced to help her mother.

While Hermione had considered inviting Blaise, Ginny had argued against it. She feared how her brothers would treat him since they wouldn't want to hide their attraction. Hermione had to admit that it would be better to keep the tension low.

Draco didn't seem too happy about the glitter shower. George was taking pictures and while he was brushing off the tiny pieces of paper. Theo and Pansy were grinning widely and whispering to each other.

When Pansy caught Hermione looking at them she winked and put a finger on her lips. Hermione nodded and smiled.

Suddenly Draco's eyes became big and he stepped forward. "Pans? Theo?"

"The one and only," Theo answered with a smirk and Pansy just laughed.

"How? When?" Draco stammered while hugging them.

"Well, I met with Hermione yesterday and she asked whether I would like to join your surprise party. Of course I said yes," Pansy explained and Draco looked over to Hermione who just winked at him.

"And obviously her impertinent owl knew how to find me, so she wrote me and asked whether I was allowed to leave the Manor," Theo said. "She explained that they were planning a surprise party and I couldn't say no to that."
Draco narrowed his eyes. "Did you mention that I hate surprise parties?"

"Oh, yes, they did." Hermione said smiling innocently. "I didn't care though."

Draco rolled his eyes and shrugged. "Well, I suppose I will live. By the way, Theo I hope you organised the most important part of any party!"

Hermione frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Booze," Theo said and pointed to two bottles of Firewhiskey and a bottle of-

"Dragon's Breath?! Are you insane?!" Hermione cried. "Put that away or Molly will skin you alive!"

"Don't worry, 'Mione," George said from behind her. "It's charmed so it looks like Butterbeer to any disapproving adults."

"What?" she swirled around to face him. "How would you do that?"

George grinned at her, even though it didn't really reach his eyes it looked much more natural than any other smile she had seen from him in the last weeks. Then her mind registered that he was talking.

"-so you have to add in a thought sensitive charm, they are a bit tricky, but Fred and I," he stopped to swallow, "we managed them in our last year. Those daydream charms we use are a variation of this."

"That's impressing charm work," Theo remarked and George bowed with a smug smirk. "But maybe we should get Draco outside before Mrs Weasley gets impatient."

"No more glitter I hope!" Draco scowled and the others laughed.

"No more glitter, promised," Hermione said and took his hand to pull him outside.

As soon as they stepped out the door she let his hand go, but she smiled at him before she went to help Molly to arrange the tableware.

Ginny came to her. "Do you know any spell to turn any alcohol George puts into his glass into something else?"

"I'm afraid, no," Hermione said quietly.

"Damn, then we have to keep a close eye on him," Ginny sighed and Hermione nodded.

A few minutes later everyone sat down and Hermione found herself between Theo and Pansy. Theo was sitting next to Draco and Pansy had Harry to her left. Opposite of her Charlie sat down between Fleur and George.

Everyone dug in and in the first few minutes nearly nobody spoke. Molly was praised for her lovely cooking and Fleur cooed at Teddy. Bill seemed rather amused by his wife's behaviour.

When everyone had finished Andromeda vanished the leftovers of the meal and Molly stood up to levitate the cake from the kitchen onto the table.

"Draco dear, your mother told me you always loved pistachio cream cake," Mrs Weasley said while setting the cake down in front of him. "I hope you enjoy this one. When Ron told me about
the surprise party they were planning for you I wanted to make sure that your favourite foods were served. I think we should celebrate your freedom and my family and I wish you all the best for your new start!"

Hermione watched how Draco blushed and whispered a quiet 'thank you'. She saw that the smile didn't really reach his eyes and he looked a bit thoughtful. Did he think he didn't deserve freedom? Hermione surely hoped he didn't.

After the very delicious cake had been served and eaten Andromeda brought the radio out and chose a station which played only music. Mr and Mrs Weasley left soon, followed by Bill and Fleur, and Harry and Ron.

The latter had assured him that they would stay if they could but they had to be at the Ministry early in the morning. Draco saw Pansy frowning at Harry, but he didn't really think about it.

His parents, Andromeda and Teddy were the next to excuse themselves and Hermione cast a Silencing Charm around the garden. That way they wouldn't have to mind their volume.

"When did you get so good at that charm that you can do it wandlessly?" Theo asked curiously while sipping his 'Butterbeer'.

"On the run," Hermione said, her voice rather distant. They had sat down around one end of the table with only eight of them being left.

"I'm sorry," Theo said, his voice hardly audible. Draco and Pansy looked rather troubled as well.

"It's alright. Originally I used it to study for my O.W.L.s when I had to be in the common room," Hermione joked. George and Ginny laughed at that, only the Slytherins seemed to be confused.

"Why would you need a Silencing Charm to study?" Theo finally asked.

"You have never been on a Gryffindor party, have you?" Charlie asked laughing.

All three Slytherins shook their heads. "Well, it is like a normal party, just louder and crazier. Now imagine how the day to day live would be for people like that," Percy said in annoyance.

"You have my complete and utter sympathy, Hermione," Draco said turning to her.

"It's not that bad! Just, the twins were nearly constantly testing their new sweets and that could get rather…messy," Hermione answered patting Draco's arm. "But I appreciate the thought."

"Do you know what would be really lovely now?" Pansy asked suddenly. "A nice French red-wine!"

"I'm afraid we have nothing like that," George said while checking his pockets jokingly.

"I know a muggle bar where they have something like that," Ginny offered reluctantly. "And don't you go and judge me, my beloved brothers! I know for certain that you two," she pointed at Charlie and George, "were pissed for the first time when you were sixteen!"

They both raised their hands in mock surrender. "We would never tell our little sister what to do!" George said.
"No, we have Ron for that," Charlie added and they high-fived while Percy pinched the bridge of his nose with two fingers.

"I'm not related to the three of you, not even remotely!" he exclaimed and everyone laughed, even Percy himself.

"So, how about a ladies night out?" Ginny asked when she had calmed down a bit. A smile was still playing at the corner of her lips.

Hermione and Pansy exchanged a glance and shrugged. "Sounds like a decent plan, I guess you two could crash at my place if it gets late," Hermione said and the three girls stood up, drinking the last of their real Butterbeer.

"Have fun!" Charlie called after them and then they were gone.

The five young men sat in a tense silence for a few minutes before Percy pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered them to the others. They all accepted.

"I never took you for a smoker, prefect," Draco finally said.

Percy groaned. "Please don't remind me of how pompous I was at school."

"And after," George said quietly.

"And after," Percy admitted. "Sometimes I wish I had a time-turner so I could go back and shake my younger self to its senses."

"Who doesn't," Draco said taking a deep drag of his cigarette. When he had first smoked a cigarette he hadn't been sixteen yet. It had been the day after the battle in Department of Mysteries. He had sought refuge on the Astronomy Tower where he had met some older Slytherins. They had offered him one and he had taken it. He had coughed his lungs out, but after the first few drags of the second cigarette he had relaxed.

"Did you ever have a choice?" Charlie asked suddenly.

"No," Theo said, his voice hard and his shoulders taut. "Well, if we wanted to stay a part of our family tree at first, and later if we wanted to stay alive. He made it rather clear that 'disloyalty'," he said the word with venom, "would lead to our and our family's death."

"Or worse," Draco added. "The girls had it easier. They weren't expected to join or express any opinion. As long as they chose the right type of man, only a man mind you, everything would be alright for them."

"That sounds awful," Percy commented sincerely. "I was probably the only one being nearly disinherited for not joining the cause."

"Well, you're a Weasley, how dare you defy your parents?" Charlie said mockingly and Percy nodded his head gravely.

"And there is really no way that you are staying?" he asked.

Charlie shook his head. "No, not after what happened."

Theo looked between them curiously. "What happened?"

"Nothing, mother and I had a bad fight. I left for Romania the next day and she never truly forgave
me,” Charlie said with finality and the two Slytherin boys nodded.

"Theo, is the old hunting lodge still in one piece?” Draco asked when he had finished his fag and put it out. He vanished the rest so Andy wouldn't find it in the morning.

“Yes, you think about moving there?” Theo asked trying to sound as if they were talking about something more fancy than a shabby hut.


"Sounds like a good plan, especially since I wouldn't want to smoke weed where any mother of ours could smell it," Charlie said casually.

Draco wondered why the lad would want to smoke garden pests but he shrugged it off.

They shrunk the table back into its normal size and brought everything inside. They decided to leave the fairy lights in the trees because it looked rather beautiful and went to the floo.

"Nott Manor!” Theo said loudly and vanished into the green flames. Draco waited until the Weasleys had left and followed them.

"The floo not working at the lodge?” Draco asked. "Wait, never mind."

"It's only connected to the house," Theo explained to the Weasleys and they nodded. They seemed a little awestruck by the Entrance Hall and even Draco had to admit that it looked impressing.

They flooed to the lodge and Draco noticed that Theo had obviously cleaned and repaired it since their last visit over Easter. And redecorated.

The group settled down in front of the fire and Charlie pulled out a small, square linen bag. He pulled two linen sacks out of it, small sheets of paper and what looked like cigarette butts.

"What are you doing?" Theo asked curiously.

"I am building a joint," Charlie answered, not taking his eyes from his work.

"What do you mean by 'joint'?” Percy asked frowning.

Charlie looked up with surprise. "You don't know what a joint is?” They shook their heads. "Have you ever heard of Marihuana?"

"That drug from Afghanistan?” George asked curiously sliding forward on his seat to take a closer look.

"Exactly,” Charlie answered rolling the 'joint' between his thigh and his hand. "This stuff can make you happy or relax you, depends on the sort. It's bit hard to get the good stuff here in Great Britain though. Oh and you shouldn't really mix it with hard alcohol since it amplifies the impact."

"Good that I am not even tipsy yet,” Theo said setting down his bottle, George laughed and did the same.

"So, what kind is the stuff you have?” Draco asked watching the gleam in his best friend's eyes with worry. Whenever they talked about going to the lodge he had had the same look, especially when it meant a hell lot of alcohol.

Charlie snapped his fingers and a flame appeared on the top of his index. He burned the point of
the joint and took two or three pulls before he gave it to Percy who sat to his left. The former
goody-two-shoes had slumped in the low armchair and put his head back when he breathed out.

When it was Draco's turn he already had an idea how it would taste, but it surprised him anyway.
The taste was much sharper than he had expected. Another pull and he gave the joint to George.

Draco's head started to spin pleasantly. He felt himself relax, taking deeper breaths and sinking
further into the armchair. He leaned back and just felt.

"You know, I don't think I felt this good since the end of fourth year," Theo finally murmured and
Draco nodded.

"Now imagine working for the Ministry during that time," Percy said. He had opened the first two
buttons of his oxford and it occurred to Draco that that would be an amazing idea.

"Well, at least you didn't have mom breathing down your neck, demanding that you believe
Dumbles. As if there was anything not to believe. Not if you saw Harry afterwards," George said, a
mocking smile marring his features.

"How did you even come across this stuff, Charlie?" Percy asked after a few minutes of very
relaxed silence.

"Dragon-tamer isn't exactly a stress-free job. So whenever we had a bad day some of the older
tamers would get out the weed. One of them taught me the how's and where's when he retired," Charlie said slowly. "And after the Battle they send me quite a package via owl since the Ministry
doesn't control the import. By the way, it's forbidden in the muggle world, gods know why."

"They probably think it's devil's stuff," Theo joked and the others laughed.

"By the way, Theo," George spoke up and tried to sit straighter. "Why does your lodge look like a
muggle pub?"

The black haired boy looked around as if he saw it for the first time. "I thought it would be more
matching to be honest. My own private pub. Doesn't that sound amazing?"

The others nodded and they fell silent once again, enjoying the light-headedness. Draco wondered
how long it would hold on.

Roughly an hour later he felt the high recede and became aware of a pang of hunger. He sat up
straighter, opening his cuffs and rolling up the arms of his oxford.

"Anyone else hungry?" George asked and the others nodded.

"Cinny!" Theo called and a house-elf wrapped in a tea-towel popped into the room. It's eyes
widened at the sight of five young men slumped in the armchairs at the fireplace.

"What can Cinny do for you, Master Nott?" it squeaked and Draco decided that Cinny was
probably female.

"I would love those tortilla wraps you made once," Theo said and motioned for them to tell the elf
what they wanted to have.

Percy asked for chocolate cake, George for shepherd's pie, Charlie asked for burgers and Draco
decided on a raspberry cake. Cinny left and returned with their orders half an hour later. By then
they were mostly awake again.
"D' you reckon it's safe to drink alcohol again?" George asked munching his pie.

Charlie seemed to think for a moment. "Maybe after you have eaten plus another half an hour."

"Splendid," Theo said and pushed nearly half of his wrap into his mouth.

"You eat like Weaselbee," Draco remarked with a smirk. Theo only flipped the bird at him.

"Weaselbee?" Charlie asked curiously licking mustard off his fingers.

"Your youngest brother's nickname in Slytherin," Draco explained since Theo was still chewing.

"Will have to remember that," George promised between two bites. "Fred'll-," he stopped talking.

Draco did something he hadn't expected. He put his hand on George's shoulder. "Fred probably laughs his arse off in the afterlife because two Slytherins and three Weasleys are chilling together. You have to admit it sounds like the beginning of a bad joke."

George smiled a bit. "You're right. Thank you."

"Only because I am- What is the smoking equivalent of pissed?" Draco asked Charlie.

"Baked," he replied after swallowing.

"I'm only right because I'm still baked," Draco finished his thought.

"Oh come on, stop that," Theo complained. "You're smiling way too smugly!"

"No, really, thank you, all of you," George said quietly. "I think this is the first good evening since…then."

"Any time, mate," Draco said and the others nodded along.

"If you need to get away a bit you can always owl me and come over. All of you," Theo said leaning forward to give his words more emphasis.

And for the first time since what felt forever George smiled his old mischievous grin.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, I hope the second part didn't deter you! viv-heart came up with the idea and I liked it a lot. Charlie compromising the youth *giggles* Tell me in the comments! :) Also happy Day of the German Unity!
The morning after

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovely readers! University has me in its tight grasp and viv-heart is very busy as well, so sorry for the late update :/ But here we go. As always viv-heart is my beta :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At five thirty-four in the morning Pansy was wide awake. The girls had decided to stay in Hermione's room and had transfigured herbed into three. It was rather close to the stairs and therefore Pansy heard when one of the boys got up and went downstairs. The steps were too light for Weasley so it was probably Harry. She decided that she could just get up and talk to him now. Pansy shimmied out of the arms of Ginny (Merlin that girl was cuddly!) and opened the door.

Stepping out on the top of the stairs Pansy wondered why Harry was already awake. They weren't going to the Ministry this early, were they?

Weasley was a notorious late sleeper and Harry wasn't exactly a morning person either.

Well, there was only one way to find out. Pansy tiptoed down the stairs as to not disturb the portraits. The Black's that were hanging in Parkinson House were rather cranky in the early morning. When she arrived at the kitchen door Pansy heard someone humming quietly.

Opening the door Pansy found Harry, clad only in his pyjama bottoms doing something at the stove. Pansy leant in the doorframe and enjoyed the view. She had to admit that the young man could need a bit more on his ribs. But his upper body was toned, probably thanks to years of Quidditch and being hunted by a mad man.

"Gah, Pansy!" he suddenly yelled and nearly dropped the pan he was holding.

"A wonderful morning to you as well, Harry," Pansy purred and stepped into the kitchen. "Is there a reason why you are cooking?"

Harry stared at her and blushed a deep red. Pansy suddenly realised that she was only wearing a long-ish t-shirt and knickers. And she had left her wand in Hermione's room.

"Well, seems we're both short of one piece of clothing," Pansy said sitting down at the table.

"Erm, yeah, maybe I could summon a shirt for me and pyjama bottoms for you?" Harry asked pushing his glasses a bit higher up his nose.

"That would be lovely," Pansy answered grinning mischievously.

Seconds later she slipped into the bottoms that fit her surprisingly well.

Harry pulled the shirt over his head and Pansy suppressed a appreciative hum at the movement of his back muscles.

"Now, you didn't answer my question," Pansy said when he turned back to the stove.
"I was- a bit distracted," Harry answered flicking a look over his shoulder probably trying to gauge her reaction.

"The feeling was mutual," Pansy said laughing. "I asked why you are cooking and even more so the muggle way."

"It's soothing," Harry mumbled. "You want some?"

"It smells heavenly and it doesn't look burned," Pansy stood up and peeked over his shoulder. "So, yes, I think I would like something."

Harry served them scrambled eggs, beans and sausages. He toasted some bread with a quick spell and they sat down to eat.

"When did you come here tonight?" Harry asked in between two bites and Pansy nearly reprimanded him but then she remembered he had lived on the run for quite some time. Eating was important.

"Around two I think. We didn't stay too long at Andromeda's and left for a nice muggle pub. It was quite a funny evening," Pansy said when she had finished chewing. "By the way, Ginny is awfully cuddly!"

Harry laughed. "That she is! But it was pretty nice in the first weeks. It got a bit much after."

"I understand," Pansy said quietly. "By the way, why are you already up?"

"Nightmare and I figured it would be useless to go back to sleep if I wanted to be at the Ministry at eight," Harry said in a strained voice.

"What would you want at the Ministry?"

"I was asked to verify some things in a trial," Harry said but Pansy had a feeling that he was not telling the whole truth.

"Did you tell your friends that you will take your NEWTs at Hogwarts?" Pansy asked trying to sound casual.

Harry blushed slightly. "Not yet. I think Ron would feel a bit lost without me. At least I have 'Mione, but he would be alone."

"But do you want to let him arrive at Auror Training only to see that you aren't there?" Pansy asked raising her eyebrow at him.

"I- No, of course not," Harry stammered and pushed his glasses up his nose. Probably a nervous habit. "I will tell him tonight over dinner."

Pansy looked at him skeptically. "I'm sure you will or I'm going to drop by everyday and annoy the hell out of you until you do it."

"Well, we could need someone to help us with redecorating the rooms we already cleaned out," Harry answered grinning cheekily.

"Oh, no, I don't think I'd move as much as my finger while I'm here!" Pansy grinned just as broadly. "But if you tell Ron by the end of the week I could consider talking to my interior decorator!"
Harry huffed, leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest. "Are you trying to blackmail me?"

"No, I'm giving you an incentive to tell Weasley," Pansy winked.

"Tell me what?" someone asked from the doorway.

Harry's and Pansy's heads swivelled around simultaneously and as soon as she realised that it was Weasley standing there Pansy stood up. "I'll let you two talk. Be nice to him, Weasley."

She left with a last smile and wink to Harry and climbed back up the stairs with the intention to go back to sleep. Or maybe she could ask Hermione for a hangover potion - she felt a bit too dizzy for her liking.

Harry was biting on the edge of his thumb, he didn't know how to start and Ron looking at him expectantly didn't help things. Silently cursing Pansy for her insistence he got up and grabbed a kettle.

"You want some tea?" Harry asked distractedly.

"I'd like some answers more, but yeah, if you're making some," Ron shrugged and sat down on Pansy's seat.

"I- You know, I-," Harry stopped talking and swallowed. "Pansy made me wonder whether I really wanted to fight the bad guys. And I realised that I don't know. I'd like some time to get used to peace."

Ron looked at him in silence for some time. Harry saw him clenching and unclenching his fist a few times and when he finally spoke his voice was calm.

"I'm glad you told me before we start training in two weeks," Ron said. "So, Pansy changed your mind?"

"Not really, she only said that she would like to catch her breath before she had to deal with the real world and I realised that I wanted that as well. And I'm just sick of fighting. I need some time to find out whether or not I really want to continue the fight of my youth in my adult life," Harry had his eyes fixed on the plate in front of him. He didn't want to see the disappointment in Ron's face.

"I guess that's a good reason," the redhead finally said. "But you know, you should have told me immediately. I was really looking forward to it."

"I know and I'm sorry, but I didn't really want to leave you alone," Harry said finally looking up at Ron.

"I'll have to get used to not have you there, but I'm gonna be okay," Ron said with a lopsided smile. "It's not like we're going to do the same thing together for the rest of our lives. That would be awfully boring."

"Well, I don't think there is going to happen much at Hogwarts now that Tom is gone," Harry said grinning. "Suppose you're going to make me jealous with all your tales from Auror training."

Ron laughed. "Oh, I'll spin them so they seem bloody amazing and you're going to curse your decision to go to Hogwarts in the first week!"

"Prat!" Harry exclaimed and they toppled over laughing from the absurdity of the situation.
"You know," Ron said when he finally was able to breathe again. "I always thought it would be you who fought all those bloody bastards. I thought I would end up working at Wizarding Wheezes because I won't manage the job."

Harry looked up at the sudden pensive tone. "Remember how you beat McGonagall in chess in first year? You're going to be a great auror and if you happen to forget it we're going to remind you."

"Thanks mate, I appreciate it," Ron said with a grin and with a look at the table he continued. "Am I going to get something to eat or do I have to burn the kitchen trying to cook something first?"

Harry laughed and stood up. "Please don't. Once was one time too often."

Harry cooked and Ron brought him anything he needed. They joked around as always and when Tinna apparated into the kitchen they were already done eating. Ron was cleaning the dishes magically since he was much better at that than at cooking.

"Masters had already breakfast?" Tinna asked yawning.

"We did and Pansy, a guest of 'Mione as well," Harry answered cheerfully. "Good morning by the way."

"Miss Parkinson is visiting?" Tinna perked up at that.

"Yes, do you know her from before you moved here?" Ron asked. Tinna didn't really talk about her past.

"Miss Parkinson was visiting my House as a young Miss very often," the house-elf lady answered busying herself in the pantry. "How many guests does Miss have?"

"Only Ginny and Pansy I think," Harry said levitating the plates back into their cupboards. "They were out late last night, so maybe some hangover food would be a good idea," Ron suggested and Harry nodded.

"Alright, Tinna will prepare something. Misters need to go dress now or they will be late for the trial," Tinna said and made a shooing gesture in the direction of the young men. She let them cook as long as she wasn't already awake. When she was, she was the Queen of the Kitchen and didn't even let Kreacher as much as cut the carrots.

Kreacher admitted that he was glad about that since the finer details of magic became harder with his age. But on the other hand he didn't allow the younger elf to polish the silverware since it had always been his task.

Harry and Ron went upstairs and dressed for their day in court. Afterwards Harry would have to tell Kingsley that he would return to Hogwarts for his NEWTs.

Draco woke up with a start. He jumped from the bed a hex on his lips before he realised that he wasn't in his room in the Manor, that Greyback was dead and definitely not in his room. Not like back then.

Looking around he remembered that he was at the guest room he normally stayed at when he was at Nott Manor. At least they managed to get here then. Even though he didn't remember anything after getting food and Theo being a sappy bastard.
The dream pushed past his memories of the last night, or the lack thereof. Cursing Draco conjured a bowl, filled it with water and splashed it into his face. The night when Greyback had broke into his room pissed as a newt had been awful. The werewolf had taken three stupefies before he fell and Draco had levitated him outside. It had taken nearly an hour before his hands stopped shaking afterwards.

Since then he had learned to cast wards around his door and windows. Draco never found out why Greyback had been in his room. Theo thought the man had been just too drunk to realise that he was at the wrong door and Draco had to agree. The normally so aggressive man didn't try to attack him. But still…

The blond sat down on the bed, his breath still coming too fast. He needed to get out, get away from the confines of this room. Draco stood up and summoned the shirt from the pile on the chair. Only pyjama bottoms wouldn't be exactly socially acceptable.

Pulling the shirt on he cancelled the wards on the door and stepped out into the hall. The sky was already turning to a light blue which caused him to check the time with a Tempus charm. It was seven in the morning. Way too early after a night in the hunting lodge.

"Cinny?" Draco whispered not so much because of the headache, but to not wake the others.

The elf lady apparated to his side with a quiet pop. "Yes, Mister Draco?"

"When did we return to the house?"

She cocked her head in thought. "Cinny thinks it was around half past three. Is Mister Draco wanting breakfast?"

His stomach rebelled at the thought of food and Draco shook his head. "No, thanks. I will take a walk first. Is anyone else awake?"

"Yes, Mister Weasley without his twin is in the gardens," Cinny said mournfully.

Draco raised an eyebrow. "How do you know he has- had a twin?"

"Cinny sees that his magic is torn apart, Cinny knows that there is a twin missing. Miss Ophelia Nott lost her twin in 1584, she was so very sad that she drowned herself in a close-by pond," Cinny answered rubbing her eyes. "Cinny was very young when it happens but she remembers. Somebody needs to heal poor Mister Weasley."

Draco stood there dumbfounded. "Elves can see magic?"

"Only a few of us, those of the oldest clans," Cinny said proudly. "Cinny has to go back to the kitchen now."

"Wait, Cinny! I'm sorry you had to see Ophelia die. I will try to help George," Draco said. The elf-lady nodded before apparating away.

Out in the gardens Draco spotted George by a pond and remembering Cinny's tale he hurried over. The other man heard him coming and gave him wave while obviously trying to suppress a yawn.

"Morning," Draco said sitting down next to him.

"You look awful," George remarked with a sideways glance.
"Thank you, you too," Draco answered tartly.

George laughed loudly. "Well, you're basically the first one to honestly say that to me."

"Always at your service," the blond smirked. "But yeah, nightmares are a bloody nuisance."

George nodded emphatically. "They are! Normally the alcohol keeps them at bay, but the unfamiliar surrounding tonight…Well, next time I'll bring my own pillow!"

"I know. Theo's are definitely too thin!" Draco exclaimed theatrically. "You could as well sleep without them. No idea how Theo manages to get a decent night's sleep."

"Seriously, thin cushions are one thing. But cushions that lead you to believe that they are thick and fluffy and aren't, that's just-," George trailed off seemingly searching for the right word.

"-utter betrayal!" Draco finished with a snort.

George looked at him strangely but then he smiled a little. "Indeed, we really should have a word with Theo."

Chapter End Notes

George and Draco bonding time, yay! ;) Did you catch my easter egg? If so, tell me in the comments! I hope you enjoyed the chapter as much as I did. The next one will (probably) introduce a change of pace where I don't write each day but important events. See you (hopefully) soon! :)


Let's tell the Tonkses

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovely readers! The first weeks of university were quite demanding for viv and me. I went to MMC Berlin this weekend and saw many lovely Harry Potter cosplayers, even a Dramione couple! Now I have a bank holiday and tomorrow a holiday because of reformation day, this translates into time to write! ;) viv-heart is still my amazing beta. Enjoy! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Draco felt sober enough to floo over to Andromeda's he took his good-byes from everyone. The other two Weasleys and Theo were awake by then and eating breakfast. It was nearly lunchtime and Cinny had already insisted on feeding him and George.

Draco knew his family would understand when he missed breakfast, they had left behind a note to keep them from worrying. But his mother would be really cross if he missed lunch as well.

Like he had expected his mother didn't look too amused when he stumbled out of the fireplace at half past eleven. She frowned at him while she put the toy with which she had played with Teddy up to this point away.

"Where have you been Draco?" she demanded picking up Teddy and putting him in his crib.

"I was at Theo's. We went to bed very late and Cinny insisted that I eat breakfast before leaving," Draco said in a conciliatory tone.

Narcissa harrumphed. "So you won't even eat lunch with us?"

Before Draco could answer Andromeda stepped in, holding a letter in her hand. "Oh, Draco, you're back!" she said in surprise. "I just wanted to ask Narcissa whether she had heard from you."

"What did you want from me?" Draco asked eyeing the letter in her hand curiously.

"Frank Tonks answered. He invited us to visit this afternoon since his parents are visiting and the whole family has taken a free day," Andromeda answered, giving the letter to Draco. "He would like us to arrive around two o'clock so we can talk before his children return from school."

Draco looked at his mother who wore a pinched look. "I would really like to visit him, but maybe a little food first would be good."

Narcissa nodded and ushered him into the kitchen where his father was cooking. None of them had expected it, but not only was Lucius wickedly good at it, he also loved cooking. Draco had actually heard him whisper with Andromeda about opening his own restaurant once Draco took over the family business.

They ate in silence, but it was companionable. It was so different from the silences that had surrounded their first meals. Had it really only been a bit more than a week since Acting Minister Shacklebolt had send him to an unknown safehouse? Draco thought about thanking the man for the decision to put them here. His aunt was an amazing woman, but as much as she gave comfort she
needed it and even Draco could tell that she needed people to care for.

When Draco came down the steps, having showered and changed into new clothes, Andromeda only tsked.

"Do you want to scare Ted's family?" she asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

Draco looked down on himself. He wore a black oxford, black trousers and shiny black leather shoes. Maybe it was a bit much black.

"Don't you have a colourful oxford in your wardrobe? I could have sworn I saw one when the elves brought your clothes," Andromeda said, frowning at him.

"I thought it would look too formal," Draco admitted.

"And the black one won't?" Andromeda asked and sighed. "Do you own a t-shirt or a jumper?"

"A jumper with dark grey and black stripes," Draco said playing with the hem of his oxford. He had to admit that the clothing reminded him of last year.

"Then wear that," Andromeda said.

Draco sighed and went to change. When he came back down again Andromeda nodded and led him outside, down the gravel path. They stepped through the little gate out onto a broad path which seemed to lead to a village uphill from them.

"We will apparate to them, since they live in Plymouth," Andromeda explained and offered him her arm.

Draco hesitantly took it and was instantly sucked into the apparition. Being unprepared he needed a few seconds to get his bearing when they re-appeared in a small alley.

"It's just a few streets down from here," Andromeda called over her shoulder striding out into the busy street.

Draco followed her, grumbling under his breath about aunts that walked too fast. Nevertheless he soon caught up with her. They walked about a mile until they turned right into a smaller street with quaint little houses.

"Andy, they do know you brought me, right?" Draco asked suddenly nervous when they came to a stop in front of a light yellow house.

"Of course, love. It's not polite to bring guests without announcing them," Andromeda said with a wink before she pushed the button next to the door.

A bell sounded inside the house and something growled. Draco flinched and nearly took a step back.

"Take down that terrible pureblood mask," Andromeda hissed at him right when the door opened and a huge brown dog and a man who looked a lot like Ted appeared. "Frank! It's lovely to see you! And Sheila, my have you grown since the last time I saw you!"

Draco must have looked stunned because Frank Tonks grinned at him. "I guess you haven't seen your aunt quite like this yet?"

"Not exactly, no," Draco admitted watching Andromeda cuddling with the dog which looked like a
crossbreed between a Husky and a Labrador. "I'm Draco Malfoy."

Frank took his outstretched hand. "Frank Tonks, let's get you inside."

They stepped over Andromeda and Sheila and Draco took off his shoes when he saw that Frank wore slippers. Just when he started to feel uncomfortable Andromeda stood up and gave him a pair of guest slippers while grabbing a pair for herself.

"Come on in, my parents and my wife will be here soon. She had to pick them up from the train station," Frank told them while opening one of three doors that led from the hall.

Stepping through Draco found himself in a nice, small living room. The table was ready to be set and surrounded by six chairs. On the other side of the room two couches and an armchair were positioned in front of a black box which seemed to have a blackened window in the front. Maybe this was a TV, Hermione had told him about something like that, but where were the moving pictures?

"Have you ever been in a muggle home?" Frank asked from behind him and Draco realised that he had unconsciously stepped closer to the box.

"No, sir, but it doesn't seem too different from a magical home," Draco answered while looking around.

"Please call me Frank," the man said and Draco nodded with a smile.

"Frank, may we help you with the table, it would be so much faster with magic," Andromeda said with a wink.

"Oh, you just want to show off," Frank teased good-naturedly but motioned for her to do it.

"Draco, would you help me?" she asked turning to him.

"Of course," Draco said and whispered "Wingardium Leviosa!"

The Levitation Charm was actually the first one he had managed to do wandlessly, but sometimes things rose too fast when he tried to do it voiceless. Now the plates, teacups and forks started to fly and Andromeda took the opportunity to, wandlessly, put the everyday tablecloth away and change it for a finer one. When the cloth was in place Draco put down a plate in front of each chair and repeated it with the tea cups and forks with only tiny motions of his index finger.

By the time Andromeda had summoned a small candle holder and a vase with flowers from one of the cupboards Frank's eyes were big as saucers.

"I- I thought only really accomplished wizards and witches were able to do magic without wands?" he stammered.

"I'm the second best in my year and I wanted to learn wandless magic from the very beginning," Draco admitted blushing. "And Andy is nothing if not an accomplished witch."

"Stop it, you make me blush," Andromeda said, looking flattered.

Frank was pulled out of his surprise by the doorbell and went to open the door. Andromeda started to go after him but Draco stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"Do you think it was a bit much?" he asked quietly.
"No, it just has been a while since I came over," Andromeda said smiling reassuringly. "Now let's greet the others."

Draco nodded and followed her out into the hall. There was an older couple with grey hair and quite a few laugh lines around their eyes and a woman about Andromeda's age with hair nearly as light as Draco's. It was obvious how much Frank loved his wife by the way he looked at her.

"Well, young lad, aren't you going to say hello?" the older woman wanted to know.

Draco startled and stepped forward, bowing over her hand. "I'm sorry, Ma'am. I was caught by the beauty of the relationship your son and his wife seem to have."

"Oh my, you're a flatterer," the woman smiled brightly. "Please call me Nan, otherwise there will just be too much confusion with three Mrs Tonks!"

"I will, Nan," Draco said with a wink he knew was charming. It felt strange calling this muggle woman 'Nan' like he would a grandmother, but she smiled so brightly at him using the title that he accepted it easily.

"You don't need to call me Mrs Tonks either, it's Mary," Frank's wife said and blushed when he bowed over her hand as well, if not as deep. His mother had made sure that he knew to bow lower to an older person than to a younger one.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mary," he said when he faced her again, letting her hand go.

The older Mr Tonks gave him a once over. "Don't you dare bow to me, young man!"

Draco chuckled. "As you wish, sir," he said with a wink as if sharing a secret over the firm handshake.

"Good lad, I'm Ted for you," he said while helping Nan out of her light jacket.

"Of course, Ted," Draco answered trying to sound as charming as he had before but remembering just what they had to tell this family today.

They retired to the living room, sitting down at the table while Frank went to fetch the cake. Andromeda made conversation by asking how the older Tonkses were and how the children were doing at school. Frank was nearly seven years younger than Andromeda's Ted had been and had had children when he was older therefore they were still at school, while Tonks- Draco stopped the train of thought. Later.

"Now, shall we first eat or first talk?" Frank said when he putting the tea and coffee pot on the table.

Andromeda and Draco exchanged a look. "It's up to you, but I'm afraid we won't eat much either way."

Nan put a hand on Andromeda's. "Out with it girl, something is choking you up."

Andromeda smiled at Nan and Draco could see her shoulders sacking a bit when she decided to talk first.

"Andy, maybe I could start?" he asked quietly, his social training kicking in and his aunt nodded gratefully.
The Tonkses turned to him curiously. "I'm not sure how much Ted and Andy told you about our world. But you probably know that there was a war brewing when they eloped. It ended in 1981, or at least we thought so," Draco stopped taking a sip from his too hot tea, desperate for something to do with his hands. The family nodded and motioned for him to continue.

"In June four years ago the leader of those who had started the war returned. I won't go into details now since it's not the important part. Just know that my cousin Nymphadora and her future husband Remus Lupin decided to fight the so called Death Eaters. My family was part of this group."

Nan gasped and Frank's eyes flickered unsurely to Andromeda who sat with her back ramrod straight.

"Dora and Remus fell in love while fighting the war during the last four years. Last summer they married, shortly before our Ministry fell and was taken over by the Death Eaters. They pursued muggleborns and their families. At first Ted and Andy were relatively safe. But when so called Snatchers turned up in the village close to them this February, I think?" Andromeda nodded, her eyes fixed on the candle flames. "Ted had to flee. Would you like to take over Andy?" he asked quietly and she shook her head, tears brimming in her eyes.

Draco took a deep breath. "He was caught trying to help other refugees. He was killed."

"No!" the elder Ted yelled and Nan clasped her hands in front of her mouth. Frank looked shell shocked and Mary grabbed Andromeda's hand over the table. They all had forgotten the food.

"This happened in March. Nymphadora was very pregnant by that time, staying with Andy. On the eighteenth of April Edward Remus Lupin was born to her and her husband. On the first of May the final battle of this war started," Draco was whispering by now, tears burning in his eyes at the sight of Andromeda. "In the early morning of the second of May Nymphadora and Remus Lupin were killed by Bellatrix Lestrange and Antonin Dolohov."

By now everyone was crying, Mary's sobs were muffled by Frank's shoulder while he leaned heavily on her. The older Tonkses looked broken.

"My parents defected shortly after, I already had defected before the battle really started. I can't express my sorrow over these losses, the loss of people I didn't bother to get to know because I thought it mattered who your parents are," Draco finished quietly.

Only then he realised that Andromeda had his hand in a death grip that he returned. Frank slowly stood up and looked at him murderously. Draco wasn't surprised and rose as well.

"Out of my house, you bastard," Frank said deadly calm and Draco nodded turning to leave.

"Stay, boy," Ted suddenly said. Draco looked at him in confusion but the old man wasn't looking at him.

"Frank, that boy didn't kill your brother or your niece. In fact he seemed just as saddened by their deaths as we are. Andy surely had a reason to bring him. She trusted him to tell the story of her loved ones," Ted said motioning with his hand to Andromeda who was being comforted by Nan and Mary.

"But he was one of them!" Frank said with desperation evident in his voice.

"That may be, but I can't hate every German soldier who fought in the Second World War just because one of them killed my two brothers," Ted said calmly standing up to go to his remaining
The two men were nearly the same height but Frank crumbled when his father put his arms around him. Draco felt very much out of place and he would have given anything for an Invisibility Cloak now.

"Draco?" Andromeda called out just when he was thinking about disillusioning himself.

"Yes, Andy?" Draco stepped closer to grab the hand she stretched out to him.

"I don't blame you for anything that happened to my family. If there is someone to blame that would be Voldemort and we both know that he is very dead," she said with a tiny smile.

"He is, just like Aunt Bella and Dolohov," Draco said returning her smile and crouching down next to her.

"Aunt Bella?" Mary asked in confusion and Nan's eyes widened.

"You don't want to tell me that your sister-?" the old woman whispered.

"Killed her own niece?" Andromeda asked. "She did just that, even if she was no sister of mine since she laughed while I was being cursed by our aunt."

Nan was the first to find her voice again. "It's good that you came over to tell us. But may we ask a few questions? Only if it is alright for you."

Draco and Andromeda exchanged a look. "Of course, we'll try to answer them as completely as possible."

Chapter End Notes

Alright, I hope you liked this! If you were wondering about Draco's jumper, Will Tudor wears it in my new cover image, which you can also find on my tumblr evolutionsbedingt ;) Tell me your thoughts and let's see how fast I manage to update!
The afternoon

Draco and Andromeda reheated the tea after the questions died down and they settled back around the table to eat the cake. Frank was very curious about his great-nephew and Draco loved talking about Teddy.

They were sitting on the couches once again when the doorbell chimed an hour later.

"That's probably Lucinda and Haley," Frank said and stood up to open the door.

Draco got nervous. He sat up straighter and clasped his hands to hide the shaking. They were only kids, why would he be afraid?

Two girls entered right behind their father. One seemed to be about eleven and the other fourteen or fifteen. The younger one had the blonde hair of her mother and the laughing brown eyes of her father, the older looked sterner with blue eyes and her brown hair in a ponytail.

Draco stood up together with his aunt and tried to gauge the right way to behave in this situation from her. If the girls had been witches from his family he would have greeted them with a small bow and a charming smile. But what did muggles do?

"Lucinda, Haley, it's good to see you again. It has been a while," Andromeda said with a bright smile taking each girl's hand. "Do you remember me?"

Haley, the younger girl, grinned broadly. "Of course Aunt Dromeda! Where is Uncle Ted and who is the blond boy?"

Andromeda's smile dropped a little and Draco decided to step in. "I'm Draco Malfoy, Andy's nephew from her side of the family. Ted couldn't come today I'm afraid," he said with a look to the girls' parents. He shook their hands and they settled back down on the couch.

"By the way, Andy, did you want to stay for dinner? Thomas said he wouldn't make it before half past six," Mary said changing the topic rather obviously.

"Then we are staying of course," Andromeda answered with a still rather shaky smile.

Lucinda looked at her aunt sharply. "Something happened to Ted, didn't it?"

Andromeda only nodded.

"What happened?" Lucinda whispered. The adults exchanged a look and finally Mary shrugged.
"We never told you because you were too young at first, but when Andromeda and Ted met their world was at war," Frank said quietly the two girls listening with rapt attention. "We thought the war was over once and for all, but four years ago the leader of the war party rose again. They targeted muggleborns and their families. Ted was killed by them, Nymphadora and her husband Remus as well."

Lucinda sat there with wide eyes and Haley looked as if she was about to cry.

"Is it over now?" Lucinda asked, her voice barely audible and her eyes shining with tears.

Draco nodded. "It is. The leader of the bad guys was killed three weeks ago. Most of his followers are either locked up or dead."

Haley stood up and went to hug Andromeda tightly. "I'm so sorry for your loss," the little girl whispered and Draco wished that they could have spared them the burden.

Lucinda wiped away her tears and went to hug Andromeda as well. Draco raised an eyebrow, he wasn't exactly used to so public displays of affection. Then Lucinda turned and scrutinised him. The last time he had felt so much like a little cockroach was when Granger had stared him down in their third year right before slapping him.

"What was your role in all of that? Why would Dromeda bring you?" Lucinda asked sharply and Draco couldn't help but admire her. She was extremely observant. She would have done well in Slytherin if not for her heritage.

"My family was on the side of the Dark Lord during most of the conflict. I was forced to join him at the age of sixteen," Draco said calmly not blinking under Lucinda's scrutiny. "I defected shortly before the last battle in which Remus and Dora were killed."

"What was the point of conflict?" the brunette asked still staring him down.

"Blood purity. I was raised to believe that muggles are lowly creatures that are dangerous and uncivilised. I was taught that muggleborns didn't deserve their magic because of their heritage," Draco said starting to sweat.

"But you changed your beliefs?" she asked calmly.

"I did, way too late, but I did," Draco said quietly, breaking the eye contact to look down on his hands. "I wish I could say it was because I saw the fault in my ways, but it was mostly self-preservation at the beginning. But with the first seed of doubt sown I was finally able to see it."

Lucinda hummed and cocked her head. After a few silent minutes of scrutiny she nodded and stretched her hand out to him. "I'm Lucinda Tonks and I'm glad you were honest."

Draco looked up at her in confusion and took her hand. "I'm Draco Malfoy and thank you for letting me be honest."

"I guess they don't forgive you as easily in your world?" Lucinda asked with a sly smile.

"Not really. They prefer throwing hexes at me," Draco joked. The trip to the Ministry for his repeat trial had been awful, especially since the aurors hadn't been too interested in protecting him.

"She would be an amazing Slytherin, don't you think?" Andromeda asked with a wink while Lucinda settled down next to her grandparents.
"She isn't very subtle about it so I'd actually say Ravenclaw. Smart, observant and interested in the details," Draco said smiling at Lucinda who blushed.

"Ravenclaw is the studious house, right?" Nan asked putting an arm around Lucinda. "That would be very fitting for our girl. She has the best grades in her year."

Draco was reminded of Hermione and smiled. "I was always bested by a muggleborn witch called Hermione Granger. She was in Gryffindor, the courageous house, but she could have easily been in Ravenclaw."

"And where would I be?" Haley asked jumping up from her parents' arms to sit down next to Draco and Andromeda.

The latter petted her hair with a loving smile. "Well, five years ago I would have said Hufflepuff, but you probably changed a lot since then!"

"Uncle Ted was in Hufflepuff, right?" Haley asked with bright eyes.

"Yes, just like your cousin Nymphadora," Andromeda said proudly.

"Hufflepuffs are very fair, work hard and are extremely loyal to their friends," Draco explained. "Never offend someone who is friends with a Hufflepuff or you'll have the whole house against you!"

"They are even worse than Slytherins," Andromeda chuckled. "No matter our difficulties in our house, if one of us is being attacked every Slytherin will help him."

"Probably hoping for a favour though," Draco remarked cynically and was swatted on his arm by Andromeda. "Ow, what was that for?!

"Don't you dare disclose our secrets to the uninitiated!" she stage whispered making Haley giggle and Draco rolled his eyes good naturedly.

They continued to banter and if the girls fell silent and seemed to tune out they would do their best to include them.

oOo

Just when they started preparing dinner the doorbell rang once again. Draco sat down the plates he had been carrying and watched as Frank went to open the door. For some reason Draco was more nervous about meeting Frank's oldest than he had been about the rest of the family. Maybe because they were the same age?

Draco crept closer to the door to hear what Frank and his son were talking about.

"Hello, dad," Thomas said. "I hope it's alright that I brought Rose? I know Grandma and Grandpa wanted to meet her."

Frank made a strangled sound. "Well, your aunt Andy is visiting with her nephew, but I'm sure we can accommodate one more person."

"Aunt Andy?" Thomas asked exhilaration palpable in his voice. "Is Uncle Ted here as well?"

"No, Tom, about that…Rose, it's good to see you, would you go in and greet the others? I have to talk to Tom for a moment."
Draco stepped away from the door. He saw Andromeda raise a questioning eyebrow but before he could answer a pretty blonde stepped into the kitchen.

"Hi everyone," she said waving shyly.

Mary came in from the living room. "Oh, Rose, I didn't know you were coming!"

"I didn't know either. Tom asked me on a whim," the girl answered blushing while she hugged Mary.

Now Nan and Ted entered the kitchen as well and Draco started to feel uncomfortable. He decided to go into the living room and continue setting the table. If he was honest with himself his problem hadn't been being surrounded by so many muggles but more being surrounded by people in general.

Suddenly Andromeda was helping him with the table. They set it the muggle way and with a short look over her shoulder Andromeda enlarged it a bit so Rose would have a place as well.

They were just done with the table when the whole extended Tonks family filtered in through the kitchen doors.

"Oh, there you are!" Nan exclaimed. "I was starting to wonder whether you had decided to leave."

"We wouldn't leave without saying goodbye," Draco assured her with a charming wink while pulling out a chair for her. His mother would approve.

"You're a good boy, you just took a few wrong choices," Nan whispered to him as she sat down.

Draco smiled, but he feared it looked a bit like a grimace. "I'm afraid I didn't really have any choice," he said and Nan nodded with a sad smile.

Draco stepped away to greet Thomas. When he turned to look at the young man Draco was stunned how innocent he looked. Wasn't he supposed to be his age?

And right there and then Draco realised that Thomas was the one of them who was actually looking like a seventeen year old boy. Draco very nearly refrained from either bolting or lashing out, taking a calming breath.

"You look like you have seen a ghost, everything alright man?" Thomas asked with a laugh and Draco forced himself to chuckle.

"Yeah, sorry, you just look a lot like you could be my brother," he said. And it was true. Thomas had inherited the light blond hair from his mother and the grey-ish blue eyes could have been found on an old Malfoy family portray.

"For real! Now that you say it!" Thomas looked really surprised. "You're basically an older version of me!"

Andromeda made a startled sound. "Thomas, Draco is seventeen."

The teen looked at his aunt with confusion. "No way! He looks like he is at least twenty-one!"

"She is right. I will turn eighteen in a few weeks," Draco said quietly watching Thomas' head swivel around.

"What the hell," Thomas said and then suddenly he walked up to Draco and grabbed his hand,
pulling him out of the room and up the stairs.

"You can't just grab a guy like this!" Draco tried to protest but Thomas was having none of it.

"What happened to you in the war?" he whispered urgently. "I know we can't talk about it in front of Rose, so what the hell happened?"

Draco sighed and sat down on the bed. By the looks of it they were in Thomas' room. "How much do you know?"

"I know about the war parties. The Order of the Phoenix and the Death Eaters," Thomas answered taking a seat in front of Draco on the floor. "That Uncle Ted wasn't in either and that Dora and Remus fought for the Order."

"Alright, please don't freak out," Draco said while he rolled his sleeve up. It revealed the scars the Mark had left behind, still easily recognisable as skull and snake.

"I guess that isn't the sign of the Order of the Phoenix," Thomas whispered leaning closer to get a better look.

"It's the Dark Mark, the sign and communication system used by the Dark Lord, Voldemort," Draco said in equally hushed tones. "I was forced to join shortly after my sixteenth birthday, as my parents lives and sanity was at stake. I barely slept for two years. I was forced to plot the murder of my own headmaster. I was forced to participate in awful activities at school."

Thomas looked at him with big eyes. "Oh bloody hell, that's terrible! But it's over now? Voldemort is dead?"

"Yes, finally, but former Death Eaters or Slytherins in general to be honest, aren't exactly welcome in this new society," Draco said looking out of the window. "Andromeda said you may know more about tattoo artists. Maybe one of them could cover the Mark?"

"Probably," Thomas said cocking his head in thought. "I actually think about getting one for my birthday. I turned eighteen two weeks ago. Maybe you'd like to come along and ask yourself?"

Draco looked at the teen in front of him in wonder. He hadn't anticipated a complete stranger asking about what happened and not judging. Even less had he thought it possible that he would help him. "I- yeah, that sounds good, thank you."

"No problem!" Thomas smiled. "I want to go tomorrow, since school'll be out earlier, does that work for you?"

"I've nothing else going on, so, yes," Draco said while rolling down his sleeve.

"Great, now let's go back downstairs before they send a search party," Thomas said jumping up from his place on the floor.

Draco stood up as well but caught the other teen at the elbow before he could open the door. "Thank you for not judging me," Draco whispered not looking at Thomas but at the floor.

"Of course, mate, it didn't sound like you had much of a choice after all," he said turning around and grabbing Draco's forearm. "Just make sure not to repeat your mistakes."

"I'm working on it," Draco said and Thomas let him go with a nod.
"I don't know about you, but I'm starving," Thomas said and they went back downstairs.

"Wen, can you explain to me why we have piano scores in this box?" Monica called down to her husband. She was going through the things on their attic having decided that it should be cleaned at least once a year. And she had nothing to do but to wait for her ankle to heal anyway.

"They're Mione's, why do you ask?" Wendell replied and they both froze as they realised what he had just said.

"Mione? Like in Hermione?" Monica whispered looking shocked and scared at the same time.

"I guess so," Wendell said and motioned to the books in her hands. "Why don't we take a look and find out?"

They sat down in between the boxes and leafed through the first book without finding anything. But when they opened the second one they found a name: 'Hermione Granger' and a year '1984'. They exchanged a look and kept thumbing through the books. In the last one they found a note.

Dear Mrs Balley,

neither I nor my husband, Richard, understand what happened today in English class. We do hope that Bob Hitchell will get well soon. We will punish our daughter accordingly. Rest assured that Hermione is very sorry.

Sincerely,

Helen and Richard Granger

Monica gasped. "Wen, that's my handwriting!"

"I know, love, I know," Wendell whispered and they sat there among the boxes of their former life in Great Britain and wondered what else they had left behind.

"We have to find out what all this means," Monica said straightening. "I will call the British Embassy in Sydney and see what they can find out."

"We should look through the other things and find out whether there is more," Wendell suggested and they stood up ready to look through the other boxes more attentively.

They found a few more children's books with the name Hermione in them, some read so often that they barely held together. There were no toys or children's clothes and Monica started to doubt that this was really everything. But they hadn't left anything behind in Great Britain!

"Monica?" Wendell called from across the attic.

"Yes, love?" she answered slowly walking over to him. That broken ankle was really annoying.

"I found another letter, this time to your parents it seems," Wendell said waving the yellowed paper.

"What does it say?" Monica asked curiously.

"It talks about Hermione and how she is doing in school. For some reason you're asking about your great-grandparents, those who were from Hungary," Wendell says.
"So the Grangers, that's really us?" Monica asks after reading the letter, dated in the summer of 1991.

"Seems so," Wendell said shrugging. "But why don't we remember a thing about Hermione or us being Helen and Richard Granger?"

Chapter End Notes

What do you think Draco should get as a tattoo? And Hermione really needs to hurry if she doesn't want her parents to find out on their own! Tell me your thoughts in the comments, they give me life ;)}
A meeting, a tattoo and a memory

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! Finally a new chapter, woohoo! Many thanks for the awesome tattoo idea for Draco to MahallieMacKenzie und loads of betalove to viv-heart. Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Andromeda Tonks née Black had to admit that it had been a few years since she had done some manipulating. The last time she had tried to convince Nymphadora that she shouldn't work in the Order. That hadn't turned out well.

Fortunately Andromeda doubted that Henry Fawley, brother of the famous Wizengamot member Richard Fawley, was prone to juvenile stubbornness.

"It's good to see you again, Andromeda," Henry said while sitting down.

"Likewise," Andromeda replied with a smile and signalled a waitress.

The small muggle café right around the corner from the Leaky Cauldron was quiet at this time of the day and Andromeda was very glad about that. The waitress came over and they asked for tea and scones.

"Now, first of all, I want to express my condolences for the losses you had to endure in the war," Henry said when the waitress had left to get their orders. "But I also want to congratulate you on the birth of your grandchild."

Andromeda smiled. "Thank you, Henry. I trust you and your family are well?"

"Of course, yes," Henry replied while taking out a notebook and a pen. "Luckily we weren't targeted and I transferred both William and Margaret to Beauxbatons after You-Know-Who returned."

"I'm glad to hear that," Andromeda said and thanked the waitress who had put the tea and scones on their table.

"Well, why did you want to speak to me? I guess it isn't about your work as a private healer?" Henry said taking a scone from his plate.

"It is indeed not," Andromeda said with a sigh. "I have a favour to ask." Henry nodded and motioned for her to continue.

"My grandson's godfather is no one else than Harry Potter and thanks to that I met Hermione Granger. She is a lovely young woman and I rather like her," Andromeda began while preparing her tea. "A few years back she was so unfortunate as to make an enemy in Rita Skeeter. I'm sure you saw the article on Wednesday?"

Henry nodded and grimaced. "Awful piece of writing. I have no idea how she managed to get it on the front page."

"I do have an idea, but that's not really important," Andromeda said thinking about all the blackmail material Skeeter surely had. "I wanted to ask you to help us in a campaign to reveal Miss Skeeter's methods and lies. We want her prosecuted and put behind bars."

"What do you have on her?" Henry asked curiosity evident in his eyes and posture.

Andromeda took a sip of her tea. "She is an unregistered Animagus and she is known to illegally use Veritaserum for questioning. She likes to use false information in her articles which sometimes led to the destruction of careers."

Henry nodded taking notes while Andromeda talked.

"Alright, what is your plan of action?"

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Draco took a deep breath before ringing the bell at the Tonks' house. He liked Thomas well enough but he was still nervous about going out into the muggle world. Visiting a muggle family was something else entirely, especially with his aunt at his side. Draco took deep breaths trying to calm himself down and clenched his fist tightly at his side. The pain focused his mind and his erratic breaths fell into a more normal pattern.

Finally the door opened and revealed Thomas in trousers and a sweatshirt that seemed way too wide for him.

"What in Merlin's name are you wearing?" Draco asked in utter confusion.

Thomas looked down on himself. "My clothes? They're comfortable."

"You didn't wear that yesterday?" Draco objected remembering the slacks and oxford he had worn the day before.

"Yeah, I came right from school. School uniform sucks to be honest," Thomas said laughing.

Draco still looked extremely confused. "But it looks like you wear the clothes of your older brother or something!"

"That's probably where this style came from," Thomas admitted. "You know what? We'll stop by a clothes shop and you try on some yourself! And when we're back I can show you the music people who wear these trousers mostly listen!"

Draco nodded wide eyed, a bit shocked. Muggles were so strange! If someone showed too big clothes like these people would assume their mother didn't know charms to shrink them. Potter at least had had the decency to only wear stuff like that during holidays. And the Weasleys were a different matter altogether. While shrinking clothes was easy enough, enlarging them didn't really work.

"Wait- you said people sometimes actually wear the stuff of their older siblings without making it smaller for them?" Draco asked curiously walking faster to catch up with Thomas.

"Yeah, if they can't afford new clothes for example. Sometimes they even have to wear too small clothes if they're the oldest sibling," Thomas explained. "Doesn't that happened at- your place?"

"There are sewing charms to make clothes that are too big fit of course. Too small clothes remain a problem," Draco said distractedly. Did Harry have to wear clothes from someone else because his aunt and uncle were poor?
"By the way, better not to mention charms or anything like that while we're out," Thomas said quietly when they turned to the left at the end of the street.

"Yeah, sure, sorry I just got distracted by something," Draco said with a laugh. As if he would forget something like that, he was a Slytherin and a Malfoy after all!

"By the way, did you have a chance to think of something you want to get as a tattoo?" Thomas asked while they were waiting at a red light.

It turned green and Thomas continued to walk, interesting system. "Not really, something happy and colourful probably," Draco answered.

"Understandable," Thomas answered smiling. "I changed my mind on what I want to get actually."

"Oh, why is that?" Draco asked trying to sound casual while a car with blue lights sped past them. Only seeing the flashes of light he had thought of spell fire at first.

"I want to remember Ted and Dora," Thomas answered quietly. "So I thought about getting the Hufflepuff crest, you know?"

Draco looked at Thomas in surprise. "Really? What will you say when someone asks?"

"Mostly the truth I guess, that it's the crest of the house my dead uncle and cousin were in at school. But I will say that they were killed in a terrorist attack," Thomas said.

"And people will believe that?" Draco asked sceptically.

"Yep, there were enough in the last months, although allegedly nobody was killed or died afterwards," Thomas said with a tight smile.

"Alright," Draco said quietly. He wondered how many of those terrorist attacks had been actually the Death Eaters.

A few minutes later they arrived in front of a modern looking store and Thomas flashed him a quick smile before he stepped inside.

Draco followed. The man behind the desk situated in the back of the room stood up and came up to them with a stretched out hand. Pretty similar to magical customs then.

"Hi, my name is George, how can I help you?" the man asked with a smile and Draco noted that he was tattooed up to his face and at least down to his fingertips. George was a large, bald man who seemed to be only made of muscle and colour.

"Hi, I'm Thomas and that's my cousin Draco, we want to get a tattoo," Thomas said with an easy smile while Draco shook George's hand as well.

"Well, that's rather obvious, isn't it?" George asked with a wink and Thomas and Draco chuckled. "Please, sit down! May I offer you something, tea? Coffee?"

They declined and settled down on the couches on the left side of the room. George prepared himself a cup of coffee and Draco was surprised how fast the machine worked.

"Now, I hope you're both eighteen or older, since we don't tattoo minors," George said sitting down across from them.

Draco rose an eyebrow. "Well, I'm not yet eighteen, but I will be in a few weeks and wanted to
inform myself a bit."

George nodded. "Alright, that is no problem. You look older to be honest."

"So I have been told," Draco joked and George laughed.

"I had the same problem, especially since I lost my hair pretty early," he said while taking a sip of his coffee. "Now, tell me what you want to get."

"I'll start, since I already know what I want," Thomas said smiling. "I want to honour my late uncle and cousin and get the crest of their school house tattooed. Preferably on my upper arm or shoulder."

"Do you have a picture?" George asked cocking his head.

"Yes, wait a moment," Thomas said starting to rummage through his pant pockets. "There it is!" He produced something that looked suspiciously like a school uniform patch from his pocket. "I took it off of one of my uncle's old uniforms, it still looks the same, right Draco?"

Draco took a closer look and nodded. "It does, they only changed the shape a bit."

"Well, that is a whole lot of details," George said looking at the patch.

"Will that be a problem?" Thomas asked looking a bit afraid.

"Not really, it only means that it will have to be larger than this," George explained calmly. "Especially for the helmet on top and the badger, you don't want them to be just blotches."

"Alright, that's no problem," Thomas said easily.

"Perfect, I think it should be at least about the size of a postcard." George showed it with his hands. "So it would be about 250 pound I think."

Thomas nodded. "That sounds fair. How long would it take to tattoo?"

"Roughly two and a half hours including preparation," George said looking contemplatively. "You're probably asking because of school?"

"Yes, I only have a free afternoon on Fridays," Thomas explained and it was George's turn to nod. "Right, that shouldn't be a problem. Let me look it up," he said and stood up to fetch a calendar book. "The Friday after the next is free, does that work for you?"

Thomas thought about it and nodded. "Sure, do I have to bring anything besides the money?"

"You can bring something to squish if the pain gets too much, but we have everything else," George said. "Just remember not to drink or take drugs in the previous twenty-four hours and eat enough that day, we can't have you fainting after all."

Thomas laughed and Draco smirked at the mental image. Then George turned to him and asked what he wanted as a tattoo.

"I'm still thinking about it," Draco admitted. "I have an ugly scar on my left forearm that I want covered with something cheerful and beautiful."

"Would you show me the scar? Just so I know how big the tattoo would need to be," George
Draco rolled up the sleeve of his jumper. The scar left behind by the Mark still looked rather fresh and he wasn't really sure how he should explain it if George asked.

"Wow, that looks painful," George said and leaned closer to get a better look. "Looks like you got a tattoo removed there."

"Yes, it represented something I didn't want to be part of anymore," Draco said quietly focusing on George so he didn't have to look at the scar.

"I understand, who tattooed you so young? Just out of curiosity," George asked.

Draco wondered what he should say. "A friend of the family, former friend to be honest," he finally said.

George took one look at him and luckily didn't ask further questions. Draco wasn't sure whether he could have answered them.

"So, something colourful and cheerful to hide past mistakes…” George looked around contemplatively and final got up to get a folder from another table. "I know it's not very 'manly' but what do you think about some flowers or animals?"

"Maybe you could get a narcissus flower for your mother," Thomas chimed in.

George raised a curious eyebrow and Draco laughed. "Her name is Narcissa, but I would want to have Andromeda there with her."

"Andromeda like the constellation?" George asked curiously.

"Indeed, my family had a thing for star names in the last generations," Draco answered with a smile.

"I might actually have something for you then!" George said with a huge grin and began thumbing through the folder which was filled with sketches and pictures.

He finally found what he was searching, turned the folder around and pushed it to Draco and Thomas. The muggle photograph showed a rose that was coloured like a galaxy.

"I thought maybe instead of a rose a narcissus and the stars of the constellations of your family could be a bit bigger than the rest. That would make them easily discernible. Since it would look strange to just tattoo the flower, without a stem or leaves I thought about a stem with leaves that turn from a sunset to a starry night. What do you think?" George said with glittering eyes and a big smile.

Draco looked back down at the picture and then his arm. "It sounds amazing," he whispered. 
"There is just a tiny problem, my father doesn't have a star name and while we had our differences, I still want to include him."

"Well, when was your father born?" George asked.

"September 19th 1953," Draco answered easily even though he wondered why.

"So he is a Virgo, which we could easily include in your tattoo," George said with a wink and Draco got big eyes. That was a brilliant idea!
"That sounds amazing!" he said with a huge smile.

"I'm home love!" Wendell Wilkins called when he stepped inside.

"I'm in the living room, would you come to me please?" Monica called back and Wendell frowned. While his wife was hurt it was unusual for her not to come to the door to greet him.

When Wendell stepped into the living room he found Monica sitting on the couch with her ankle lying on a cushion and the phone in her hand. She waved him closer and he stepped up to her to give her a chaste kiss.

"What is it, love?" he asked noticing her notebook lying next to her.

"I just got off the phone with the British embassy," Monica said. "They have indeed found Richard and Helen Granger, who vanished nearly a year ago. I gave them our information and the clerk said that we looked identical to them."

"Will they be able to send us more data?" Wendell asked sitting down on the couch table. "And should we start referring to each other as Helen and Richard?"

"To your first question: yes, and it should be here by Monday. To your second question: I don't know, we could try to and see whether it feels right?"

Wendell nodded. "Sounds like a plan- Helen," he said with a lopsided smile which she returned easily.

"It doesn't feel strange being called Helen, what about you, Richard?" she asked with big eyes.

He felt as if something in his mind shifted. "On the contrary, to be honest, it feels like it should be this way," he said. "Did they say something about Hermione?"

Her eyes suddenly became even bigger. "Richard, I remembered something just now!"

"Tell me, love," he said grasping her left hand in his.

"Hermione…" she trailed off. "It sounds crazy, Richard!"

"If you remembered, I should remember as well, shouldn't I, Helen?" he said liking the way her name felt on his tongue.

"Hermione is a witch," she whispered and he remembered too.

"Richard, are you still awake?" Helen whispered.

"Sure, love, what is it?" he asked sighing and turning around to face her.

"Do you think Hermione will finally find some friends if she is with children like herself?" Helen asked anxiously.

Richard contemplated the question. "I don't know. I sure hope so, I can't see her suffer anymore. She is so intelligent and kind, why can't the other children see it?"

"I don't know," Helen said barely audible.
"Do you believe me?" Helen whispered urgently. "I'm not going crazy, am I?"

"I don't believe so," Richard said with a smile. "I only remember a late night conversation we had shortly before she left for her school, but… The knowledge that she is a witch seems so right, that I don't doubt it."

"I hope the data from the embassy will bring clarity." Helen said with a sigh and Richard nodded

"I wonder how we forgot," he said. "Maybe Hermione bewitched us?"

"Or someone else from her world," Helen said coolly. "They probably didn't want us to endanger them."

"Why would we?" Richard asked perplexed. "Our daughter is one of them after all!"

"Do you think families cared during the witch hunts?" Helen whispered looking pained. "What if they only remember our attitude towards witches and wizards back then? If I only knew that I would be scared and hateful as well."

Richard nodded. "You're right, that rings true."

"As soon as I'm well enough to travel we're going to Great Britain," Helen said with determination.

Chapter End Notes

Well, now we know where Hermione got her determination from ;) What did you think of the tattoo idea? Are you excited for the plan against Rita Skeeter? Tell me, I love to hear from you! And since I'm really inspired to write the next chapter now we'll probably see each other soon ;)}
The demise of Walburga Black

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovely readers! I'm glad you liked the last chapter as much as I did. I actually wrote the chapter last week already and I just forgot to update :D Betalove to reynardinepttr on tumblr! Enjoy! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione had promised to come over after dinner on Sunday evening and even though it was nearing nine, she intended to uphold her promise. Tomorrow morning Narcissa's hearing in front of the Wizengamot would finally take place. They had stalled it many times over the last three weeks and Narcissa was rather nervous by now.

Hermione doubted that the witch had much to fear, seeing as the other wives of Death Eaters who hadn't participated in the Battle had gotten off lightly as well. Nevertheless, worry churned in Hermione's gut when she apparated to Tonk's Cottage.

She had used the weekend to search for information about her parents' departure from Great Britain. Living in her old house and talking to the neighbours, it seemed they had done as she had suggested and left shortly after her charm. But they hadn't left anything behind and Hermione started to worry that she might have forgotten a few things that had been hers.

Upon entering Andromeda's garden, Hermione spotted Draco by the pond next to the house and waved in greeting. He returned the gesture and went back to reading the book in his lap. Hermione allowed herself to watch him for a few seconds.

Draco looked much better than he had done even on the evening after his trial. The sick paleness that had marred his features since sixth year was slowly being replaced by a much healthier skin tone. He would probably never have much colour and next to her he would always look chalk white, but he didn't look like a walking corpse anymore.

Hermione shook her head and went inside. She wasn't here to ponder Draco's elfish complexion. 'Well, Tolkien elves, not house-elves,' she hurried to correct herself and shook her head once again. Malfoy, elvish? Where did that thought come from?

oOo

An hour later, Hermione stepped back outside and walked up to Draco. When she came closer she narrowed her eyes suspiciously. Why was he cradling his hand like that? And was that blood on his shirt?

"Draco! Is everything alright?" Hermione called while running up to him.

He looked up, his eyes flitting from her back to the house and down to his hand. When she reached Draco she grabbed his hand without further ado. She hadn't expected him to push her away forcefully though.

"Leave me alone, Granger!" he snarled and she actually took a step away, pressing her back against
"I- I just saw the blood and wanted to help," Hermione said quietly, raising her hands to show she
wouldn't attack him. "I'm sorry for startling you."

"I don't need your help," Draco sneered and put his hands into his pockets. "Why did you come
here?"

"I wanted to ask whether you'd like to come over tomorrow. Narcissa told me that you have been
interested in books about healing lately," Hermione explained cautiously. She had no idea what had
set him off, aside from her grabbing him. "I found quite a few while sorting through a smaller
study in the townhouse."

Draco sighed and dragged his left hand through his hair. "Depends on the hearing. If everything
works out I'm sure I could come over in the evening." His voice didn't betray any emotion.

"Alright, that sounds good," Hermione said with a tiny smile. "I'll leave you alone now, good
night."

"Good night," Draco replied coolly. At least he didn't sneer anymore.

Hermione nodded to herself and walked away. She wondered what had happened before she came
out. There had been a few specks of blood on Draco's shirt but she hadn't seen any on his hands or
arms. Maybe he had already healed the cut when she arrived. And she really shouldn't have
grabbed him like that. Draco didn't trust her like Harry or Ron did.

He had called her Granger again. Even after his second testimony, when he had been so cold
towards her, he hadn't done that. What did all this mean?

Hermione forced herself to focus on Grimmauld Place and apparated to the old house.

Draco lifted the glamour from his knuckles and stared at the bruises. Some were already fading;
others were still red, the mix accentuated by the trickles of blood where his skin had split. One and
a half weeks of punching things had left colourful traces.

Granger had to appear in the worst moment! Luckily, living with Death Eaters and in a school
where violence had been openly encouraged, Draco had learned to glamour fast and thoroughly. Be
it on himself or one of his friends. Nobody wanted the Carrows to see them hurt. They took too
much pleasure in exploiting the injuries even if the students were Marked.

Draco sat back down and gently brushed over his hurt knuckles. For a few moments his thoughts
had shut up and he could enjoy the night without the whispers of doubt that sounded suspiciously
like his Aunt Bella, and sometimes Professor Snape.

But he had to find something else. If he continued like this even magical healing wouldn't be able
to prevent the skin from scarring. One could only heal a part of the body so many times before the
magic stopped working properly. The prime example for this problem had been Mad-Eye Moody,
hurt so many times that magical healing hadn't worked anymore, leaving only muggle medicine.
But how many healers were actually good at muggle medicine? They knew it included stitches and
salves but that seemed to be it, according to the books Draco had read.

But then he had heard two Ravenclaws talking about transplant operations and it sounded like they
gave that man a new kidney! Of course you could re-grow a kidney with magic, but how did the
muggles re-attach it to the body if they only knew stitches and salves?
Maybe Andromeda would know more about this. She said that Mrs Chang, the mother of the Ravenclaw Seeker, did know enough about muggle science to help them with the infant formula.

Standing up, Draco glamoured his knuckles again and shrunk the book to put it into his trouser pocket. He stretched and slowly walked up to the house, wondering how he could broach the subject with Andromeda without telling her the source of his thoughts.

Hermione arrived at Grimmauld Place right when the door opened and Ron came barging through. He didn't even look at her and just apparated away. Slowly Hermione approached the entrance, peeking inside in search for the source of Ron's anger.

Harry stood there in the hallway, one arm around a shell-shocked Pansy and his wand in his hand. Hermione looked for any signs of damage and noticed the smoking spot on the wall where formerly Walburga Black had been.

"Harry, what happened?" Hermione called while stepping inside and closing the door behind her.

The sound pulled Pansy out of her stupor and she tried to leave, but Harry grabbed her hand before she could. "Ron and Walburga were for once in agreement that Pansy has no right to be here. Although they had different reasons."

"Alright, let's go into the kitchen and talk over a cuppa, shall we?" Hermione suggested cautiously. She didn't want to startle Pansy.

"Good idea," Harry said, pulling Pansy closer to him and leading her to the kitchen.

Hermione checked her pocket for the Calming Draught she had always with her when she went outside and followed them. Tinna was already preparing the tea and some batter in a flying bowl.

"Good evening Miss Hermione, how was your stay at your parents' house?" Tinna asked with a small bow when Hermione entered the kitchen.

"Good, thank you, but I did miss your cooking, Tinna," Hermione answered with a genuine smile while she sat down at the table. "Just like you thought, it was much easier to pretend to have returned from my boarding school when I stayed for two nights before moving to my friends' place."

"Did you get the answers you needed?" Tinna asked curiously, commanding the tea to serve itself with a tiny gesture of her hand.

"Most of them," Hermione said with a nod. "Of course the neighbours had no idea where they moved."

"Maybe the British Embassy could help you? Surely the muggles have one as well," Tinna suggested.

"That will indeed be my next move tomorrow," Hermione said, taking a sip from her tea.

"If you need any help with the Ministry of Magic in Australia just tell me, a cousin of mine works there," Pansy offered quietly with a tiny smile.

"Thank you, Pansy," Hermione beamed and was rewarded with a bigger smile. "Now tell about your weekend!"
Harry complied with a grin and started talking about cleaning out the master bedroom. Because while Molly and Sirius had removed most dark artefacts and the doxy infestation they hadn't really done much else.

"Tinna thinks most of the furniture should hold for another decade at least if we clean and polish it properly," Harry finally said and Hermione nodded thoughtfully.

"Do you know anyone who could do that?" she asked after a moment's contemplation. "I think I probably could learn the spells but I don't want to damage the furniture by mistake."

"That's why I asked Pansy to come over and take a look," Harry said with a wink.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "I didn't know you went into the furniture cleaning branch. But well, if you're happy with it," she said with a shrug and a wink.

Pansy snorted. "Of course I didn't, I don't know yet what I want to do but that won't be it. Nevertheless I have good connections to the Selwyn Corporation who specialise on all things furniture. But thanks to them being Slytherins they get barely any contracts and would probably be happy if you hired them."

"Are they any good?" Hermione asked between two sips of her second cup of tea.

"The best on the British market actually," Pansy said nonchalantly.

"Only the best for the Blacks," Harry said laughing and the two young women smiled at each other.

"Obviously," Hermione said with a broad grin. "Now, what set Ron off?"

"He came just back from dinner with his family when I came downstairs with Pansy," Harry explained quietly. "I didn't join them today because I wanted to finish the guest bedroom next to the master bedroom. But I visited for lunch and George and Percy seemed to have had a bad day."

"Oh dear Morgana, that explains a lot," Hermione whispered. While George tended to retreat into himself if he had a really bad day, Percy lashed out. Nobody had expected it when it happened for the first time and he had reduced everyone around him to tears with his scathing remarks. Only when Bill had sent him out of the room had he calmed down and apologised to everyone. He had left anyway and nobody had seen him for the next few hours.

"What does it mean?" Pansy asked her voice still hesitant and quiet.

"It means that he probably tried to get through to George all evening while listening to scathing remarks from Percy," Hermione said quietly. "He must have lost his temper when he saw someone who is, in his eyes, responsible for all of that in his home. Because that's what Grimmauld Place is for all of us, home, a safe haven."

"Oh shit, I'm so sorry," Pansy said with huge eyes.

"Don't be," Harry retorted immediately. "You couldn't have known. It's my fault for not thinking of it."

"No, Harry," Hermione cut in putting her hand on his arm. "Did you tell Ron that she would come over later?"

"I- Yes, I did, as soon as I received her reply," he said cocking his head. "What do you want to say,
'Mione?"

"You told him, he didn't say no and therefore he has no right to tell Pansy that she isn't allowed to be here," Hermione said soothingly.

"Mister Harry should listen to Miss Hermione," Tinna said while she levitated the tiny baked goods she had made during their conversation onto the table. "Mister Ronald should have remembered. It is terribly sad that he didn't, but it is not your fault. Although you probably shouldn't have taken out your wand."

Harry looked at the elf lady for a moment and then he nodded. "You're probably right. Did I ever tell you that I'm really glad Kreacher chose you as our second house-elf?"

Tinna blushed and her ears quivered happily. "Thank you, Mister Harry. Tinna is very happy that you feel like that!" she squeaked and hugged Harry gently.

"By the way, what did you make for us?" Hermione asked inspecting the tiny cakes curiously.

"Tinna presumed to make Miss Pansy's favourite biscuits," the elf lady said shyly. "Tinna hopes that is alright."

"Of course it is," Harry and Hermione assured her in unison.

"Thank you, Tinna," Pansy said and took one of the biscuits. "I really missed them at Hogwarts."

Tinna bowed and patted Pansy's arm gently. "Tinna will make more so you can take some home with you. And maybe violet muffins for Miss Violet?"

Pansy smiled brightly at that. "Oh yes! Vi will be overjoyed! Ally is an amazing cook but Vi swears that your violet muffins are actually the best."

"Well, than we will have to try them as well," Harry said with a grin and a wink to Hermione.

"Oh, and Tinna if you want to you can prepare them for Pansy and send them to her whenever she asks," Hermione said with a smile to Pansy.

"Thank you, Hermione," Pansy said and clasped her hand across the table. "They really lift my spirits on bad days."

"Then you can write or floo Tinna if you have a bad day," Hermione said easily and returned the squeeze.

"Tinna will be happy to make them for Miss Pansy!" Tinna said proudly and set to make another batch.

Sometimes her caring and thoughtful attitude reminded Hermione of Molly. Tinna could definitely be as commanding as the Weasley matriarch.

Theo looked down on the man currently sobbing in front of the floo. He was at a total loss for what to do. His father would have bellowed at him to man up. And Theo didn't remember what his mother would have said or done.

With a quiet 'pop' Cinny appeared at his side. She carried a tray with two steaming mugs, a baking dish with a lid, two plates and two spoons.
"Cinny brought some melissa tea and Mister George's favourite food," the elf lady said, quietly putting the tray on the table between the two couches.

"Thank you, Cinny," Theo whispered. He took a look at the elf lady who had been his nanny after his mother died. "What does one do in this situation, Cinny?"

She shot him a confused look but something on his face must have shown his distress, for her look softened and her ears dropped a few inches. "Master watches what Cinny does."

Then Cinny stepped closer to the sobbing man and started patting his back and muttering things like "there, there" and "it's alright, let it all out". Fascinatingly enough, Weasley calmed down slowly and was able to take the mug Cinny gave him.

Theo finally sat down on one of the couches in front of the fire and only then noticed that his hands were shaking. He grabbed the second mug to hide it and took a sip of the tea. His muscles relaxed immediately and his breathing evened out. Cinny had probably added a bit of elf magic to the tea then.

"What happened to you, Weasley?" Theo asked quietly when the other man had stopped sobbing and Cinny had apparated away.

George raised his head from its place on his knees. "Awful day," he whispered. "Percy called me Fred. I don't know if he was joking or trying to hurt me."

Theo sucked in a breath and leaned forward. "Oh Salazar, that is awful!" And then he was moving and putting an arm around George's shoulder pulling the man to him.

"I didn't know anywhere else to go," the redhead said brokenly. "Everywhere would have reminded me of him. Even some shady bar in Knockturn Alley."

"It's alright," Theo said slowly rubbing George's back. "I told you my home is open for all of you. It gets lonely, you know?"

George nodded. "I haven't been in our flat since the middle of April. And now…"

"You don't have to go," Theo said. "If you don't want to stay at the Burrow or at Potter's you can always come and live here. Salazar knows the Manor is big enough."

"Thank you, Nott," George said with half sob and put an arm around Theo's back as well.

They sat like this for a few more minutes before the heat from the fire got uncomfortable and they settled down on one of the couches.

"Why is there shepherd's pie?" George asked in confusion when he opened the pot.

"Didn't you have some when we smoked on Wednesday?" Theo asked trying to remember the night. It was rather hazy.

"Oh, right," George said squinting at the pie. "Now that you say it, I remember."

"Don't tell me you forgot the whole fucking night?" Theo asked with a startled laugh.

George turned red. "No, just details like what we ate and drank, I do remember you inviting us after all."

"Alright, I was afraid it was so easy to forget," Theo said teasingly and George smiled a bit.
"Nah, don't worry, it was pretty neat. The only thing making it better would have been a real bartender," George said with quiet amusement.

"Noted for the next time," Theo replied and started to serve them the pie.

"Thank you for having me, Nott," George said quietly when Theo gave him his plate.

"It's Theo and pleasure," he smiled and leaned back with his own plate.

"Alright, then, thank you, Theo," George said with a tiny mischievous smile.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, we finally got rid of Walburga! :D What did you enjoy most in this chapter? Tell me please! The next chapter is already written and will be up tomorrow! :)
Hello my lovely readers! I hope you all had a nice first advent. It finally snowed yesterday, yay! The chapter is a bit longer than normal, Harry and Hermione just wouldn't shut up... Anyway betalove goes to reynadinepttr and viv-heart, enjoy the chapter!

"Narcissa Malfoy, née Black, is hereby sentenced to two years of social work. She may choose her field of work herself but it has to be approved by the Wizengamot. A proposal is to be made within the next seven workdays."

Narcissa exhaled slowly. This was good. This was amazing! Doing something for two years that she had wanted to do anyway was probably the best punishment she could have hoped for.

She caught Mr Potter's eyes and nodded with a tiny smile. She was rather sure that his testimony about her actions in the Forbidden Forest was the main reason that she didn't face a harder sentence.

The chains that held her wrists in place slithered back into the chair and she stood up. Narcissa turned around to step outside when she was called back by Professor McGonagall.

"Mrs Malfoy, may I talk to you for a moment?" the Chief Sorceress asked crisply.

"Of course, Chief Sorceress," Narcissa said with a pleasant smile. It wouldn't do for the journalists to catch up on her nervousness.

"I think my office would probably be best suited for this. If you would follow me?" McGonagall turned around and walked towards a door on the right side of the courtroom, and Narcissa followed her at the same pace. She would never deign to hurry after anyone.

The door led to a dimly lit hallway looking like any other hallway in the Department. McGonagall stopped on the third door to the left and opened it with a whispered password. Narcissa followed her inside and the door closed behind her on its own. The office was lined with bookshelves and had a brown and red colour scheme. The big desk across from the door seemed to be mahogany and the chairs were upholstered with red velvet.

"Please take a seat, Mrs Malfoy," McGonagall said while sitting down behind the desk. "Would you like some tea?"

"No, thank you," Narcissa said politely, sitting down on the right chair. "Would you be so kind as to tell me why I am here?"

McGonagall sighed and pulled something out of the desk drawer. "I'm here to talk with you about the Black holdings in your name. You gave us the permission to search and cleanse them from dark artefacts."

Narcissa nodded. "I hope they weren't in too bad a shape?"
"No, the magic laid upon them during their construction is still strong enough to prevent any
damage by forces of nature. They do have some magical pests but nothing too bad," McGonagall
said distractedly while thumbing through the parchment sheets. "Ah, here it is. The Cornwall
summer house. There wasn't even one dark artefact, therefore the house has already been cleared
and the Wizengamot decided to allow you to use it again. We wanted to suggest that maybe you
could use it for your social work sentence."

"You want to suggest I turn it into an orphanage," Narcissa stated calmly.

McGonagall looked startled for a moment but then caught herself. "That would be a wonderful
way of using the space the house has, and the location is certainly protected enough that nobody
would notice magical children."

"Actually Lucius and I had already something in mind," Narcissa said cocking her head. An
orphanage in the summer house was certainly an idea worth contemplating though.

"And what would that be?" McGonagall asked curiously.

"As you surely know, we live with Andromeda at the moment. We help her with everything as well
as we can; that also includes the care for Edward Lupin," Narcissa explained. She relished the
surprise showing on McGonagall's face. "Actually Lucius has taken quite a liking to the boy.
Andromeda feeds him a muggle infant formula and Lucius came up with the idea to develop the
magical one up to or past the standards of the muggle one. As far as we have been told the magical
version is stuck in the thirties and not suited for a child as young as dear Edward."

"What do you propose?" McGonagall asked in what looked like genuine surprise.

"We would like to form a team of healers, potioneers and muggle scientists. The Malfoy
Apothecary would fund the research and development of new formulas that cover the needs of
differently aged babies better," Narcissa said proudly. This project would open so many new
opportunities for magical research.

"How do you want to explain the ingredients to the muggle scientists?" McGonagall asked with
glittering eyes.

"I'm sure there are more than enough muggleborns with doctors or scientists for parents. Maybe
even muggleborns that decided to return to the muggle world and work as scientists there," Narcissa said leaning forward and genuinely smiling at the witch on the other side of the table.

"To be honest that would probably be a much better long-term solution," McGonagall said
thoughtfully. "Your husband will probably get longer sentence than you, but between you and me I
doubt they will send him to Azkaban. If you really did this, that would open so many possibilities
for the magical world and it would go a long way to start changing the mind of people. If the
muggles are better in that field, where else?"

Narcissa nodded. "Exactly. When I found out about this extreme difference I started to doubt the
magical superiority."

"Splendid. That's what we will do. You may announce it after Mr Malfoy's hearing and I will
personally take on the task of your parole officer," McGonagall said with a satisfied smile that
made her look like a cat more than ever.

Narcissa nodded with a cat-like smile herself and they stood up to shake hands on it. "So mote it
be," she whispered and felt the magic of the Small Vow seep into her skin.
The Small Vow would only remind her not to break it with a little sting and if she broke it, it would only leave a bit of a burn behind. But it would make keeping the promise easier.

Hermione frantically cleaned the library for an hour before Draco was set to arrive. She was nervous about this visit. She frequently hoped that he was in a better mood than the day before. And he hadn't been here yet and she would need to go over and take him along thanks to the Unplottability that was keyed to the constant inhabitants of the house. They hadn't even done that on purpose. They just had strangely cut themselves on the front door, and only when Harry called Kreacher back to live with them did the wizened elf explain to them that the house had decided for them to be its new owners.

"How can it decide that on its own?" Hermione had asked, a bit shocked, and mentally going over everything she knew about magical houses.

"It's old and forbidden magic," Kreacher had said calmly. "But the Noble and Ancient House of Black did it long before the ban and it is an enchantment that nobody can remove. If the bloodline it is keyed to ends in the male line, the house chooses the next owner. The Slytherins lost their ancient home in the West County that way."

The perks were that the house seemed to become brighter day after day and Kreacher and Tinna theorised that their combined magical energy helped the house. Hermione thought that the house was just glad to be rid of the burden of all the dark artefacts and spells.

A quarter to six, Harry stepped inside the library. "Hermione, you do realise that this is the cleanest this room will ever be until we get a chance to change the tapestry?"

"What?" Hermione looked up from the shelf she was currently dusting and looked around. The room was positively gleaming. "Oh, well, now it's probably the best cleaned room next to the kitchen."

Harry chuckled. "True enough, but I doubt Malfoy would notice."

"Harry! He is used to living at Andy's! Have you seen how clean that house is? You could basically eat from the floor!" Hermione exclaimed and flinched at how screechy her voice sounded.

"Take a break," Harry advised with a smile. "And maybe clean the dirt off your trousers."

Hermione looked down on the offending garment and cleaned it with a quick flick of her wand. "Thank you, Harry."

"No problem, someone has to remind you of your surroundings after all," he said and she stuck out her tongue. "By the way, did you plan on having dinner with Malfoy?"

"No, why?" Hermione asked frowning.

"Because you haven't eaten since we had lunch at noon," he said and she stuck out her tongue. "By the way, did you plan on having dinner with Malfoy?"

"No, why?" Hermione asked frowning.

"Because you haven't eaten since we had lunch at noon," Harry replied shrugging. "I was just wondering."

"I'm not particularly hungry, to be honest," Hermione said. "I'll grab something when I get hungry."

"Alright," Harry said. "I'll be out with Pansy today. We'll meet Mr and Mrs Selwyn for dinner at the Leaky. Can you imagine that it's one of the last pubs that will even serve Slytherins?"
"Actually I can," Hermione said sadly. "I walked next to Draco before his trial. I heard what they called him and I blocked quite a few hexes that the aurors 'protecting' us just ignored."

"We should really do something against that," Harry said with a clenched jaw. "Well, I'll be off, and I think you have to go as well."

oOo

Hermione thought that flooing together was a rather intimate thing. One had to hold on tightly to the other and it was definitely more comfortable the closer one was together. That fact had Hermione putting her arms around Draco's waist and him holding her tightly to his side. She noticed that she felt his ribs under her hands, but they didn't feel too prominent.

As soon as she stepped out of the hearth, she let go of Draco to dust off herself and hoped that her blush was gone by the time she was done.

Looking up she saw faint traces of pink on Draco's cheeks as well, and had to suppress a chuckle. Well, at least she wasn't the only one enjoying this more than she should then.  

"Now, where to?" Draco said finally looking around in the kitchen.

"Upstairs," Hermione said turning around and walking towards the door.

"Somehow I imagined it completely differently," Draco remarked when they climbed the stairs to the first floor.

"How did you imagine it?" Hermione asked opening the door to the library.

"Bigger, mostly, and maybe a little less dark," Draco answered, stepping inside and closing the door.

"It was actually even darker when we first moved in back after fourth year," Hermione said, sitting down on one of the couches. The books she intended to show to Draco were sitting on the table together with some tea and biscuits. So either Tinna had overheard Harry and Hermione talking or Harry had asked her to do it.

"How long had it been without a master back then?" Draco asked curiously, sitting down next to her - a polite distance between them of course.

"Roughly twelve years I think. Walburga died shortly after Sirius was sent to prison," Hermione said contemplatively.

"That's an awfully long time," Draco said sounding a bit awed. "I wonder why Mother didn't try to get inside."

"Walburga put a whole lot of wards and curses on it," Hermione explained. "It took Sirius, Mad-Eye Moody and Dumbledore nearly a week to break through all of them."

Draco whistled. "She was really bat-shit crazy towards the end."

"I think she was bat-shit crazy from the day she was born," Hermione said viciously. "I'm sorry, I know she was your great-aunt."

"Who I never met and Mother barely talked about her at all," Draco said with a laugh. "Don't worry, I won't take offense."
"Good," Hermione said. "Because I don't have even one good thing to say about her. But you didn't come here to hear me ranting about Walburga Black."

"Right, I take it the books in front of us are the ones you were talking about?" Draco asked eyeing the books on the table.

"Exactly. Most of them are about healing curse and hex wounds. But there are three that are about general healing of broken bones and flesh wounds." Hermione pointed the books out while she was speaking. "These two are about creature inflicted wounds, this one even has a paragraph about wounds inflicted by a hippogriff," Hermione said slyly.

Draco groaned. "You're just as bad as Pansy. Why are you as bad as Pansy?"

"I don't think I'm fawning about poor 'Drakey' being hurt," Hermione said, laughing, already readying herself to bolt should he try to attack her.

"You thought that was honest?" Draco asked startled.

"Yes, of course, why?" Hermione cocked her head in confusion.

Draco started laughing, very loud and very hard. "Oh my goodness, I have to tell Pansy, she won't believe it!" he gasped.

Hermione crossed her arms started tapping her foot. "What are you talking about?" she asked indignantly.

"That was pure and utter sarcasm!" Draco exclaimed brushing the tears away. "She was making fun of me for being such a baby."

"But you took her seriously!" Hermione said forcefully.

"Yeah, because I was wallowing in self-pity but even Greg caught on to her ridiculing me before I did! I thought that you Gryffs were more intelligent, especially you, Hermione!" Draco said his laughter having died down to chuckles.

"In my defence I was very sleep deprived back then," Hermione said blushing slightly and looking down on her hands.

"And you haven't known Pansy since you were in nappies," Draco said poking her gently in the side. "You shall be forgiven."

Hermione snorted. "You're awful!"

"Now you hurt me," Draco said playfully, poking her with a bit more force.

"Well, you certainly have bettered yourself, that's right," Hermione said with a smile, because she really didn't want to hurt him.

"All thanks to you," Draco said leaning against the back of the couch while facing her. "Who could stay a bigoted arsehole if he was constantly bested by the supposedly inferior girl."

Hermione snorted again and turned so she faced him as well. "You did pretty great for six years," she reminded him with a smile.

"Blame teenage hormones," Draco said easily and returned her smile.
"Don't worry, I do," Hermione said with a wink and Draco actually blushed.

"I'm sorry by the way," he said quietly toying with the hem of his shirt. "That I took so long to realise. And for yesterday evening"

Hermione instinctively put her hand on his knee. "It's alright. It's not good and I certainly hope that you will educate people who still are prejudiced, but I have forgiven you. And I guess I shouldn't just have grabbed you."

"Thank you, Hermione" Draco said quietly.

"No problem," she said with a smile and with a last squeeze took back her hand. "By the way, Andromeda told me you found a muggle friend?"

"Well, Thomas is basically my cousin and we only met twice, I don't know whether that counts," Draco said shyly.

"Will you meet again?" Hermione asked curiously, shifting so she leaned against the couch more comfortably.

"Yes, he wants to go clothes shopping tomorrow," Draco told her. "I think Andy put him up to it because she thinks I don't have enough clothes that are suitable for a guy of my age."

Hermione laughed. "I'd love to see you clothes shopping with in a muggle store, but sadly I have to go to the Ministry tomorrow."

"Thomas has already threatened to take pictures," Draco grumbled. "And he wears the strangest clothes! He calls them baggy pants and he says they're extremely comfortable. But they look as if they could slip from your hips any moment!"

Hermione had to suppress her laughter at Draco's indignation. "I heard of them. They seem to be the latest fashion from America."

"He said they were somehow connected to music, but I'm not quite sure what he meant. How can trousers be connected to music?" Draco looked like the concept really confused him and Hermione had to clasp her hand over her mouth so he wouldn't see her smile.

"Maybe you can ask him to explain it more thoroughly and try some on while you're shopping," she suggest smiling brightly. The mental image of Draco in baggy pants was just too hilarious and she would have to share it with Harry as soon as he was back.

They continued to talk about Thomas and muggle fashion until the newly installed clock reminded them of the time. Draco took out his wand to shrink the books but Hermione stopped him before he could.

"Don't, some of them are too old, they wouldn't survive shrinking and enlarging," she said and got one of her enchanted book boxes from under the table. "Put them in here. it's enlarged on the inside and there is a Featherweight Charm on it."

"Brilliant, Granger, really," Draco said with a smile and her last name sounded more like an endearment than it had the previous day.

"Well, I have to stay in character after all," Hermione said, smiling brightly at the compliment.

They went downstairs discussing the pros and cons of extension charms and just when they
reached the bottom step the front door flew open and Harry came rushing in.

"I'm going to sue them! I'm going to fucking lose them their fucking business if it costs me my entire vault!" he shouted and Hermione felt the fizzle of magic before a ball of lightning raced past her and into the spot where Walburga had been a day ago. Well that explained how the awful portrait had been destroyed.

"Harry, please calm down, it's no problem, really," Pansy said stepping inside and closing the door cautiously.

"No problem? No problem!" Harry said deadly calm. "They treated you like dirt! Even worse! I fought to end prejudice but it seems like the people just turned to prejudice towards another group!"

"What happened, Pansy?" Hermione asked quietly. She didn't dare step closer because lightning still sparked over Harry's robes.

"We had dinner as planned, but Harry wanted to take me out for dessert, as a thanks. But they don't serve Slytherins at Fortescue's. Not that I can blame them," Pansy said quietly. She stepped forward and put a hand on Harry's shoulder, completely ignoring the bits of lightning.

"They should be the bigger people," Harry hissed, but he didn't remove Pansy's hand from his shoulder and she started rubbing it soothingly.

"But they aren't and really, it's not so bad," Pansy said with a tiny smile. "I found really nice muggle restaurants once I started exploring London a bit. Some are even fancier than some wizarding places."

"Still, you shouldn't be forced to go to the muggle world just because you want to eat," Harry grumbled, looking at the floor.

"I know, but for now I can live with it," Pansy said quietly and put her hand on his cheek. "When it's not acceptable anymore and everything has calmed down a bit we will sue them all, you can help if you want."

Harry leaned into her touch. "Alright," he said, sounding defeated.

Hermione and Draco finally stepped closer and each went to their best friend to hug them.

"I'm going to help as well," Hermione said, letting go of Harry and turning to Pansy and Draco.

"Thank you, 'Mione," Pansy said with a smile playing at the corner of her lips.

"I'm going to take Pansy home, if that's okay," Draco said quietly with a look to Hermione.

"Of course, just don't forget your books," she said with a smile.

Pansy snorted. "The day Draco forgets books I'm going to declare my undying love of Bertie Bott's puke flavoured beans."

"Sounds like he is a lot like 'Mione with books," Harry said winking at her. "Did she tell you that she had nearly thirty books with her while we were on the run? And never ask her for recommendations on light reading!"

"Hey, it's not like you're any better with all things Quidditch," Hermione exclaimed and poked him
They bickered all the way down to the kitchen and only took a break to say goodbye to Pansy and Draco.

"You really like her, don't you?" Hermione asked quietly while she was eating. They hadn't wanted to wake Tinha but she had insisted on preparing a late dinner. Ron was staying at the Burrow for the night.

"She's so fierce, it's amazing," Harry said chuckling. "And she doesn't care about me being the Chosen One. She treats me like a normal human being and... somehow she seems to understand me better than Ginny ever did."

"That sounds wonderful," Hermione said with a smile and squeezed Harry's arm.

"What about you and Malfoy?" Harry asked with genuine curiosity shining in his eyes. "He nearly pulled you back from the landing when I lost control."

Hermione smiled thinking about their evening, she had had so much fun. "I don't know. He is so different from the boy he was. I mean of course he grew up, but still, he turned out really well."

"Maybe he is like my father," Harry mused and at Hermione's confused face explained. "He seems to have been an utter prat up till sixth year. Something happened that changed him. Because I really can't believe that my mother would have married someone who bullied Slytherins mercilessly. Back in fifth year I didn't really understand why it was so bad, but now I do."

"What do you mean? Because of what you saw from Professor Snape's memories?" Hermione asked curiously.

"Not exactly. I knew what happened there was bad," Harry said cradling his cup of tea. "But I didn't realise that even the casual bullying I saw was bad. I only thought my father went over the top at that moment. After all, Malfoy and I had a rather similar relationship at that point. But I hated him because of his attitude. As far as I heard from Sirius and Remus, my father hated Snape solely because he was a Slytherin. When he realised that Snape was an easy victim he singled him out."

"Wow, I didn't know that," Hermione whispered, her food completely forgotten. "That at least explains Professor Snape's hatred for you. It doesn't justify his actions of course."

"No, of course not," Harry said taking a sip of his tea. "And while I understand why Sirius continued to antagonise Snape it doesn't justify it either."

"Those two were really screwed up," Hermione said poking listlessly at her previously tasty food. "And it didn't help that Dumbledore kept them both at places where they were hurt."

Harry scoffed. "Sirius could have easily stayed somewhere else, but I guess this was more convenient. But Snape? If he wanted to keep him close so he could watch over me there was no other option."

"Maybe," Hermione admitted. "However I hope that you and Draco will be on better terms than your father and Professor Snape."

"I'll try," Harry promised. "After all, he seems to be acting decently towards you."

"He is," Hermione confirmed. And he was, if one ignored the episode in the Ministry and
yesterday evening.

Chapter End Notes

We finally had a real dramione moment, yippeh! What did you think? I hope you liked it! Would you like to see the clothes shopping with Thomas or should I skip ahead to Lucius trial? I'm open for suggestions!
Hello my lovely readers! I hope you had a less stressful advent than I had! All betalove to reynardinepttr (on tumblr). Now we'll read about the last Malfoy hearing, enjoy :)

Draco conjured a mirror and looked at himself. Yesterday in the store it had seemed like a good idea to buy the forest green dress shirt and black trousers. But today, Draco felt itchy in it. It looked like somebody else should wear it, not him, and it felt as if it wasn't fitting properly, although it was.

Cursing, Draco pulled off the dress shirt and got out a black one. But it already felt wrong while he put it on, and cursing even louder he threw it into the corner. Draco sat down on his bed and put his face into his hands.

Suddenly he heard a soft knock and his mother asking whether she could come in. After rubbing his face again he pulled on a simple sweater and went to open the door. He didn't want his mother to see the Sectumsempra scars on his torso and the…others on his back.

"What do you want, Mother?" Draco asked quietly when she stepped inside.

"I just wanted to see if you had any trouble with deciding what to wear," Narcissa explained, levitating the discarded dress shirts onto their respective hangers. "And I obviously was right."

"They just don't feel right," Draco explained, sitting back down on his bed.

"Did you think of wearing robes?" Narcissa asked curiously, turning to him.

Draco looked up at her, startled. "I thought we wanted to make a statement today?"

"Your father will have to make a statement today," Narcissa said with a smile. "You already wore muggle-like clothes for your hearing and trial, and women's dresses and robes look nearly identical."

"So, you think I should wear robes today?" Draco asked cautiously.

Narcissa nodded and turned back to his wardrobe. She pulled out a dark green robe with black and silver ornaments. Salazar knew why the elves had sent it since it was way too formal for daily life.

"Don't you think that one is a bit much for a hearing?" Draco asked doubtfully, but Narcissa shook her head.

"No, it's perfect. It will remind the people that we are still very rich," Narcissa said with a cat-like smile. "They will need the reminder when we announce that we want to fund research."

Draco laughed, stood up, and kissed his mother on her cheek. "Devious, Mother, devious. But of course I will wear it, if you think it is the right thing to do."
"Of course I do," Narcissa said with a wink. "Just remember to wear trousers under it, those courtrooms are always awfully chilly."

Draco nodded and Narcissa left him to change with a small smile. Putting on the robes, Draco felt a little bit better than he had in the dress shirts. He would have to live with the rest of the uneasiness. Re-doing the glamour on his knuckles, so it would hold for the duration of the hearing at least, Draco left the room with a last look in the mirror. He really did look good in these robes.

Lucius hated the shackles around his wrists and ankles. He couldn't even move enough to clench his fists to hide the shaking of his hands. And they were shaking visibly. So much so that the photographers would probably be able to get a picture of them.

You're a Malfoy, don't you dare show emotion! The voice of Abraxas Malfoy echoed through Lucius's mind. But even the old terror couldn't scare him into keeping still.

Lucius listened to his solicitor arguing with the Wizengamot. He knew he was lucky that the man decided to continue work for him. Many other families had lost their solicitors when they were revealed to be Death Eaters. But Filius Crowley was a loyal man if one continued to pay him.

Lucius swallowed and looked over to the part of the amphitheatre that was reserved for his family. Narcissa looked as pale as he felt and Draco was brushing his knuckles absentmindedly. Lucius had noticed the strange new behaviour of his son whenever the boy was nervous or stressed. He wondered whether it was Draco keeping himself from punching something, or if it was just a random movement.

The sudden rustling of robes pulled Lucius's thoughts back to the Wizengamot. The members stood up and left for the deliberation chamber. Mr Crowley turned to Lucius.

"I think we have good chance to get you on a long probation period, similar to your wife's," he said quietly.

Lucius nodded. "How are the chances that they'll send me to Azkaban for only a short period of time?"

"To be honest I don't think Parkinson and his people would allow that," Crowley said. "I think it is more likely for them to up the probation time until Longbottom and her side accept it."

"Alright," Lucius said tightly. They waited half an hour until the Wizengamot finally returned. Madam Longbottom looked disgruntled to say the least, but Cassius nodded his head curtly when he caught Lucius's eyes.

"Mister Lucius Malfoy is hereby sentenced to fifteen years of probation and social work. He will not be allowed to use any kind of dark magic. He is not allowed to have any kind of dark magical object. If he is found to condone dark magic without reporting it, he will be prosecuted. If he is found guilty of any crimes the probation will turn into a prison sentence. His wand will be checked every week. An ease of the sentence can be negotiated in five years from today."

Lucius very nearly crumbled in relief as he heard the sentence. This was manageable. He could do this! And working on the infant formula would definitely take at least seven years if his calculations were correct.

The shackles released his hands and feet and Lucius stood. He thanked his lawyer and said goodbye, turning to leave for the foyer where he would make a statement. His wife and son were waiting outside the door that led outside from the ground floor of the courtroom. He greeted them
with a small smile, more emotion than a Malfoy normally showed in public.

Lucius took a deep breath before he tucked Narcissa's hand into the crook of his arm and exchanged a nod with Draco and Hermione, who had just joined them. Andromeda had already left to tell the journalists that Lucius planned to make a statement.

One of the first things Abraxas Malfoy had taught his son about politics and lobbyism was to never learn a speech by heart. Know what you want to say and improvise according to the mood of the crowd. Nobody likes listening to a rehearsed speech; look like you were inspired by them to say something grand.

Taking this advice to heart had helped Lucius many times over the years and he would use this knowledge once again. But now for something so different that it probably had Abraxas rolling in his grave.

The little group stepped out of the lift at a controlled pace and went over to Andromeda.

"Everything is ready," she whispered while kissing him on the cheek in greeting. Of course their every move since they left the lift was calculated.

"Thank you," Lucius said quietly and watched as Hermione and Andromeda positioned themselves to either side of his family. A perfect display of their new alliance, and probably a beautiful picture.

The journalists were already shouting questions at them but Lucius ignored them to smile at his wife and son. That would made for an even better picture.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen," Lucius said calmly with a small smile again tugging at the corner of his mouth. "I hoped to make a short statement about my hearing and my sentence."

The crowd quieted down and only the clicks of the camera were still audible. "The first thing I want to- no, need to say is the most important. I am truly and deeply saddened by the consequences of my ignorance of the truth about so called 'blood purity'. My actions in the past decades were led by antiquated and misanthropic views that I took way too long to re-evaluate."

Lucius made a small pause to look over to Hermione, who smiled encouragingly. "My wife's friendship with the probably most famous muggleborn of our world forced me to finally face the truth and accept it. Hermione is a brilliant witch, and a compassionate human being, with a commendable amount of patience. My family will forever be in her debt for saving Draco, and more so for looking past our history and accepting our hand in friendship."

Lucius paused again, this time to look over to Andromeda. "These past weeks we have lived with the formerly estranged sister of Narcissa, who, like Hermione, taught us with patience and kindness to see muggles and muggleborns as our equals. Many of you might wonder why I am telling you this." A few people in the crowd that had assembled by now chuckled. "One and a half weeks ago I wondered about the infant formula Andromeda was feeding her grandson Teddy, whose parents, Dagda bless their souls, died in the war. I learned that the standard wizarding formula was at least sixty years behind the standard of the muggle one. Can you believe it? Granted they have a better version at St. Mungo's, but how many families can realistically buy it if even my sister-in-law can't?" A murmur rippled through the crowd of journalists, but Lucius didn't let them speak up. "How many wizarding families have ties to the muggle world that allow them to get their formula? Narcissa and I both knew we had to change something. Malfoy Apothecary will start funding the research and development of a wizarding infant formula as soon as I get back to work tomorrow. For this project we need at least one master potioneer who knows about muggle science, a midwife, and most importantly: muggle scientists and doctors that will be able to work together
with their magical counterparts."

There were startled gasps all through the crowd of journalists, ministry officials and visitors. The journalists started shouting questions, but Lucius raised his hand and they fell silent again. "We trust that there have to be muggleborns who either returned to the muggle world to be scientists or whose informed family members work in the field. When my dearest wife told the Chief Sorceress about this plan she agreed to credit this project as our social work. Afterwards I am sure there will be more work to do at the front of cross-world research and science."

For a few precious seconds the crowd was silent before some spectators started to applaud and cheer, and Lucius allowed himself a small, pleased smile. He answered the questions from the journalists as well as possible, but after roughly ten minutes he closed the questions and excused himself to leave for Andromeda's home.

Arriving in the living room through the floo, they brushed the soot from their clothes and then Narcissa was hugging him fiercely.

"You did so well," she whispered and kissed him gently.

Lucius felt a bit unsure since he didn't normally kiss her in front of others, but finally he pulled her closer and when the kiss stopped he buried his face in her neck.

When he looked up he saw that the others had left the room to give them a bit privacy. Lucius used it to kiss Narcissa again and revel in the happiness he was feeling right now. Even a month ago he wouldn't have believed anyone who told him that he would be this happy so soon. It felt like the first time he had ever kissed Narcissa and it was nearly as perfect.

"Lucius, Lucius!" Narcissa's amused voice broke through his reverie.

"What is it, princess?" Lucius asked, looking up from the Black Lake into the face of the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Don't call me princess or I won't tell you the good news," Narcissa replied tartly while sitting down next to him, carefully pulling her skirt under her legs.

"I'm sorry, milady," Lucius said smoothly, catching her right hand in his left and kissing her knuckles.

"You are a terrible flirt, Mr Malfoy," Narcissa said, blushing happily.

"Now, what good news do you have?" Lucius asked, leaning back against the tree.

"My parents just wrote me! Your father has accepted the betrothal contract!" Narcissa said with a big smile and only his impeccable pureblood manners kept Lucius from gaping at her.

"Really now?" he asked quietly. He couldn't believe his father would do that, after all a marriage to Lilian Selwyn would be much more favourable.

"Yes, isn't it wonderful?" Narcissa said her eyes shining with happy tears.

Lucius moved his hand to her cheek to brush the tears away and before he knew it he was leaning in and kissing her for the first time. Her lips were soft and incredibly perfect, and after the first moment of surprise she returned his kiss.
"Lucius, Lucius!" Narcissa's amused voice pulled him out of his reverie, again. "Where were you just now?" she asked gently.

Lucius didn't answer at first and just pulled her closer. "I remembered the day my father finally accepted the betrothal contract. It feels like a lifetime ago."

"It was the best, well, third best day of my life," Narcissa said quietly leaning her cheek against his shoulder. "Only our wedding and the day Draco was born surpass it."

"I'm glad you feel like that," Lucius whispered into her ear and laughed as she shivered.

"Let's go into the kitchen before anyone gets ideas," Narcissa said, lightly slapping his chest.

Chuckling, Lucius followed his wife into the kitchen, still holding her hand and smiling more happily than he probably had in years.

Daily Prophet, 27th May 1998, Notices

*Today we want to wish the happiest of birthdays to Miss Rita Skeeter, our long-time colleague and friend! In addition to writing for our paper for thirty years, nearly to the day, she has published two books, both of which are best sellers with an intriguing new perspective of members of our society. Her amazing skills in finding and telling the most important and mind blowing stories are famous not just in wizarding Britain, but the whole English speaking wizarding world! Over the years she has acquired a great and loyal fandom and we hope that it will only grow bigger over the years!*

*If you would like to join us in wishing Miss Skeeter a happy birthday, or would like to share an anecdote about her, feel free to write to our editor!*

Chapter End Notes

I really love Lucissa and I hope you liked this chapter! What did you think of Lucius's speech, wasn't it amazing? If you'd like to read something Christmas-y in the next days and like flintwood, keep an eye out for my new five chapter Muggle AU, which plays during WWI! There will also be another Christmas one-shot with Flintwood up soon. Merry Christmas to those of you who celebrate and a belated: Happy Hanukkha to my jewish readers! :)
A visit to Diagon Alley

Chapter Notes

Look who is back! Yay! I'm sorry that I left you hanging like that. Christmas, real life and preparations for two presentations in one week made it hard to write :( But now I'm back, the next four chapters are planned and I have semester break till the end of March! This chapter was betaed by the lovely reynardinepttr. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

27th May 1998, 18:03

William Crisplock was in dire straits. On the one hand he wouldn't dare anger Melinda Abbott, owner of the biggest magical florist shop and best friend to his wife Saracissa. On the other hand he had no good reason to actually allow this letter in his paper. Rita Skeeter may have some very questionable methods, but her articles sold the paper better than anyone else's! If she left now with the situation at hand they'd be ruined! Which hedgewitches would still buy the paper if their beloved Rita wasn't in it?

Sighing, William read the letter again. Maybe he could convince Saracissa to talk to Mrs Abbott.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I agree to wish Miss Skeeter a happy birthday. But I can't condone praising her like you did in your note from the 27th May 1998. Her latest piece on Miss Hermione Granger, our beloved war heroine, should be enough reason to question Miss Skeeter's skills and most certainly her integrity. Sensational and amateurish, she slanders a teenage witch, who just saved us all, because Miss Skeeter can't accept that Miss Granger is trying to build bridges.

If one takes a closer look at the history between Miss Skeeter and Miss Granger one will find the 'articles' Miss Skeeter wrote during the Triwizard Tournament. She painted Miss Granger as an airheaded gold-digger who plays with men's hearts as she likes. The girl was fifteen at that time! Miss Skeeter could have easily ruined Miss Granger's future with those awful pieces of writing. As it was, Miss Granger got immense amounts of hate mail from all over the world, some even aiming to seriously injure her!

I could go on and on about Miss Skeeter's tendency to slander people that we love and admire. I could speculate that she is jealous of their fame and seeks to destroy it, but my words would probably fall on deaf ears. I could tell people that Miss Skeeter's manners during each interview I witnessed are severely lacking, even more so if the interview partner is young or inexperienced in dealing with the press. I know that one can never be sure that the quotes from the interview will be presented in context. I wasn't surprised to read that Miss Skeeter used Veritaserum to gain information from the well-respected Bathilda Bagshot, but I was surprised that nobody called for an investigation.

Miss Skeeter should not be praised for slandering our heroes and using illegal methods to obtain her knowledge. I call for an investigation of Miss Skeeter's methods. She should not be allowed to tell her lies and half-truths without being questioned anymore!
William sighed deeply. He had to admit that he had never felt good publishing those articles about Miss Granger and Mr Potter during the Triwizard Tournament. Once he had learned the truth about You-Know-Who's return, he had felt stupid to allow his journalists to stray so far from the professional objectivity they should have retained.

But this letter would ruin his already tainted reputation. Still, he had to wonder what Melinda would do if he didn't publish the letter. She could go to other newspapers. The 'Irish Times' had never been very fond of Miss Skeeter and they were read in Great Britain even though their articles focus on Ireland. Even the 'Courrier du Magicien' might agree to publish it in their international section, not to talk about the 'Die AnderWELT', and the 'Волшебные Известия' would have a field day.

Grumbling to himself William finally set the letter on the small pile that would be published and looked at the next one in the 'letter to the editor' pile. It looked like somebody had decided to let their child play with crayons.

30th May 1998, 14:18

Hermione walked through Diagon Alley for what felt like the first time in ages. After the war she hadn't had much time to just take a free afternoon and browse the shops in peace. Everywhere the reconstruction was visible, as well as the scars the war had left behind. The candles in front of nearly every shop in Diagon Alley reminded the wizards and witches passing them of the dead. Some stopped and conjured flowers or candles to put next to those already there.

Of course photographers were following Hermione, but for now she had no problem with that. She understood their need to document the lives of their chosen heroes. They didn't really intrude and kept their distance but if anyone came too close Hermione had a Confundus ready to be cast.

She stopped at Wizarding Wheezes, conjuring a wreath with acacia, zinnia and pheasant's eye. Maybe Hermione had read one too many books from the Black library but the thought of telling Fred that she remembered him sorrowfully as an absent friend had been nice.

An older witch standing next to her smiled at Hermione. "It's nice to see young people honouring the old traditions. Were you close friends?"

Hermione looked up in surprise. "Not as close as we could have been. I was a prefect during his last year at Hogwarts and not very amused that he sold his products at school," Hermione admitted with a small smile.

The old witch laughed. "He seems to have taken after his uncle Gideon then, may their souls rest peacefully."

"Did you know the Prewett twins? Molly, Mrs Weasley, doesn't really talk about them," Hermione said, turning to the witch and taking a closer look at the woman. She seemed to be in her seventies with long silver hair, but appearance was a fickle thing with magical folks. She wore a dated ruby robe and a matching hat.

"Oh yes, I knew them," the witch chuckled. "I was their nanny, you know. My name is Agnes Gently."
"I'm Hermione Granger," the younger witch said, offering her hand.

"I know who you are, who wouldn't nowadays?" Miss Gently said taking Hermione's hand in both of hers. "I have to thank you for putting yourself out there like this. Not many would be brave enough to fight a Dark Lord out in the open. I know I didn't when I heard of You-Know-Who or of Grindelwald."

"Why don't we sit down and maybe you could tell me a bit about the twins?" Hermione proposed with an eye on the growing crowd. Now she'd like a bit of privacy.

"Oh, sure, lead the way, Miss," Miss Gently said with a wink and put her hand in the crook of Hermione's arm.

oOo

When Hermione returned to Grimmauld Place two hours later she was positively vibrating with nervous energy. She called for Harry and Ron, hoping that they would hear her and come downstairs actually not just shout a yes back.

Soon enough two sets of steps came down the stairs to the kitchen. Hermione was busying herself with arranging food on a platter, Tinna having given up trying to dissuade her from playing with the food.

"'Mione, what's up?" Ron asked when the two boys entered the basement room.

"I met Agnes Gently today!" Hermione said with a big smile, turning to the boys. "She is an amazing woman!"

"Mum's nanny?" Ron frowned and reached for a biscuit. "What'd she say?"

"She told me about your uncles when they were young," Hermione said pacing in front of the hearth. "The similarities to Fred and George were astounding!"

Harry chuckled. "Calm down 'Mione. Take a seat and start from the beginning."

Hermione patted her hair and sat down. "You're right, I'm sorry. It has just been so wonderful to talk to her."

"Guess it would, Mum really loves to talk 'bout her," Ron said with a fond smile. "I don't think they have any contact though."

"Yes, Agnes said Molly didn't write her much after her brothers were killed," Hermione said quietly. "We think it's because she had her hands full with you and your siblings. But that's why I will set up a meeting for the two of them!"

"Mum's barely left the Burrow since the Battle," Ron said thoughtfully. "I doubt she would be up for meeting someone she hadn't had contact with for decades."

"Maybe Agnes could come over?" Harry asked looking at them. "We could tell everyone to vacate the premises so they'd have their privacy."

Hermione chuckled. "Have you read any thrillers recently?"

"What?" Harry asked dumb-founded.

"Vacate the premises?" Hermione asked laughing, and Ron snorted.
"She's right mate, not your typical word choice," he said, gently nudging Harry.

"Pansy's recommended me a few books she liked," Harry mumbled, toying with a biscuit before popping it into his mouth. "Magical, American thrillers. It's actually rather fascinating."

Ron raised his eyebrows. "Is there something going on you aren't telling us?"

"Definitely. I'm mean he is reading, and did you notice?" Hermione asked with a mischievous glint in her eyes and a big grin. "Books. Plural."

"Oh my gosh, what did she do to you, mate?" Ron cried with fake worry.

"Nothing! Just recommended books!" Harry exclaimed, rolling his eyes.

"Yes, we got that part," Hermione said patiently, leaning forward. "But you actually read and liked them!"

Harry scoffed, leaned back and crossed his arms. "So what? It's not like friends can't recommend books."

"You read Quidditch books, if any," Ron said, laughing at Harry's grimace. "Thrillers from America? That's a whole new level!"

Now Harry was blushing and Hermione decided that they had pried enough. She reached over to him and put her hand on his arm. "It's alright, we're just teasing you. I'm glad that you liked them, maybe you could loan them to me?"

Harry shrugged, "If you want to."

"Now, you wanted to tell us about Mum's nanny," Ron said with a last look to Harry. "Spill!"

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16:43

"Theo?"

The young man in question looked up from his book and tried to locate the caller.

"Who's there?" he asked when he couldn't see anyone. The floo would have chimed if anyone came that way- If it wasn't for the spell he had found and used yesterday. It projected the words spoken in front of the fireplace directly into his ear.

Sighing Theo got up and left his private study. The perks of being richer than Croesus. The downside was that it would actually be faster if he took the floo to the entrance hall instead of walking through the whole western wing and down three flights of stairs.

When he arrived in the intimidating room he saw a familiar redhead studying the frowning family portraits. Theo slowed down and took a moment to really look at George.

He was thin, not as obviously as Percy with his more lanky build, but it was there. His collarbones protruded sharply from his skin and his robes sat a bit loosely around his shoulders. George had dark shadows under his eyes and the frown on his forehead seemed to have taken up permanent residence. While his stance was relaxed Theo knew that he could have his wand out in seconds.

Overall George looked like all of those who had fought the war and then a bit. But Theo would have been surprised if he hadn't. Losing a family member was never easy and his own twin? Theo
shuddered to think of the pain.

"You called?" he said approaching George from the side so he would see him.

"So you're here after all," the redhead said turning to Theo. "The house is awfully big, isn't it?"

"Especially on foot," Theo said lightly. Of course he was wondering want George was doing in his home, but he wouldn't be so blunt to actually ask.

George looked down to the floor and started playing with something he had pulled out of his pocket. "I wondered whether your offer still stands."

"Which one?" Theo asked, cocking his head.

"About having too much space, me moving in," George trailed off, looking very insecure.

Theo takes a moment to consider him. "Of course, if you'd like to. But we'll have to go into the flat eventually to get your stuff."

"I know," George whispered and Theo nodded.

"Alright then, it's settled. You're going to get rooms in the western wing," he said briskly, trying to take control of the situation. "Would you like to have a laboratory for product development?"

George looked at him with big eyes. "I- I don't know, I haven't been that inspired lately."

"Maybe the quiet and having a laboratory will help," Theo said with a lopsided smile. "I will tell the house-elvess to prepare everything. When do you want to move in?"

"How about tomorrow? If that's alright for you?" George asked meekly. Theo very nearly went over and hugged the man. Again. He had to stop doing stuff like that.

"Sounds great," he said instead. "Grank!"

George raised an eyebrow but Theo only shrugged and before he could elaborate any further the wizened head of the Nott house elves appeared in front of him.

"Master Nott was calling?" Grank asked with a small bow to Theo and a nod to George.

"Grank, would you please tell the staff to prepare the rooms next to mine? And fireproof the study, it will be used as laboratory," Theo said, turning to George. "Anything else?"

"If you have any potions equipment you don't need anymore, or old clothes that I can try a few spells on, I'd take them," George said shyly and Theo smiled encouragingly.

"Former Master Nott won't need his laboratory in the basement anymore, shall Grank clean the tools and send them up to Mister…?"

"Weasley, George Weasley," he answered with a small smile.

"Welcome to Nott Manor, Mister Weasley," Grank said with a small bow. "The family wing is directly connected to the basement, if Mister Weasley wanted he could probably use the old laboratory."

"I wouldn't if I were you," Theo said quietly. "It's awfully dreary down there."
"Could we take a look first?" George asked contemplatively.

Theo swallowed. He hated the basement for reasons he didn't even want to think about. Just flashes of memories. The stink of death, screams in the night and the pain of Crucio whenever he came too close.

"Of course, why not," Theo said with a smile instead, and motioned to the door behind the stairs. The basement was originally only a place for prisoners and storage so there were few proper entries. One from the kitchen and one from the far end of the western wing. Theo thought they should take the short way, which would normally be used by servants.

Grank followed them down the stairs and when they reached the bottom he snapped his fingers to light the torches. Theo flinched when the fire shot up and he felt his left eyelid starting to twitch. But a short look to George showed him that he wouldn't get away with taking a Calming Draught without facing questions.

They walked down the narrow corridor until it met a bigger one where they turned left. This was the storage part of the basement but Theo felt his hands starting to shake anyway. When they turned to the right to enter the western wing basement Theo started to shake in earnest. He basically felt the Crucio scorching his nerves and thought he heard screams. But it wasn't possible. His father was in Azkaban and the aurors had cleaned out the basement after he turned himself in.

Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. Before his brain could catch up, Theo had pushed George against the wall and put his wand against the redhead's neck. Their faces were inches from each other and for some reason Theo didn't see an ounce of fear in George's. Only resignation.

"Oh shit," Theo said quietly, removing his wand and taking a step back. "I'm so sorry!"

"It's- It's alright," George said calmly. "You didn't react when I called your name, you stood there shaking and I was a bit worried. You don't have to go to the laboratory with me."

Theo shook his head and pushed his hands through his hair. "No, it's alright, just…" he pulled out the Calming Draught and took a healthy dose.

George raised an eyebrow. "That was more than the recommended dose."

Theo scowled. "I do realise that."

"I'm sorry, of course you do," George said, slumping his shoulders and Theo felt bad almost immediately.

"Come on, let's get this over with and we can see if Mika makes her special muffins for us," Theo said nudging George gently with his shoulder.

"Sounds good," the redhead answered with a smile, his eyes searching Theo's face, probably checking whether he was truly better.

The Calming Draught did what it was supposed to do, but Theo knew that he'd have to take a bigger dose next time. His body had gotten too used to the stuff during the last school year. On the other hand, nothing else except alcohol helped Theo to calm down.

Chapter End Notes
So, what did you think? What was you favourite part? What would you like to see in future chapters? Tell me! I'm curious ;) Have a nice week and see you soon!
31st May 1998, 03:24

"Ginevra, what a beautiful name for such a beautiful young lady," Tom purred in Ginny's head. "I wish my mother had been that creative with my name."

"I like your name, Tom," Ginny thought timidly.

"Thank you, dear," the voice in her head said, sounding pleased. "Now, let's go down to Hagrid's, shall we?"

Ginny nodded, but before she could stand up, blackness encompassed her and she felt like she was being pushed back. She saw her hands around the necks of the roosters. Tracing red letters on the wall. Hanging Mrs Norris up where she would be seen.

"Ginny! Ginny!" Tom called teasingly, and then Voldemort descended on her and started shaking her.

"Ginny! Wake up, Gin!" Somebody's fingers dug into her shoulders. With a scream she woke up and blasted them across the room. Opening her eyes she clasped her hand over her mouth when she saw Charlie slide down the wall.

She was out of her bed and running over to him before she realised it. Falling to her knees, Ginny pulled her wand out of its sheath on her left arm. She whispered 'Rennervate' and released the breath she had been holding when Charlie started stirring softly.

"I'm so sorry, Charlie," she whispered over and over again, voice and hands shaking. Conjuring a few candles, Ginny searched her brother's head for the source of the blood on the wall. When she found the gash she summoned a small white globe to give her better light. The healing charm Ginny chose had served her well during the last year. She had in fact gotten so good with it, that it didn't even leave a scar.

"It's alright," Charlie mumbled when she was done, rubbing the spot where the wound had been a moment ago. "Do I want to know why you're so good at healing charms?"

Ginny shrugged. "The last year was hell and it wasn't exactly safe to go to Madam Pomfrey. Someone would always be lurking around."

Charlie cocked his head and searched her face. Ginny returned to her bed, wrapping her arms around her knees. She didn't need his sympathy, or pity, or whatever. She had gotten plenty from her friends. Her family had been too busy mourning to really notice her though.
"Do you want to tell me?" Charlie asked, standing up to sit in the armchair by her window. "I guess nobody else asked so far."

Ginny hummed in affirmation and turned to look out of the window into the night sky. "They were too torn up with grief, I don't blame them."

"I'm glad," Charlie said with a small smile. "Because you shouldn't."

Ginny snorted. "But you're right, aside from Harry nobody's asked so far."

"Not even the guy you're seeing?" Charlie asked in surprise, and Ginny whipped her head around to him. "Your glamour slipped the other day and I know for a fact that you're sometimes leaving the Burrow late at night."

"How?" Ginny snapped. She felt cold curl in her stomach and her fingers itched to draw her wand again.

"I was still in the living room, just thinking, when you walked out the back door," Charlie explained calmly. "You didn't notice me because the fire had burned down."

"Oh." Ginny breathed a sigh of relief. "Did you tell anyone?"

Charlie seemed confused. "Why would I? It's your decision, and you seemed more relaxed the next morning, so I figured he is good for you."

"Why are you so sure it's a he?" Ginny asked teasingly, trying to lighten the mood. "Maybe I have a very beautiful lady I visit at night."

"Well, I guess you're right, my bad," Charlie said with a low chuckle. "But don't let Mum hear that she won't get grandchildren from you either."

"What do you mean?" Ginny asked, frowning at her older brother.

"What do you know about what happened before I left for Romania?" Charlie asked, not meeting her eyes and toying with a button on his shirt.

Ginny shrugged. "Not much. I know Mum was upset, but she didn't tell me anything because I was too young in her eyes. And that Bill left soon after for Egypt."

"Yeah, she was upset alright," Charlie said much more viciously than Ginny had ever heard him talk. His normally soft and friendly features were marred by a deep scowl, and she feared he'd rip off the button he was playing with.

"What happened, Sha?" Ginny asked quietly, leaning towards her brother and using her childhood nickname for him.

He smiled weakly. "I discovered my sexuality, or rather the lack thereof. I realised that I'd be happy with dragons for children."

Ginny watched her brother closely and caught the movement of his hand when he clenched it into a fist. Somehow she knew what must have happened next. "You told Mum?"

Charlie nodded grimly. "As soon as I realised it. The only thing that stuck with her was of course that she wouldn't get grandchildren from me. As if she didn't have other children."

"I'm so sorry," Ginny whispered, paling. "She had no right to treat you like that!"
"Thank you, Gin," Charlie said with a small smile. "The biggest problem was, that I was still a 
teenager and started yelling at her. It's actually a wonder nobody came running. We were
interrupted by a letter coming with an owl we didn't know. It was the International Dragon
Preservation Agency, telling me that the only free position was in Romania," Charlie trailed off,
looking out of the window.

"And you accepted it," Ginny stated. It was obvious.

"Right there in front of Mum," Charlie confirmed with a slight bow of his head. "I sent the owl
straight back to them and told her I was going upstairs to pack. I had seen that she couldn't accept
me the way I am and I knew I wouldn't be able to live with that. Not after I finally knew why I
never understood my roommates or my own brother."

"Do you regret it?" Ginny asked quietly.

"Yes," Charlie said with certainty. "I don't regret working for the IDPA, but I regret leaving in the
middle of an argument like that."

"Did she ever come around?" Ginny was nearly sure that she knew the answer, but she needed to
hear it.

"No, she came to apologise on Christmas that year, but it ended in just another shouting match,"
Charlie told her sadly. "She still thinks I'll just have to find the right girl and then everything will
change."

"That's why you're planning to leave again, right?" Ginny scooted over to the other end of her bed,
closer to Charlie. "I'm so sorry that had to happen to you."

"It's okay," her brother told her with a sad smile. "I don't need her approval anymore. Dad is
actually pretty fine with it and Bill only asked me to tell him if I needed anything over with the
'barbarians'."

Ginny laughed. "That sounds like him."

"So, are you sufficiently distracted from your nightmare?" Charlie asked gently.

"Yes, actually," Ginny smiled at him. "Thank you for telling me."

"You deserved to know," Charlie said simply. "So, are you really seeing a lady?"

Ginny blushed. "No, a fine gentleman Mum, Dad and Ron wouldn't approve of."

"So, a Slytherin in your year?" Charlie asked, his eyes glinting and a mischievous smile tugging at
his lips.

"No, actually in Ron's year," Ginny said laughing. "Blaise Zabini, son to Giulia Zabini, famous
black widow and fashion icon."

"No way!" Charlie exclaimed. "I heard he is just as heartless as his mother!"

"That's a reputation he likes to maintain," Ginny said with a grin. "And I know he slept around a
lot, but he hasn't since we've met and he actually seems to care about me."

"What makes you think so?" Charlie asked curiously, but he didn't seem to doubt her.

"He invites me to rock concerts, tries to teach me how to drive a muggle car. Stuff like that," Ginny
explained, cradling her cushion close. "No roses, or expensive chocolates, luckily."


"It is," Ginny whispered. "It makes me forget the last year and he makes me very happy."

"That's it, I'm sold on him," Charlie replied with a wink. "If anybody has a problem with your relationship, send them to me!"

Ginny laughed. "Thank you, Sha."

"That's what big brothers are for," Charlie said, standing up and stretching. "But if he hurts you, he'll be dragon food. I have that cute Chinese Fireball over at the reserve that really likes to play with his food."

Ginny groaned and buried her face in her hands, so Charlie wouldn't see her smile. He left cackling, and when he closed the door behind him Ginny flopped backwards onto her bed. She banished the glowing orb and only left three floating candles. She was lucky to have a brother like him.

12:07

George looked at the tiny bag on the bed. A fifteen by forty centimetre bag was all it took for him to get ready. Granted he had shrunk down his books and the second pair of shoes. But all his clothes, the little things he tinkered with when he was nervous and the small radio they had used as a communication device during the war fit into a depressingly small bag.

During the last year it had been better that way. A small go-bag could be easily snatched if one needed to leave in a hurry, as they often had. It was safer to have less you could forget to pack and leave behind. Especially with Fenrir and his pack working with You-Know-Who. It had saved their lives a few times too often.

And yet. It still bothered George that he had been able to reduce his whole life into a bag he could easily carry with one hand.

George was startled out of his reverie by his mother calling up the stairs. Lunch was ready. He doubted it. But he nevertheless shut the bag and left the room. His mother didn't yet know that he would leave this afternoon. That he didn't plan on coming back except for Sunday dinners. Too many memories in this place.

Not for the first time George wondered how Theo was able to stay in the manor. After the incident the day before, he asked him about what happened in the house during the war. The way Theo had paled made George regret his question.

Arriving downstairs, George took a look around. Charlie was already setting the table and Ginny was reading on the couch in the living room. She wore long sleeves although it was rather warm today, and pulled them over her hands from time to time. Percy was nowhere to be seen, but was probably outside smoking.

Finally Molly realised that he was standing at the bottom of the stairs and called George over to taste the sauce. It was good, as always, but George didn't feel the usual spark of delight in his mother's cooking skills.

Lunch was a quiet affair until, when nearly everyone was done, George said "I'm moving to Theo's today."
"Which Theo, love?" Molly asked cautiously, putting down her cutlery slowly.

"Theodore Nott," George answered calmly. "He offered, since he has more than enough space, and I accepted."

Molly openly gaped at him, Arthur looked between his wife and his son. Ginny smiled encouragingly. Charlie gave him a thumbs up.

"That's a good idea, Theo seems rather lonely," Percy said finally with a small smile. "I guess the flat is still out of question?"

George nodded and smiled at his older brother, thankful for the lifeline he was throwing him. "That's right, and I need my own place again."

"But aren't you happier here, with your family around?" Molly asked shrilly.

"I'm sorry, mum. I guess I'm already too used to living alone to really enjoy living with my family," George explained with a sad smile. He understood where she was coming from, why she didn't want to let any of her children go. It was bad enough that Ron lived with Harry and Hermione.

Finally Arthur put a hand on Molly's arm. "I'd take it as a sign that he's getting better, love," he said calmly, shooting a quick smile to George. "I'm sure he'll still visit, it's not like he's moving to the other side of the world."

George noticed a frown on Charlie's face, but it was gone so quickly that he was nearly sure that he had imagined it. "Dad's right mum, I'll just be an owl away."

Molly nodded, but she stood up and left for the stairs anyway. His father sighed sadly, looking after his wife.

"It's hard on her, but I think it is for the better," Arthur finally said, turning back to his children. "She will have to get used to you not living here again."

"I guess I'll be next," Percy said quietly. "I'll be moving back into my flat in London soon. My flatmates will both return within the week."

"Who are you rooming with?" Ginny asked curiously. Percy didn't normally talk much about his life before and during the war.

"Penelope Clearwater and Gabriel Truman," he answered quietly. "And technically Pen's girlfriend Gemma Fawley."

"The daughter of Richard Fawley?" Arthur asked in surprise.

"Yes, she is there more often than not," Percy said drily, chuckling. "She is actually quite nice."

"George, would you mind if I tagged along?" Ginny asked suddenly, before their father could ask any more questions.

"Yeah sure, I'll only get my bag and say goodbye to mum," George said, standing up and sending his plate to the sink with a flick of his wrist.

Fifteen minutes later George was finally able to flee the clutches of his mother, and they flooed over to Nott Manor. Theo was already waiting in front of the floo, sitting on the couch reading.

"You you didn't have to wait here for me," George said in lieu of greeting. "It's quite cold down
here. By the way, I hope you don't mind that I brought Ginny along."

"A wonderful afternoon to you too, George, Ginny," Theo said sarcastically, putting his book away and standing up. "And I quite enjoyed the cold after a morning spent outside in the sun."

George snorted, clasping Theo's outstretched hand. "What happened to you? Are you ill? Why did you spend the morning outside?"

"Grank forced me to tell him whether the gardens can stay like this," Theo admitted. He turned to Ginny and said with a slight bow, "is there a special reason why you decided to accompany your brother?"

"Indeed there is," Ginny said with a laugh. "Maybe we could talk on the way to George's room?"

Theo nodded and motioned for them to follow him. "Now, what is on your mind?"

Ginny bit her lower lip, a sure sign that she was nervous. "Hermione, Blaise and I thought we should organise a little birthday gathering for Draco. Maybe even invite his muggle cousin, since they seem to get on rather well."

Theo looked back at Ginny. "So you're the girl Blaise is so secretive about."

George stumbled and Theo caught his arm to steady him. "You're dating Blaise 'I fucked everything' Zabini?"

Ginny blushed, drew her wand and pointed it at George in one fluid motion. "Yes, I am, problem?" she asked tartly.

George frowned at Ginny's defensiveness. And then he realised what kind of reaction she anticipated from her brother. She expected to be ridiculed by him. "Does he make you happy?"

Ginny startled. "I- Yes, he does."

"Good, if he doesn't he'll have the pleasure of trying out my newest inventions first," George said with a wink. "By the way is it true that he can do that thing with his fingers..."

Ginny sent a Stinging Hex at his left cheek, but it barely hurt. He rubbed the spot demonstratively.

"I guess that means yes," Theo said contemplatively, a huge grin on his face. "And that would explain a few things about last year."

"Just because you aren't my brother doesn't mean I won't hex you," Ginny said with glinting eyes and Theo raised his hands in mock surrender.

"Alright, alright, Red," he said laughing. "Don't worry, no more jokes from my side."

"Anyway, about that party," Ginny said as they continued down the hall. "Blaise thought it should be just his friends and he mentioned a lodge?"

George laughed. "Oh, the lodge..."

"Shut up, you prat," Theo muttered his cheeks colouring. "The hunting lodge was Draco's, Blaise's and mine preferred spot to get pissed. I actually redecorated it as a pub and it's rather close to the bigger lake on our premises. Quite perfect for a summer birthday party."

"So you'll be our host?" Ginny asked, turning around so she could look at them.
"Yeah, of course, we need more parties these days," Theo said with a small smile. "But I'll have to check the wards, whether I can make them let a muggle in. They're quite old and they were put in place long before the Statute."

George actually felt a tiny spark of excitement. "I think I'll come up with a few fun things for the party, if you don't mind."

"No, absolutely! Maybe Granger can handle the invitations? But let's not make it a surprise party, Draco doesn't particularly care for those," Theo said, before stopping in front of a huge door. "Luckily we have a month's time to prepare everything."

While they had been talking they had reached the third floor in the west wing, and George only just now realised that all the portraits he had seen so far in the house had been silenced. But all of that was forgotten when Theo opened the door to his suite.

The first room was a small, quaint sitting room, a fireplace on the left side. One couch faced the fire, another was positioned in front of the huge window, looking out over the gardens towards a lake.

On the left side, next to the fireplace, a door led into a study, roughly the same size as the sitting room. Three walls were lined with shelves and the fourth had cupboards to the sides of the floor length window. A long table had enough potions equipment for three projects at once and a desk was already stacked with parchment and quills. A small fireplace was situated on the left wall.

Theo then led George to another door on the opposite side of the sitting room. That one opened into a bedroom, which had a king-sized four-poster bed with plum coloured hangings. This room again had a small fireplace on the left wall, in front of which a loveseat and a foot-stool were inviting him to relax.

"Well, that's certainly an upgrade," Ginny finally said and George could only nod.

This was beautiful and amazing and way too much. But apparently Theo didn't think so.

"It's my pleasure," he said quietly. "Normally the siblings of the Nott family would live on the same floor. But my father didn't want any more children, so these rooms haven't been used in some time."

George looked over to Theo, and caught him fingering his right trouser pocket.

"I can't believe you'd just give them to me," George said to distract him. It worked.

21:53

That night, after they retreated into their respective rooms, George found himself entering his study. He soon found the book he had searched for and settled down at the desk, preparing a sheet of parchment and a fresh inkpot.

'Calming Draughts and how to brew them' turned out to be the perfect book for George's needs. It gave a short summary of the brewing theory of the Calming Draughts most commonly applied in hospitals and in private. It also told him how certain potions could be modified. George remembered that the liquid Theo had taken the other day didn't look like the basic Calming Draught they learned to brew in school. The book described a dove-grey potion that was mostly given to counter anxiety-fuelled nightmares.
George started taking notes on the theory and the brewing process. He would develop a less addictive, easy to make Draught especially for people with panic attacks, because George doubted that Theo was the only one. And since he hadn't found anything like that in the book, he'd have to mostly develop it himself.

Chapter End Notes

So, Weasley siblings interaction and George's inspiration is finally back! What did you think about this chapter? Tell me, your comments truly make my day! :)


Finally the next chapter! I had a crazy busy March, managed to nearly electrocute myself, burned my hands to a third degree (just small patches luckily) and couldn't write for two weeks even though I had a term paper due. What the hell life? But, I'm able to write again and if everything works out I won't be gone for two months again, fingers crossed! Also: there was a mistake in the last chapter, where someone said they had a month to prepare Draco's birthday. They don't, they have a week, so there is a planning session in this chapter! Luckily the lovely reynardinepttr continues to be an amazing beta, so now I can say: Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1st June 1998, 07:18 (GMT+11)

Helen splashed water on her face and wondered, not for the first time, why her only daughter had made them forget about her, and sent them to Australia of all things. They had heard that there had been a rise of violence in the last year, but what had home invasions and gang crimes got to do with them?

Granted there had been that terror attack in London. But that had been before they had been sent away.

Helen swallowed the sob trying to break free. Their own daughter had sent them away! She could have talked to them! Surely they would have understood if it was that dangerous. But Hermione had taken away that freedom. Did she even plan on getting them back? Or was she glad to be rid of her parents like so many teenagers would be?

Shaking her head, Helen dried off her face. She doubted that she had raised a girl who hated her parents. Even if they couldn't truly understand the magical world they had always been supportive and had bought her every book she wanted about any subject.

"Helen? Everything alright?" Richard knocked against the bathroom door.

"Yes, love, just lost in thoughts!" Helen called back, smiling softly. Trust her husband to notice when she took longer than usual. She took her crutches and opened the door. "I think you would have heard if I fell."

Richard chuckled. "Not necessarily, I was dancing in the kitchen."

"Oh? Did they play Queen?" Helen asked teasingly. Richard was nearly as passionate about them as Hermione had been.

"In my defence: Bohemian Rhapsody is frankly amazing!" he said with a wink and started down the stairs.

"Never said anything to the contrary," Helen called after him, and grinned when she heard him whistling the song.
Following her husband downstairs Helen realised that they probably should start planning their holiday to the UK soon. But where would they start searching for Hermione? She had left the house even before them, and Helen didn't remember any addresses of her friends. Although. Hadn't there been a boy? In Surrey?

Richard stepped in front of her and smoothed his thumb over the crease on her forehead. "What's bothering you, love?"

"If we go back as planned," Helen stated, nibbling on her lower lip. "Where do we even start searching? That school of hers is protected and I don't remember any addresses of her friends."

Now it was Richard's turn to frown. "You have a point. Maybe in Diagon Alley? I mean, it's a long shot, but someone will surely know how to help us there."

"Do you remember where the entrance is?" Helen asked with a raised eyebrow. "Because I don't."

"I think I know, I'm not quite sure though," Richard said. "But let's eat first."

08:49 (GMT +/- 0)

Lucius straightened his robes, tugging at the shoulders. It felt like the first time he had opened the board meeting after his father's death all over again. Looking down at his hands he realised that they indeed trembled. Scoffing at himself, he clenched a fist, sneered at his reflection in the mirror and swooped out of the room, directly into his lovely wife.

"Oh good, there you are, I worried you were having a staring contest with the mirror," Narcissa said tartly and Lucius grabbed her shoulders before she could turn away. While she sometimes was quite snarky this bordered on cutting.

"Love, what is it?" he asked quietly, gently brushing his thumbs over her taut shoulders.

Narcissa sighed, and pushed him back into their room. Once the door closed her shoulders slumped down and her carefully controlled mask slipped away.

"The board is nearly as prejudiced as we were at the beginning of the war," she said, pacing in front of the window. "That's why your father and later you chose them. They wouldn't question funds going missing or people not being hired because of their heritage. But this. If you can't convince them…"

Lucius stepped closer to his frantic love and gently put a hand on her shoulder. "If I can't convince them, I wouldn't be a Malfoy. I didn't spend the weekend idle in the Manor, I went to collect certain documents and checked them. They're quite up to date, even if I barely managed any work in the last year."

"You're certain you have enough?" Narcissa asked nervously, leaning into his touch. "You know how hard-headed Borgin is, and Rowle…"

Lucius flashed his wife a predatory grin. "Borgin can be easily bought and I'm sure Rowle's chair is already dangerously unsteady now that his sister's half of the family is either dead or in Azkaban."

Narcissa sighed deeply and collected herself. "Good. We have to do this, even if it means working with muggles."

"We'll only work with the best of those who already know," Lucius gently brushed a curl behind
her ear. "If they're willing to work with us they probably won't be much of a danger."

"Let's hope that's true," Narcissa said darkly, but she leant in to give her husband a last kiss. "Now, shoo, you're already running late!"

Lucius smiled against her lips. "Yes, love. Have the advertisement ready when I come home."

He left with a wink and quickly walked down the stairs. He waved good-bye to Andromeda and Edward who were out by the rose bushes, Edward in a sling on his grandmother's back.

When he apparated away he felt confident enough about the board that he entered the conference room with a small smile still playing around his lips.

10:03

Hermione really hadn't expected anyone in front of the floo and blamed it entirely on the surprise of running into a lean chest that she clung on. She may also have stumbled a bit. But when two hands landed at the small of her back, Hermione was jolted back into reality: she was currently clinging to Draco-her-former-enemy-Malfoy!

Blushing, she stepped back and busied herself with vanishing the soot from his soft green t-shirt and herself. It was only then that she realised that Draco was wearing muggle clothing. And he was currently talking to her while she was staring at him. Brilliant.

"Sorry, what did you say? I was a bit lost in my thoughts," Hermione admitted with a self-deprecating laugh.

"No problem," Draco said with a smile. "I only asked you where you were going so fast."

"Oh," Hermione grinned. "I'm just excited to help your mother with the advertisement for the project!"

"I see," Draco said with a small smirk. "I can promise you she isn't going to run away from you though."

Hermione huffed. "I know. It's just such a big step, isn't it?"

He nodded earnestly, crossing his arms in front of his chest. "It is. I hope it works out for them."

Hermione decided to change the topic to the green t-shirt and black jeans Draco was wearing. "So where are you going?" she asked, indicating his outfit.

"Pansy wants to eat brunch with me and Theo, says she found the best bagels to have ever crossed her way in Manchester of all places," Draco said, chuckling. "I'm not even sure how she found the place."

"Well, then I won't keep you," Hermione said, smiling. Who would have thought that Draco Malfoy would voluntarily go to the muggle world for brunch? "Send my best to them."

"Will do," Draco said, grabbing a handful of floo powder. "Have fun with my mother!"

Hermione looked after Draco vanishing into the flames for a moment and then shook herself out of her reverie. It wasn't that fascinating to see Draco in a fitted t-shirt and jeans, honestly. Shaking her head at her strange focus, Hermione stepped out of the living room to see Narcissa come down the
"Hello Hermione," she said with a bright smile. "I'm sorry I wasn't down earlier. I hope you didn't wait too long?"

"No, not at all," Hermione said, greeting Narcissa with a delicate kiss on each cheek. "I quite literally ran into Draco and we talked for a moment before he left for Pansy's."

"Oh right, they're brunching today," Narcissa said, tugging Hermione's hand into her arm and led her out the back door. "Let's work outside, it's such a lovely day!"

They settled down on the bench between two rose bushes on the southern side of the house. The rose bushes, where Andromeda was working with Teddy in a sling, to their left and the pond and its trees to their right.

Narcissa summoned a travel writing desk from her room and they started jotting down notes on the qualities the Malfoys would need for their foray into combining magic and science.

Narcissa had asked for Hermione's assistance since she knew a lot about science, and Narcissa felt comfortable enough with her to admit to not knowing something and accept help.

After an hour of intense work they went inside to get some lemonade and a bite of food. Leaning against the kitchen counter Narcissa examined her young friend closely. She had noticed the frown on her face and the tension in her shoulders before, but Narcissa had attributed them to the work they were doing.

"You seem a bit worried, Hermione," Narcissa said quietly, watching the witch for a reaction.

Hermione heaved a sigh. "I'm sorry, it's quite stupid."

Narcissa quirked an eyebrow. "I'm rather sure it isn't or it wouldn't have you worried like this."

Hermione sighed again and shrugged. "Maybe. It's just- Ron starts his auror training today and I'm worried about how he'll do. He isn't the greatest worker, and without me there to nag him to do his homework…"

Narcissa stepped closer and put a hand on Hermione's shoulder. "Either he'll learn to do his own work or he won't. But that isn't something you should worry about, dear. He has to learn to manage things on his own. What I heard from my sister and other mothers, children in their teenage years tend to be more interested in other things besides school. But once they've found a career they truly enjoy, that changes."

"You're probably right," Hermione admitted. "I'm still worried about him. He didn't take his NEWTs because of this offer by the Ministry. What if one day he decides he doesn't want to be an auror, or if he's injured on the job and can't be one anymore?"

"Then he'll find something else to do," Narcissa said soothingly. "It is true that most jobs aren't offered to people who didn't get their NEWTs. But a former auror? Succeeding in that training will likely be qualification enough."

"Thank you," Hermione said with a small smile.

13:26
After the brunch Theo had excused himself to go and visit Blaise. Pansy and Draco had sent along their best wishes and decided to take a walk. It was a beautiful summer day with a few puffy white clouds in the sky, and they were both in good spirits.

"So," Pansy started after a few hundred metres. "How is Hermione doing?"

Draco laughed. "Why don't you ask her yourself? You're something like friends after all."

"Yes, but you've seen her this morning, I wouldn't get an answer to my letter till later this evening if I send one now," Pansy explained haughtily.

"Touché," Draco said, chuckling. "She seemed fine, eager to help my mother with the advertisement." He blushed lightly at the memory of Hermione clinging to him until she had found her balance again.

Ever-perceptive Pansy noticed of course. "Did she finally kiss you then?"

Draco stopped dead in his tracks. "What?! Why would you ask? And why should she?"

"I don't know? Maybe because she is more relaxed around you, as far as I have noticed? And you don't just blush about anything," Pansy explained with a cat-ate-the-canary grin.

"Why should she relax around me? I bullied her for years, I stood by while she was tortured," Draco said coldly, his good mood blown away and his knuckles itching to make contact with something.

"She spent enough time around you lately to notice that you don't treat and see her like that anymore," Pansy said calmly, grabbing his hands and holding them tightly. "Don't tell me you haven't noticed how she treats you?"

"You should become a psychologist, Pans," Draco said, hating how unsure he sounded. He had noticed her reaching out to him. Coming back out to the pond after talking to his parents. Talking for hours about healing and various theories with him. But that's just what friends did, right?

"Maybe before the war, but now? Around Harry and probably the Weasel she is always ready to fight. Harry told me recently that she forgets to eat all through the day, too focused on cleaning the house or research or whatever else she's doing. She doesn't even notice in the evening," Pansy explained quietly while she tugged him along. "Remember how you told me that she ate five muffins and a slice of cake in one afternoon? Harry says she had only tea and a scone for breakfast that day."

"And you think that's because of me? That's ridiculous," Draco scoffed.

"No, it's because she relaxes and is out of her normal surroundings," Pansy said wisely. "Out of the house that she remembers as Order headquarters and a hide-out during the war."

"You should become a psychologist, Pans," Draco said, but he didn't deny the truth in her words. He was quite sure that if they had moved back into the Manor, he would have been very miserable.

"Maybe I will," Pansy said with a small smile. "I have found that muggles do have the most fascinating things and psychology is just one of them."

Draco stopped walking and put a hand against Pansy's forehead. "Hm, no fever," he said contemplatively and took a step backwards. "Who are you, and what have you done to Pansy
Parkinson?"

Pansy batted his hand away and laughed. "Oh come on, I'm not welcome in the magical world and I had to get out of the house before I became like Granger. It started out with restaurants, you know? I would apparate to the Leaky Cauldron and then go exploring from there. I'm still not quite comfortable with ambulances though."

"It's their lights, right?" Draco asked quietly, starting to walk again. "One drove past me when I was about with Thomas, and I just froze and gripped my wand."

"Yep, I'm over the freezing and wand-gripping, but I still flinch," Pansy admitted quietly. "But back to Granger! What do you think of her?"

Draco felt his shoulders sag down. "She's brilliant, so full of positive energy. I don't know if it's a recent development, but I regret every single moment I spent talking her down. Although..." he trailed off for a moment pretending to think. "Her taste in Quidditch teams is really questionable."

Pansy hit him lightly on the arm. "Git, not everything is about Quidditch!"

"Are you sure about that?" Draco asked teasingly. "After all you're dating the enemy seeker."

"I am not!" Pansy exclaimed indignantly.

"Oh, so, what do you call meeting for lunch and dinner, exchanging books and cuddling now? Best friends with benefits?" Draco asked with a big grin.

Pansy huffed and he put his arm around her shoulders. "If you're happy I won't say a word against it, love. But the moment he hurts you I will turn into the big, bad Death Eater for your sake, okay?"

"Can't, saviour of the wizarding world and all that. You'd be in Azkaban faster than you can say 'Granger'," Pansy said with a pout. "And I'd hate to lose my best friend like that."

"Alright, then I'll take care to make it untraceable," Draco joked and was rewarded with a small smile. "Really, Pans, just because I don't like him, doesn't mean you can't. I would never dare to try and tell you who to love."

They walked on in silence and when they saw a street vendor who sold ice cream Pansy simply pulled Draco over and bought them both a cone.

"You know, this tastes nearly better than Fortescue's," Draco remarked after a moment.

Pansy nodded. "Yes, even though it melts, somehow the flavours seem stronger. Fascinating, isn't it?"

"So, you're totally convinced that Granger likes me more than just an average friend?" Draco asked hesitantly, licking at his ice cream.

"Well, maybe not one hundred percent," Pansy amended. "But at least eighty-five."

Draco hummed. "What do you think I should do? Just ask her?"

Pansy laughed. "No, goodness no. I'm quite sure she doesn't even realise it. Maybe take her out on an ice cream date?"

"I'd need to go to Gringotts first," Draco said contemplatively. "But I like the idea."
"Very good," Pansy said with a broad smile. "I'm sure she will be happy to go."

"Let's hope so," Draco grumbled. "If she isn't, you owe me."

"And I'll be happy to deliver, don't worry," Pansy assured him, still smiling. "I doubt that I'm wrong though."

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21:17

"Who do you think we should invite?" Ginny asked Blaise, gnawing at her quill and looking down at the empty parchment.

"All seventh year Slytherins for sure," Pansy answered, stepping out of the kitchen and joining Hermione on the opposite couch. "Does he get along with all your brothers?"

"Maybe we should wait for Theo and George and ask them?" Hermione said, the tone of her voice teasing.

"They're already twenty minutes late, who knows when they'll show up," Pansy muttered.

"Right now, dear," George said brightly, entering the room from the hallway. "Sorry, we were tinkering with the wards and forgot the time."

Blaise raised an eyebrow. "Sure," he said drily. "Grab something to drink from the kitchen if you like and take a seat so we can start."

Theo flipped Blaise off but turned to go into the kitchen. George settled down on the floor between the two couches, leaning his forearms on the table. "So, what do you have so far?"

"Nothing much, we were waiting for you," Pansy informed him tartly, huffing when Theo pushed her towards Hermione so he could sit down.

"That's so very lovely of you," Theo said, throwing the second beer bottle lightly to George who nodded his thanks. "That issue with the wards is cleared by the way, we found a way to make them accept Draco's cousin."

"Perfect!" Hermione said brightly. "Andromeda told me that Thomas will get his first tattoo on that day and Draco will accompany him, so they could come together."

"Muggles get tattoos?" Theo asked flabbergasted.

"Yup, they're actually getting quite popular with the people of our age," Hermione replied with a smile. "As far as I understand tattoos were actually invented by the muggles in the Bronze Age."

Now everyone stared at Hermione disbelievingly.

"No way. They were probably wizards, who charmed their skin!" George exclaimed with a laugh.

"Themistodis seems pretty sure that wizards in Greece got their inspiration for tattooing from muggles in Northern Europe, and there is proof that their closer neighbours, the Thracians, were most likely tattooed in the sixth century BCE," Hermione explained smugly.

"Are you sure you shouldn't have been in Ravenclaw?" Pansy asked into the stunned silence.

"The hat considered it," Hermione admitted with a shy smile.
"Now I know more about tattooing than I ever thought I would," Blaise said with a chuckle. "How about we decide who to invite next?"

With that they returned to the reason for their meeting. Ginny snuggled up to Blaise and smiled happily when he put his arm around her without breaking his train of thought. They soon had agreed to invite all remaining Slytherin seventh years, Charlie, Percy and Luna. There had been a bit of a discussion about the latter, but Hermione and Ginny could finally convince the others that Luna's gentle, but quirky spirit would enrich the party.

Ginny admitted to herself that she wanted her best friend there, even if it wasn't her party. It would be good to have someone her own age to talk to.

Add to that the strange bond that seemed to have formed between Draco and Luna during Christmas, which apparently only Theo had ever witnessed.

The invites done, Theo called Cinny to talk about food and drinks. When finally everything was planned, it was nearing one o'clock in the morning. Hermione and Pansy were leaning against each other, already half asleep. George leaned against Theo's legs and seemed to be only awake on pure willpower by now. Theo had put his head back and was talking with his eyes closed. Ginny hadn't participated in half an hour and Blaise was rubbing his eyes every five minutes.

"Why don't we just transfigure the couches and you sleep here?" Ginny finally asked quietly. "You'll have to share, but I'm sure you're too tired to care, right?"

Everyone nodded and Theo and Hermione transfigured the settees in beds that looked a lot like couches, but nobody cared. They collapsed on their respective beds, and Blaise and Ginny barely made it into the bedroom before they fell asleep as well.

Chapter End Notes

I don't think I ever had so many perspectives in one chapter! I hope you liked all of them. Also, oblivious!Dramione is something I haven't seen too often, so I thought why not? (Because, let's face it, book!Hermione isn't the most perceptive person if it comes to feelings.) If you have any questions, or just want to know how far I've come with the next chapter you can write me on tumblr (evolutionsbedingt . tumblr . com) I'd love to hear from you!
Group meetings and tatoos

Chapter Notes

Hello and welcome to the next installment of the-story-I-should-update-more-often! I promise that I won't abandon it, but my brain chemistry isn't very forthcoming. However your lovely reviews always make me smile, so that's motivating! ;) Betaed again by the amazing reynardinepttr. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3rd June 1998 18:05

"Hello, my name is Daphne and I have anxiety."

"Hello, Daphne," the group answered as one, and Neville was suddenly very glad that he had decided to change his appearance a bit. While he doubted that the Slytherin princess would recognise him, he didn't want to risk her making a scene.

"Do you want to share a bit more, Daphne?" the group counsellor asked gently.

Daphne nodded. "That's what I'm here for, after all." That comment made the group chuckle and Daphne smiled hesitantly. "I can't go into details on some things, to protect my privacy, but I will try to explain the situation as clearly as I can."

The counsellor nodded encouragingly and Neville leaned forward. He was very curious how the girl would translate their world's issues for muggles to understand. (That she was even talking to muggles was already mind boggling.)

"I grew up in a very conservative family, that was very proud of never having married under our assumed station," Daphne began quietly. "We didn't talk about the relatives who did. My father insisted that my younger sister and I should be perfect, noble brides and that grades weren't important for that. He insisted that we were not to mingle with 'commoners'. In my last year at school, others with that mindset started to terrorise said 'commoners', which included everyone who wasn't from a very old family. Like my friend Tracey."

Neville raised an eyebrow; he hadn't known that the Carrows had targeted Slytherins as well.

"There was a time where she barely ever came back to the dorm unharmed," Daphne whispered, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. "I learned to care for her wounds as well as possible, since she wasn't allowed to go to the nurse. A month ago, the tormentors were finally persecuted, but I still have nightmares of not being able to help her. And...for two weeks now I've had panic attacks, I fear the most innocuous things. I'm afraid of insects all of sudden, of loud noises, storms, driving...the list goes on. My old nurse, I met her while shopping recently, told me what was happening with me and about groups like this one. And here I am. I'm sure father would be livid."

The last sentence was said so quietly that Neville wasn't quite sure whether he had imagined it.

"That is really quite a lot," the counsellor said calmly. "Thank you for sharing, Daphne."

The group repeated the thanks and Daphne sat back down. Neville was unsure what to do - he had
planned to talk today. But now? How would Daphne react, knowing that someone from, well, the other side of the conflict was present?

He rubbed his nose, whispering the charm that would turn it back into its original shape. Next he stroked his eyebrows, returning them to his own. Those spells had saved his life during the last year more than once. Then Neville decided to be selfish and tell his story. He stood up, nodded to the counsellor and went to the podium. He still looked a bit different than usual, but the changes should be enough that Daphne could recognise him. She would probably feel better knowing just who was talking.

"Hello, my name is Neville and I am here for what I recently learned is a post-traumatic stress disorder." He stopped to let them greet him. Then he took a deep breath and continued. "Some of you have maybe seen me around in the last month, but I never spoke up till today." He looked over to Daphne who stared at him with narrowed eyes. "Before I begin, I have to say something to my previous speaker. I'm sorry I didn't help Tracey, we didn't know that they targeted their own house mates."

There were a few startled gasps, and Neville was quite sure that only seventeen years with a Slytherin family and the last year under the Carrows kept Daphne from flinching. The counsellor swivelled around in her chair to look at her and then back to Neville.

"If it makes you uncomfortable, to have your classmate here, you can tell me and we will find another arrangement," she told Daphne earnestly.

"It's okay," Daphne said quietly. "I don't mind him."

"I'm glad to hear that," Neville said with a small smile. "For those of you who are currently wondering what is happening here: There are four houses at our school. One is mostly attended by the conservatives' children, the other three are a more healthy mix. The conservative house and one of the others, which has the most 'commoners', have always been rivals, be it with house points or sports. But with the addition of two new teachers the rivalry turned violent to a point where some students were hiding outside their dorms to be safe." Neville wondered how he should continue without telling too much, the others would expect to have heard of something like this in the national news. "While I myself would have been mostly safe from the treatment by the conservatives I decided to help those who weren't, and therefore made a target of myself. I tried to get as many students to safety as I could, but apparently I missed a few out of the conviction that the students wouldn't attack their own house mates." Here Neville smiled sadly at Daphne, who returned it with a small nod.

"Like Daphne, I have nightmares of not being able to help. Sometimes I close my eyes and can see the scared eyes of a firstie, who was beaten up by older students. I duck when I hear loud voices or banging doors, hiding behind the next thing I can find. I get angry. I was shy and awkward before, and now I don't feel right in my own skin," Neville concluded quietly, holding Daphne's gaze, trying to tell her with his eyes how sorry he was. That she could trust him not to talk about her problems.

o0o

After the meeting Daphne came to him, stretching her hand out. "I don't think we have ever been really introduced. I'm Daphne."

Neville smiled a bit. "Hello Daphne, I'm Neville."

"Would you accompany me part of my way?" Daphne asked pleasantly, but Neville saw the steel in
"Of course," he answered with a small nod and offered her his arm.

As soon as they were out of earshot of the group Daphne spoke up again. "I trust you won't go blabbing about what I told the group."

"Without a question," Neville said quickly. "I would never do something like that."

"Good thing you're a Gryffindor," Daphne muttered.

"Will you do me the same courtesy?" Neville asked, a bit peeved by her comment about his house.

"Naturally," Daphne said easily. "It would entail explaining what I was doing there in the first place."

Neville chuckled. "Of course." They fell silent for a moment. "How is Tracey doing?"

Daphne's shoulders stiffened. "Physically quite well, the healers say there will be no permanent damage aside from the scars."

Neville nodded. He understood what she wasn't saying. "Will she come back to repeat the year?"

"I don't know. I don't think she has decided yet," Daphne answered, looking into the distance.

"May ask you something?" Neville watched her closely until she nodded. "Why didn't you try to talk to us about protection?"

"Would you have believed and trusted us?" Daphne asked, resignation clear in her voice. "We are used to protecting our own, we were used to it being us against the rest of the school. You're just as used to 'Slytherins are the bad guys'."

Neville sighed deeply. "You're probably right that there would've been voices asking not to trust you. But I would have figured something out, I think."

"You're one of the most likeable of the lot," Daphne conceded. "Maybe we would have even trusted you to help us."

They had reached the small alley Neville had been using to apparate. Daphne pulled her hand from his arm and turned to face him.

"I don't mind having you at the group," she said finally. "I think it will be good to have at least one person who'll understand what I mean when I tell them that I'm dreaming of a monster with red eyes."

"And you will understand why I feel uncomfortable in my own skin, in that new me the press is painting," Neville said quietly, with a small nod. "Maybe we can help each other."

"I would like that," Daphne whispered and then she was turning on the spot to apparate away.

The last thing Neville saw of the witch, was her sad smile.

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5th June 1998, 14:08

"Draco! Good to see you!" Mary Tonks greeted him, smiling brightly as she opened the door.
Draco smiled at her in return. "Thank you for having me."

"Of course! When Tom said you'd be over before going to the tattoo shop we were delighted," Mary said, ushering him inside.

"Mum, where should I put the cake?" Lucinda called from the kitchen while Draco was taking off his shoes.

He raised an eyebrow. "Cake?"

"You'll see in a moment," Mary replied with a wink and led him into the living room. "Happy birthday, Draco!"

Frank, Haley and Lucinda stood around the table and Thomas was coming over to greet Draco with a clap on his back. Draco was completely stunned by what lay before him. They had made a cake with green and white candles, hung a few balloons in green and silver and were grinning broadly at him.

"Now, since Haley is the only one in this family who can sing," Frank said, coming over to stand next to Draco. "We'll spare your ears and just wish you a very happy birthday and many happy returns. We weren't too sure what to get you as a present, so we thought we'd throw you a muggle birthday party instead."

Draco was still stunned, but a smile tugged at the corner of his lips. "Thank you, for all of this," he whispered. "This…is actually not all that different from a wizarding birthday."

Thomas shrugged. "All the better, then the culture shock won't keep you from trying that extremely delicious cake mum made."

Lucinda laughed. "Speaking of cake, can we eat?"

When Draco and Thomas left for the tattoo parlour half an hour later, Draco was still trying to comprehend their reason for throwing a birthday party for someone they barely knew.

"You're family, even if we aren't related by blood," Thomas said as if he had read Draco's thoughts. "But you don't really know me," Draco tried to argue.

Thomas waved his answer away. "Maybe, but I think you could use some family that isn't crazy like your other aunt. And if you learn more about muggles that wouldn't hurt either," he said with a friendly shove.

"By the way, I wanted to warn you," Draco said, suddenly a bit uncomfortable. "Since you're coming to my party tonight. Pansy is pretty open towards muggles, but she's still prejudiced, so don't be offended if she says something strange. Theo will probably speak to you, but I'm not so sure about Daphne, Millicent and Tracey."

"It's okay, there will be others there, right?" Thomas said with an easy smile, and Draco was once again reminded that Thomas was much more innocent than his schoolmates and himself.

"Yes, the Weasley siblings save for the youngest and the oldest brother. Hermione and Luna. Luna is eccentric even for our standards, so don't take her too seriously," Draco said, a small smile playing at his lips.
"Well, as long as nobody tries to use magic on me it should be fine," Thomas said with a laugh, while he pushed open the door to the tattoo parlour.

Unlike last time the tattoo parlour wasn't empty. Another man, probably an artist, sat behind the front desk, speaking to a rough looking guy whose arms where completely covered in ink. Draco only barely resisted the urge to grab his wand and turned to Thomas for direction on how to deal with the situation.

"Hey, how can I help you guys?" the artist called over after a moment. He too was heavily tattooed, and at least the designs on his left arm looked like he had done them himself.

"I have an appointment with George," Thomas answered easily. "My cousin's accompanying me."

The other costumer turned to them and gave them a once over. "Aren't you a bit young?"

"No, actually," Thomas said brightly.

Then the huge guy turned to Draco. "Nice knuckles, you into fighting?"

Draco looked down at his hands, startled that the glamour had already faded again. The charm lasted shorter and shorter each time he applied it. "Got into an argument," he shrugged, hoping that that would be the right answer.

The big guy laughed. "Not your first either, was it? Don't worry, I'm the last guy who'd judge you for letting off some steam on some arsehole's face."

"Jimmy, stop corrupting the youth," George scolded lightly, entering the room with a cup in his hands. "You can step through," he said motioning to the backroom. "Do you want something to drink?"

Thomas squinted at Jimmy, shook his head and went into the backroom. Before Draco could follow Jimmy caught his arm.

"I meant what I said," he said quietly, looking at Draco intently. "And you look old enough, so, if you're interested come by Jimmy's Repair and Replacement on Muddlester."

Draco shrugged him off. He followed Thomas and just barely resisted casting a cleaning charm on the part of his arm where Jimmy had grabbed him.

After three hours of horrified fascination on Draco's, and pained stubbornness on Thomas's part the tattoo was done and covered in cling film. Thomas had stern instructions to change the wrapping and clean off excess blood and goo as soon as he returned home that evening.

That meant it was nearing seven o'clock when Thomas finally came back downstairs and signalled Draco that he was ready to go.

Thomas had chosen slim jeans and a polo shirt, looking much more refined than he had earlier in the day with his tank top and 'baggy pants'. Draco still didn't understand the muggles' fascination with those damned things.

"Since I can't apparate with you, we'll travel via portkey," Draco explained, holding up the muggle coin he had charmed for the occasion. "It's only slightly more comfortable. But thanks to some
nicely done spellwork you should be able to portkey right back here when you say 'Portus'."

Thomas nodded along. "Alright, let's go then."

"Have fun, boys," Mary said with a warm smile.

"Don't drink too much," Frank admonished with a wink.

Draco tapped the portkey with his wand to activate it and counted down the seconds until departure. To be honest, he didn't like portkey travel, mostly because he had never managed the art of landing on his feet. So, when they arrived just outside Nott Manor Draco had to, once again, pick himself up from the gravel path. The fact that Thomas hadn't fared any better didn't do much to console him.

"If this is slightly more comfortable than apparition I'm so glad that I'll never have to live through that," Thomas said, sounding like he was only partly joking. He was rubbing his shoulder and Draco wondered, whether it had been that good an idea to portkey here with Thomas freshly tattooed.

"Are you alright?" he asked carefully.

"Yeah, just a bit rattled," Thomas waved off his concern. When he turned to the gate, he chuckled. "This thing looks way too much like something from a horror film."

Draco swallowed tightly. Knowing what happened at the manor and sometimes the grounds, there was more than enough material for a dozen of those stories. "Let's just hope that the changes Theo made to the wards will work. But that you're seeing it at all is a good sign."

"Guess so," Thomas shrugged, looking a bit uncomfortable. "But, don't laugh. I feel like something doesn't want me here."

Draco sighed. "That would be the wards. They're old and as far as I understood they could only be convinced to let you pass because you have latent magical potential."

Thomas looked at him with wide eyes. "What do you mean latent magical potential? I could be a wizard?"

"Your children could be," Theo said, approaching from the other side of the gate. "If you had them with someone who also has latent magical potential. A squib for example, or the sibling of a muggleborn."

"Theo, you were taking your sweet time," Draco grouched. "What kept you?"

"I was helping George with the fairy lights and couldn't just vanish on him," Theo shrugged. "Stop complaining, Draco."

"Let us in and we'll see about it," Draco teased. He was glad that they were still able to banter as easily as they had before this whole mess.

Theo pointedly rolled his eyes at Draco and raised his wand. He started chanting in an ethereal language that sounded somewhat like Norwegian. After a minute or two the gates shimmered like hot air in the summer sun and Theo motioned for them to step through. Draco saw Thomas stumble a few steps in and grabbed his arm to steady him.

Powerful, old magic coursed through his veins and Draco panicked when he noticed that he
couldn't move. He felt as if *something* was picking through his brain, even if they were much more careful than the Dark Lord or his aunt had ever been. Then, with a last surge of power, Thomas and Draco were pushed out of the hold of the wards and fell on their bottoms for the second time in not even half an hour.

"Bloody hell," Thomas groaned, rubbing a spot on his right forearm. "What the hell just happened? Why does it itch like this?"

Draco rolled up his sleeve in alarm when he noticed that he felt an itch in the exact same spot. "Morrigan strike me!" he exclaimed with big eyes, jumping to his feet. "Theo, we have a situation!"

Theo stepped closer and looked down on Draco's arm. "Thomas, show me your arm."

Thomas picked himself up and showed the growing red spot to Theo. Thin red lines grew more visible by the second until they formed a clear picture.

"Draco, what is this?" Thomas asked, fear palpable in his voice.

Theo answered instead. "A bind rune, a result of Draco grabbing you in the middle of ancient magic. Honestly, Draco, you should know better."

"He is a muggle! This shouldn't be possible!" Draco hissed, rolling his sleeve back down, hiding the bind rune on his arm.

"A muggle with enough latent magical potential that the wards accept him," Theo said tartly. "Thomas, congratulations, thanks to this idiot's stupidity you're now officially a Malfoy."

"What?" Thomas gaped at Theo and Draco honestly couldn't blame him.

"The kinship doesn't have to mean that," Draco argued weakly. "Not that I don't like you Thomas, and we are already related by marriage. But this should only mean-

"Sorry, mate, the oþala is clearly the anchoring rune for the other two," Theo said with a shrug. "If it was the týr rune, you'd be brothers in arms, yes. But like this. I think the wards decided that he needed to be related to you proper to pass."

"Father will have a heart attack," Draco muttered, rubbing the rune.

"How long will it be visible?" Thomas asked quietly. "I don't think I want to explain to my girlfriend why I cut a rune into my arm."

"It should vanish overnight," Theo said, taking another look at Thomas's forearm. "I'm sorry this happened."

Thomas still seemed a little bit dazed. "So what does this mean exactly? Am I his, I don't know, brother or something?"

Theo frowned. "Or something. I don't know if you heard of the concept of the ward?"

"Only in my own, muggle context," Thomas said, frowning. "If someone is orphaned, they get appointed a guardian for legal matters and such. Or people who are unable to make decisions because of age or disability."

"It's basically the same in wizarding culture," Theo explained. "You're technically a ward of the Malfoy family now, even if your parents are still alive."
"Yes, your father will have a heart attack," Thomas said, turning to Draco. "And mine too."

"The thing is," Theo threw in, clearly suppressing a smirk. "I think Narcissa will be delighted to have a second son to dote on."

"Even if he is a muggle?" Thomas asked dubiously.

"Who knows, my mother seems to have forgotten the last twenty years of hatred towards muggles and muggleborns anyway," Draco groaned, burying his face in his hands.

Thomas patted him on the head. "Hush, at least now I'm officially allowed to tease you."

"I hate you," Draco pouted, glowering at Thomas through his fingers.

"If you're done with your family bonding," Theo drawled, amusement tinging his voice. "I think we have a party to get to."

"I hate both of you," Draco said, stalking off down the gravel path. "It's my birthday, you should be nice to me."

Chapter End Notes

So, Draco triggered some ancient magic again. What do you think about that? If you're wondering which runes I used (or generally what the heck I'm talking about) take a look at my tumblr (evolutionsbedingt) where I'll post an explanation tagged as #runes and #arbitrary jurisdiction. Are you excited for the birthday party? I certainly am! Looking forward to reading your reviews and see you (hopefully) soon! :) 

5th June 1998, 19:09

Hermione looked around the forest and had to remind herself to close her mouth. There were fairy lights in the lower branches, the little bulbs shimmering in soft green and silver. Banners of fabric between the trees looked like perfect places to lounge and chat. The garlands hanging in the over them were moving in a soft breeze which seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere and kept the stifling heat of the summer day at bay. At every tree trunk there was a big glass jar which would later hold Bluebell Flames.

The soft, pale sand of the path to the lake was marked with fairy lights dancing in the bushes. The lakefront was illuminated by fairy lights as well and there were cushions and blankets around two wood piles. Out on the lake Hermione spotted a small island with a few trees.

"Theo, this is amazing," Pansy breathed behind Hermione who could only nod mutely, still too much in awe to form full sentences.

"Glad you girls like it," George answered, the grin palpable in his voice and when Hermione turned to look at him she saw a soft tinge of red at the tips of his ears.

"Which spells did you use for the garlands?" Hermione finally found her voice and of course her mind latched onto the safest topic: charmwork.

Theo suddenly spun on his heel. "Damn, I forgot Draco!" He apparated away before any of them could say a word.

George shook his head and turned back to Hermione. "We found the charms in a book in Theo's library. 'A Guide to the Perfect Garden Party' was really helpful for the hammocks as well."

"Oh, I know the book. Mother always insisted I should read it." Pansy rolled her eyes. "But if it has something like that breeze charm I might actually take a peek."

Pansy had just finished talking when they felt a powerful surge of magic that had them all grabbing for their wands. It was over in the blink of an eye, but the tension didn't leave their bodies. When they heard voices in the forest they drew their wands, walking up to the clearing. Pansy looked like she might bolt any second and George's face had turned to stone.

"Salazar's underpants you gave me a fright!" a female voice exclaimed when they rounded the corner and Hermione lowered her wand when she saw Daphne Greengrass clutching her hand to her chest. The other hand was obviously lying on her concealed wand and she was standing slightly in front of a smaller, brunette girl.
"I'm sorry, Daphne, Tracey," Pansy pushed past Hermione, putting away her wand as she went and Hermione followed her example. "Did you feel the surge of magic?"

"Yes, we just stepped out of the cabin when it hit us," Daphne said, pushing back her blonde hair with a shaking hand. "So that wasn't planned?"

"Maybe it was the wards," George suggested quietly. "I hope Thomas is alright."

Hermione froze in shock. She hadn't realised that the surge could have meant a problem with the wards they were trying to circumvent for Thomas. "Oh goodness, you're right!"

"Who is Thomas?" Daphne frowned, looking between them. Tracey behind her stiffened again, the girl had yet to say a word.

"Draco's cousin by marriage," Pansy explained. "He is Andromeda's nephew. He's a muggle, but Draco assures me he's great."

Daphne relaxed marginally and finally stepped sideways to stand next to instead of in front of Tracey. "Would you introduce us around Pansy?"

"Of course," Pansy smiled reassuringly at the two girls and Hermione was surprised to note the softness in her eyes.

"Tracey, Daphne, meet George Weasley and Hermione Granger," Pansy said with a wink. "You of course know them both from school."

Daphne smiled at both of them shortly, but Tracey only nodded, keeping close to the blonde's side.

"It's only a few weeks difference," Draco's voice permeated the uneasy silence that threatened to settle on them. "And I've been through far more, making me the older brother!"

"Nonsense, just because your life sucked more than mine you don't automatically get older!" a second male voice argued - that was probably Thomas then. Hermione smiled a bit at the sass, but she wondered why they were arguing about brothers.

"If you two don't stop bickering right this instant I will transfigure you both into stones and throw you into the lake." Theo sounded severely annoyed and Hermione had to hide a grin behind her hand when the three of them rounded the corner, and Draco and Thomas wore identical pouts.

"Good to see you're all in one piece." George was the first to speak.

"Why?" Theo frowned in confusion.

"We felt the power surge and got concerned whether something went wrong," Hermione explained, watching Thomas look around with unabashed awe on his face.

"Oh, yeah, Draco, why don't you explain the power surge?" Theo smiled sweetly and suddenly Draco looked like a deer caught in the headlights, or maybe like the mouse in the gaze of the snake. Hermione smiled to herself.

"Uh, um, well-" Draco started to stammer, scratching the back of his neck.

Thomas rolled his eyes and stepped forward, saving Draco. "Apparently you shouldn't grab anyone inside old wards, even if it's a muggle like me."

Hermione was momentarily derailed by how much Thomas looked like Draco, they could have
been - "Brothers? I heard you talking about that."

Draco nodded resolutely, even though his cheeks were flaming red. "Yup, and not just brothers-in-arms or something like that."

Next to Hermione Pansy collapsed into a fit of giggles and she saw Daphne's lips twitch as well.

"Well, Narcissa is going to be delighted," Pansy gasped out between her bouts of laughter.

Hermione snorted. "I think overjoyed is more apt a description, but imagine Lucius's face when he finds out!"

Pansy met Hermione's eyes and they both started outright laughing. This time Daphne and George joined in with quiet chuckles and Hermione was sure that Theo had to work really hard to suppress his own laughter.

Percy and Charlie chose exactly that moment to step out of the cabin and looked around with matching expressions of confusion. "What did we miss?"

George composed himself enough to answer. "Draco and Thomas are brothers by magic. Imagine Lucius's face when he hears that he has a muggle son!"

Charlie started laughing as well and even Percy's face showed some traces of mirth.

"How wonderful to have you all entertained at my cost," Draco huffed, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

"Sorry, mate, but even I have to admit that it is pretty funny and I've yet to meet your father," Thomas grinned broadly, clapping Draco on his back.

"Maybe you should call him Dad when you meet him," Pansy suggested, grinning slyly.

Theo shook his head. "We don't want him dying immediately, do we? It's enough that Thomas already looks like a relative of the Malfoys."

"You mean it isn't from the spell?" Daphne asked, amusement still tinging her voice.

"No, you should have seen him when he first met me," Thomas laughed. "Looked like he had seen a ghost!"

"If your hair was a bit lighter even old Lucius would try and remember any…indiscretions back in the day," George said with a wink, before sauntering over and throwing an arm over Thomas's shoulder. "Welcome to world of magic, please buckle in and prepare for a turbulent ride!"

Thomas looked a bit unsure at first, but then he relaxed. "Let me guess: 'We're all mad here'?"

"That too, yes," George said falsely contemplative. "But now that you say it; where is Ginny with Blaise and Luna?"

"Right behind you, jerk," Ginny answered, stepping out of the shadow of the trees. "Blaise insisted on walking and showing us the gardens a bit."

"I honestly didn't remember how far out this is, love," Blaise chuckled. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Hello everyone." Luna entered the clearing, absentmindedly brushing little twigs out of her hair.
"What did you do to upset the wards like this? I can feel them whispering from here."

After a stunned moment of silence Theo answered Luna's question and she only nodded absentmindedly.

"That would make sense, I'll tell them to calm down. I'm sure Thomas is a delightful person and no danger to the house," she answered with a small smile. Then she turned to Thomas, stretching out her hand in greeting. "Hello Thomas, I'm glad Draco now has a real brother."

Thomas seemed somewhat stunned but he took her hand and shook it gently. "I'm glad you think so."

Draco then introduced everyone formally, and while they mostly knew each other from school it was still a nice gesture. Soon they had settled down in the hammocks or on conjured cushions on the forest floor. Only Charlie levitated a chair out of the cabin, saying something about 'his old bones'.

Hermione ended up in a hammock with Pansy and Ginny, Luna and Blaise sitting on cushions to their sides.

"Didn't you invite Millie as well?" Daphne asked Pansy from the next hammock over.

Pansy nodded. "Yes, but when she heard that it wouldn't be just us she cancelled."

"Well, she was never the most social," Daphne sighed. "But it would have been nice to have her here."

Pansy nodded and turned back to rummaging in her purse. She pulled out a brightly wrapped rectangle and positioned it behind her in the hammock.

This part of the evening had been something Hermione dreaded, because she had fidgeted with what to gift Draco all week.

She had thought she didn't know him all that well, but when she made up a list of all the things she knew about him she easily jotted down twenty points in the first ten minutes. When Harry had found her in the kitchen afterwards he had laughed and said that they had been bound to notice.

"Hermione," he had said. "From the first year onwards Ron and I kept commenting on the stuff he had or did. In the sixth year I honest to god stalked him. What did you expect? Of course we know a lot. And then you went and befriended first his mother and then him!"

She had sighed and conceded that he had a point. The next morning she had sent off her order for Draco's present and was suitably sure that she had found something he'd like.

"Now, my dearest Draco," Pansy had risen, conjured a glass and tapped against it with her wand. "Since I'm possibly your oldest friend along with Theo I'll say a few words. I promise not to spill any secrets, I'm not drunk enough yet." That got her a few chuckles and a glare from Draco. "But I have to say this: I'm so glad the war is over. You look more like yourself again. Well, maybe an improved self because you lost a good chunk of that arrogance."

"But this year when I wish you all the best, a fulfilled life, a year filled with happy memories and good people I'm confident that you'll actually get it."

Hermione caught Draco looking at her and smiled at him. She noticed Percy looking down and Theo gently knocking into George.
Pansy continued. "You don't, or better didn't, know this. But we were all so caught up into settling into our lives again, we didn't realise today would be you birthday until a week ago. So, please excuse that a few things aren't as over top as you're used to. Also there is no cake, because we thought ice cream would be much more appropriate for a summer evening." With that Pansy raised her glass which was now filled with sparkling fluid. "To Draco, many happy returns!"

Glasses where now appearing in front of everyone and they rose together to toast Draco. He was grinning broadly and when Hermione caught his eyes she winked at him.

"Thank you, Pansy. I think that was your best speech so far," Draco said, rising as well. Pansy did a small curtsey.

"I want to thank you all for coming," Draco continued. "I know that for some of you this life after isn't as easy as we all wished. But tonight I'm hopeful that we'll pull through eventually. To new alliances!"

They drank to that. When they put down their glasses, Theo announced that it was time for the gifts.

Luna was the first to present her gift to Draco: an amulet made of moonstone and hawthorn. The hawthorn made up an intricate cage around the gem and Hermione made a mental note to ask Luna about the spell she used to achieve that. Knowing the Ravenclaw, it could well be one of her own creation. Draco thanked her with a small smile that seemed a bit out of place on his face.

Daphne and Tracey gifted Draco with a box of home-made chocolate and tartelettes. Draco teased them that they didn't need to fatten him up and Daphne asked drily whether he was sure. Hermione was reminded that Slytherins look out for each other, and that Draco really had filled out since the Battle.

Theo went next, presenting Draco with a few invaluable books about curse breaking that Hermione was itching to get her hands on. From the look on Percy's face he was feeling much the same.

George winked at Draco and told him that he would see later. Hermione wondered whether she should dread whatever he had cooked up, remembering the twins' penchant for slightly destructive pranks.

Percy and Charlie presented Draco with an expensive bottle of muggle whiskey. Thomas seemed really impressed by it and Hermione thought she had once heard a friend of her father's praise the label.

Blaise and Ginny of course had brought a joint present. From what Hermione understood it was a signed Montrose Magpies Quaffle with which they had apparently made an especially daring move. It was accompanied by tickets for their next game in two weeks.

"It's the first game since the war," Draco said with big eyes. "How did you get tickets for that?"

"Well, it helps if the old Slytherin captain is on the roster," Blaise said with a wink.

"Flint?" Draco asked sounding somewhat flabbergasted.

"No, Montague. Of course Flint!" Blaise rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "He is apparently one of the few players who isn't in prison."

Draco nodded, a sad look flashing across his face. "Thank you, Blaise, Ginny. This means a lot."
Pansy was up next and smiled shrewdly at Draco. "Well, since our brunch in Manchester went over so well I've got a gift card from Harrods for you. After all the next time we'll have dinner I need you to be dressed accordingly."

Thomas eyes grew big and Hermione felt herself straighten in surprise. They exchanged a look that clearly communicated their astonishment.

"They have gift cards at Harrods?" Thomas asked just as Hermione said "You know about gift cards?"

Pansy looked between them with a slight sneer. "Of course they got gift cards at Harrods and of course I know about them. Just because I'm a witch doesn't mean I'm stupid."

Hermione was still baffled. "I didn't know you ventured that far."

Pansy blushed slightly and looked down at her hands. "Well, once I got used to the amount of people I liked the anonymity. Nobody knows who I am." She didn't need to say 'what I did', Hermione heard it clearly.

"Oh Pansy," she whispered, saddened on the witch's behalf. "If you have any questions feel free to write me, all right?"

Pansy nodded and smiled. "Maybe I'll take you shopping at Harrods one day."

Hermione snorted and just shook her head. Draco had meanwhile removed the wrapping paper and the muggle chocolate bar, and opened the envelope containing the gift card.

"How much are five-hundred pounds in Galleons?" he asked, looking up at Pansy questioningly.

Hermione and Thomas gaped.

"Two-thousand four-hundred sixty-five Galleons," Pansy answered calmly. "You two do know that I'm rich, right?" The last comment was directed at Hermione and Thomas who both nodded mutely.

"It's still another thing to hear that you can just gift your friend a five-hundred pounds gift card," Thomas explained weakly. "Just…"

"Stop right there and don't finish that sentence," Pansy said sharply. "Whatever you gave Draco I'm sure he values it just as much as any other gift he received today. If you weren't very important to him he wouldn't have invited you along."

Thomas swallowed and nodded, managing a small smile. Draco flicked him on the arm. "She's right, petit frère."

"I'm older than you," Thomas pouted, but Hermione saw the smile in his eyes and relaxed. She really didn't want Thomas to feel like he was being excluded.

"So, 'Mione, only you're left," George announced, breaking the moment of silence before it could settle.

"Thank you, George, I wouldn't have realised without you," Hermione remarked with a smile and George stuck his tongue out at her. She was so, so glad that he felt comfortable enough to joke around.
Hermione levitated her present over to Draco. "I hope you'll like these. It's bit of a mix but maybe a good introduction in muggle literature."

She watched his face closely while he carefully removed the paper around the three books. The first one had actually been Harry's suggestion, but Hermione had agreed that 'To Kill a Mockingbird' by Harper Lee would certainly hit close to home in a way that would maybe help Draco.

The second book, or rather books, was one of Hermione's personal favourites, 'Lord of the Rings' by J. R. R. Tolkien had prepared her very well for the long-winded texts on wizarding history and with a little knowledge about Norse mythology it became an even more fascinating read.

The last one was the book which taught her to control her magic: 'Matilda' by Roald Dahl. If only she knew where she'd left her copy…maybe it was back at the Burrow together with all the other books she hadn't taken along on the hunt.

"Good choice," Thomas was looking over Draco's shoulder. "I like that edition of Lord of the Rings, where did you get it?"

"An antiquarian book-shop in London, it's around the corner from where I live," Hermione explained with a smile. "I know I should have chosen more belletristic novels, but I didn't want to overwhelm him."

"And Lord of the Rings isn't overwhelming?" Thomas asked teasingly.

Hermione laughed. "Not after the texts we had to read for History of Magic, after that it is positively vibrant."

"After that anything is positively vibrant," Theo argued, laughing. "I think the both of us and maybe one of the Ravenclaws are the only once to have ever actually read them, not just skimmed over them."

"You can't exactly blame us though," Daphne grinned at Theo. "After all you would rant about them anyway, why read them if you told us all the information we'd need?"

Theo huffed, but a smile was playing at the corner of his lips.

Draco vanished the last of the wrapping paper. "Well, I'm somewhat disappointed that nobody thought to gift me a bag with an Extension Charm for all these great presents! Thank you everybody!"

Hermione smiled at how happy Draco seemed, he was positively radiant and it slowly took over everyone else, even Tracey seemed to perk up a bit.

"Now, on to the next part!" Theo declared.
5th June 1998, 21:18

Draco was thoroughly relaxed and happy. His friends were the most amazing people in the world, putting together the best birthday party ever (and that included the one when he turned eleven and got his first real broom). After they had eaten the ice cream and started on the snacks the conversation had become less stilted and moments of silence were few and far in between.

Luna was chatting animatedly with Charlie about a tiny dragon species that had recently been discovered in the swamps of Louisiana. Pansy, Daphne and Blaise were discussing muggle fashion while Tracey and Ginny were talking about Quidditch.

"Draco, are you coming or what?" Thomas called, already halfway down the path to the lake.

"Coming," Draco called, following his brother – and wasn't that a strange concept – and the others down to the shore.

Hermione had settled down on one of the cushions by the wood piles. George and Percy were already in the water, while Theo and Thomas were apparently waiting for him.

"Come on, old man," Thomas whined. "I don't want to wait all day!"

"Are you even allowed into the water with your tattoo?" Draco asked, suddenly concerned.

Thomas eyes became big. "Damn, I didn't think of that!"

Hermione stood up from her cushion and came over to them. "Where'd you get it?"

Thomas turned around to show her his shoulder. "This afternoon, I don't know how I could forget, especially since it still stings."

"I think I can put a water-repellent charm on that area," Hermione said contemplatively. "It shouldn't damage the ink and you don't have to worry about it in the water."

Theo stepped closer. "Maybe you could attach the charm to the wrapping? It would probably hold better than on skin."

Hermione nodded. "If that's okay with you Thomas? I know not everyone is comfortable with being subjected to magic."

Thomas gave his okay and Hermione got to work. To finish the charm she levitated some water from the lake and smiled brightly when it rolled straight of the wrapping without leaving a drop behind. "You're all set!"

Thomas thanked her and set off into the lake, followed by Theo.

"Won't you go in with them?" Hermione asked, turning to Draco.

He shrugged. "I don't feel that comfortable about it."
Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. "Is it about your scars?"

"Partially," Draco nodded. "Mostly the one from the Mark. You know, Thomas gave me a gift card for the tattoo I want to cover the scar."

"That's a nice gesture," Hermione smiled, looking out to the boys playing in the water. Theo, George and Percy all wore their wands in sheaths on their arms but they didn't seem to be using magic to splash the water. "I'm glad everyone is at least civil to him."

Draco shrugged again. "He's easy to like and the only real question was whether Daphne and Millicent would say something." He wondered whether it would be rude to ask, but finally his curiosity won. "Why are you not going into the water? I mean, I understand why you didn't stay at the clearing..." he trailed off and looked over to Hermione.

"Scars," Hermione said without any inflection. "I don't feel too comfortable either."

"That bad?" Draco was surprised. Of course he knew of the scar on her forearm and her neck, but he had thought those were the only ones.

Hermione looked at him for a moment, then she turned back to face the lake. "The Battle of the Ministry at the end of the fifth year. Dolohov got me with a dark curse. Madam Pomfrey said I was lucky that he was silenced, otherwise I could have died."

"Oh," Draco didn't know what to say. "For what it's worth I'm sorry that happened."

Hermione looked over to him, her curls bouncing with the abrupt movement. "It's not your fault! We were foolhardy enough to think that no adult would be there fast enough and that we should go ourselves. If anyone is to blame then it would be Voldemort for sending Harry that vision of Sirius!"

Draco chuckled darkly. "Well, he certainly paid for it, just like Dolohov."

"Yeah," Hermione said quietly. "Although I'm still not comfortable with the Ministry's actions that day."

"At least they'll never again cause damage that way," Draco crossed his arms in front of his chest. He caught her raised eyebrow out of the corner of his eye. "Don't look at me like that. After I heard what happened to Sirius I would have preferred they got a fair trial as well."

"Who would have thought?" Hermione teased. She frowned, looking down on her forearm. "You know what? Let's be proud of our scars, because they mean that we survived."

Now it was Draco's turn to look at her with surprise. "What do you mean?"

Hermione pulled her loose shirt over her head. "I'm saying we shouldn't be ashamed of them, wear them with pride." She shimmied out of her skirt. "And those who judge us negatively because of them don't deserve our attention anyway."

Draco was left gaping as Hermione walked into the lake in a bikini. Had Thomas not explained to him that muggle swimwear differed a lot from wizarding wear he certainly would have been shocked. No, what really had him rooted to the spot was the realisation that Hermione Granger was hot!

She didn't look like those models in the wizarding fashion magazines, tall and willowy. She wasn't petite either. She had curves and if that butt wasn't to die for!
Draco had to tear his gaze away when she turned around. But his eyes only landed on the thick, purple scar that started between her breasts and ran down to the right side of her stomach.

"That bad?" she echoed his own words back at him with a sad smile.

"No," Draco shook his head. "Not really."

He finally found the determination to pull his own shirt over his head. He saw Hermione's eyes widen in surprise for a moment before they softened into something too close to pity for his liking. He turned to getting rid of his trousers and transfiguring his pants into bathing trunks so he wouldn't have to deal with that.

"Not that bad either," Hermione said softly when he joined her in the lake.

Splashing the cool water on his limbs to acquaint them with the temperature, he hid his face in his hands. "If you say so."

"Finally, we were wondering whether you'd chickened out!" Theo called effectively cutting off whatever Hermione had wanted to say. "Whose team will you be on?"

Draco looked up in surprise. "There are teams?"

"Obviously," Thomas said with sparkling eyes. "And you'll be on mine, brother dearest!"

"If you say so," Draco laughed, his dark thoughts about scars and pity vanishing. "Three on three?"

"Yep," George confirmed and threw a freshly summoned ball at Hermione. "You'll be with me and Perce, Mione."

"Percy and me," Hermione corrected with a sweet smile, but she swam over to them without protest.

"Alright, for fairness reasons there is no magic allowed," George said as soon as he had the ball in his hands again.

"You don't have to, you know," Thomas shrugged. "I think it would be interesting to see that."

"Nah, it'll be more fun that way," George said. "We really shouldn't rely on magic that much anyway."

"Also that amount of magic would make the nøkken nervous," Theo added casually.

"The what now?" George asked with big eyes.

"Norse merfolk," Theo explained. "My folks brought them with them to protect the waterway into the grounds. They quite pleasant unless you use magic around them, bad experiences I guess."

"Alright, no magic in these waters, understood," George nodded, throwing the ball from hand to hand.

Draco had known there were merpeople in the waters on the grounds, and he had known that he wasn't supposed to use magic while in the water. But nobody had ever told him that it was connected.

They played until it got too dark to properly see the ball. But Hermione grabbed Draco's hand before he could follow the others to the shore where the rest of their group was now sitting around
"You know, I wish I had been there when Harry went after you," Hermione said when he turned to her. Her eyes were big and sad. "Maybe I could have stopped him from attacking you."

Draco smiled ruefully. "I don't think anyone could stop Potter when he is in a mood."

Hermione chuckled. "Maybe. I still am angry with him for using a spell that he didn't know."

"How would he have known what it does without trying it?" Draco asked, his tone teasing.

"He could have tried on one of the dummies we had for the DA," Hermione replied tartly. "But no, he had to go and throw it at an unsuspecting victim."

"I think I was pretty suspecting after he had thrown everything else at me already," Draco laughed, winking at her. To his surprise she blushed.

"Still, had he even taken a moment to translate the spell he would have known not to use it," Hermione replied, flicking Draco against his chest.

"Why? We use Cutting Spells all the time while duelling," Draco said, gently batting her hand away. "He couldn't have known from the translation that Sectumsempra is designed to resist healing."

Hermione heaved a sigh. "He also wouldn't have known had he used it on a dummy, I know. Ron and I had a lengthy debate about it."

"The Weasel King?" Draco asked in surprise.

Hermione glowered at him, but it lacked real heat. "Yes, Ron is quite good at predicting moves and their outcomes. He's actually a brilliant chess player. He said unless Harry had shown that spell to Snape and specifically asked about it he couldn't have known what it did without casting it."

"Weaslebee is a brilliant chess player?" Draco echoed, now downright baffled. "I mean, he is right about the spell, don't tell him I said that!" Hermione laughed. "But I really didn't know!"

"Well, he beat McGonagall's giant chess in first year" Hermione told him proudly. "She was really impressed when she heard that."

"He beat McGonagall?! In first year?" Draco would sit down if he could. "Why does nobody tell me things like that?"

"Maybe because you hated his guts from the moment you laid eyes on him and wouldn't have believed it anyway?" Hermione asked, her tone teasing and her eyes sparkling.

Draco huffed. "It's not like he acted any better!"

Hermione outright laughed at him for that, so he had to retaliate by shoving quite a large amount of water into her face. As soon as she could open her eyes again she lunged for him, but he easily dodged her attack and threw himself into the water to swim away.

As soon as he had ground under his feet he started to run, laughing freely. He just made it onto dry ground when a Tripping Jinx did its work and he fell on his face.

When he turned to push himself up, Hermione was standing over him, hair loose and dripping on her shoulders, wand held to her side, eyes glinting with victory.
"All right, all right, I yield!" Draco panted. "Can you please help me up?"

Hermione took her wand between her teeth while doing up her hair again, finally fixing it with a quick spell and the wand shoved through. Only then she grabbed his outstretched hand and pulled him up.

They were standing chest to chest, Draco looking down into her chocolate brown eyes, illuminated by the fires behind them. She grinned up at him. "I won."

"But only through witchcraft and trickery!" Draco said with faux-mockery.

"Says the Slytherin," Hermione shook her head at him and turned to join their friends at the campfires. "Now if you'll excuse me, I want to talk to people who appreciate that."

"Insufferable witch," Draco called after her, but he was afraid that the grin on his face betrayed his true thoughts entirely.

He summoned his clothes from where he had put them on one of the blankets and cast a quick Drying Charm on himself before he put them on. As pleasant as the cold water had been after a hot summer day and while playing games, he started to feel cold now that the sun was completely gone.

The campfires burned brightly and their heat was most welcome to his frozen toes. He sat down between Theo and Hermione and gladly accepted the beer the former offered him. It was a muggle brand Blaise had recommended and after he had gotten used to the strong flavour he certainly could see why. Butterbeer got too sweet if you had more than two or three.

"So, what's the plan now?" Draco asked, using the lull in the conversation around him. Daphne, Tracey and Thomas had been talking about the difference between muggle and wizarding sweets.

George perked up from Theo's other side. (Apparently they had decided to remove the cushion that would have separated the two groups,) "Well, we've got marshmallows, on Blaise's suggestion, which one roasts on a stick in the campfire. But somebody has to keep an eye on the time, at midnight there will be a surprise!"

Draco raised an eyebrow, he remembered the twins' 'surprises' for the Slytherin student body very vividly.

"Don't worry, Draco, I made sure it's a good one," Theo said with a grin.

Draco only relaxed marginally, Theo had a wicked sense for humour and always grudgingly respected the twins for their ideas and the charmwork behind them.

"If the surprise is anything like your surprise on Yule in our third year I'm not surprised that Draco is apprehensive," Tracey said quietly, with a small smile.

Theo stuck out his tongue at her. "I thought it was very funny!"

"Yes, you didn't have to sing Christmas carols whenever you said the word 'present' or 'gift'," Daphne reminded him, her scowl only softened by the twinkling in her eyes.

George gasped audibly. "That is an amazing idea! How did you do that?"

"I charmed the chocolate I gave everyone," Theo explained proudly. Draco nearly didn't notice his flaming red ears; Theo blushing because somebody appreciate his prank? That was a new one!
"Oh, you'll have to teach me that!" George exclaimed and Draco felt Hermione stiffen next to him.

"Well, you've heard it," Percy said drily. "Better not accept anything to eat or drink from either of them anytime soon."

The group laughed. Then George called Cinny to bring the sticks with the marshmallows and Blaise proceeded to teach everyone how to roast marshmallows to perfection.

On the stroke of midnight George released a spark from his wand that ignited the fireworks which previously had been hidden by the bushes. Draco studiously ignored how everyone but Thomas flinched and grabbed for their wands when the first rocket went off.

Colourful streaks flew across the sky and exploded into wheels of Slytherin green and silver, followed by Gryffindor red and gold, Ravenclaw blue and bronze and finally Hufflepuff yellow and black.

Then a giant snake appeared on the sky hissing at the lion that had exploded next to her immediately after. They circled each other for a moment before they turned into silver and golden shower of sparks, intermingling until they hit the surface of the lake.

The next barrage of explosions turned into the words 'Happy Birthday Draco' and a silvery-white ferret that ran across the sky towards Draco.

Hermione laughed loudly and leant over to whisper into his ear. "Harry and Ron would have loved that."

Draco snorted. "I know, Granger."

She looked startled at his use of her last name, but then she smiled wickedly. "If you say so, Malfoy."

The firework lasted for about half an hour and when it was over Draco stood up, went over to George and hugged him. "That was bloody brilliant, Weasley!"

"I'm glad you think so," the redhead grinned from ear to ear. "I wasn't quite whether I'd get it all done in one week, you know."

"You really outdid yourself, little brother," Charlie said, joining them. "Flitwick would be so proud of you!"

"Yes, he would, wouldn't he?" George sounded downright melancholic, looking out on the lake as if he still could see the colourful explosions.

"Fred would be proud too," Charlie said quietly and Draco realised why George looked so broken.

"Hey, George," Theo called from the bushes, where he just vanished the last traces of the fireworks. "Can you take a look whether I found everything?"

George nodded and went over to the treeline, leaving Charlie and Draco to stand next to each other.

"Thank you for coming, by the way," Draco finally said. "I wasn't sure if you could leave work after returning so recently."

Charlie waved his concerns away. "They told me I could return to Great Britain whenever I wished. But only because I insisted on returning to Romania already."
They watched as Theo pulled George into a brief hug before the two of them turned to re-join the group. Draco tried to comprehend the look on Theo's face when Charlie sighed softly next to him.

"How long have they lived together now?" he asked quietly.

"George moved in on Sunday," Draco answered. "Why?"

Charlie shrugged. "They seem comfortable with each other."

"They're both pranksters," Draco pointed out. "Maybe that's what's connecting them."

"Maybe," Charlie nodded and walked back to his place at the fire.

Draco followed him, mulling over what he had seen of Theo's and George's interactions that evening. They both seemed to be in better spirits than they had been on the night in the cabin. Draco had chalked it up to the time that had passed. But maybe it was more? A friendship that gave both of them strength to face life?

Like his own friendship with Hermione, knowing that at least one person was able to see past his mistakes and failures, past the mask of indifference, certainly helped him to leave the bed every morning. His family and his friends from before of course liked him, but he would never take Hermione's friendship for granted. Half of the time he didn't even think he deserved it.

The fires were mostly burned down by now and they were just readying themselves to go into the clearing or even the cabin when the first faint sounds of a violin reached their ears. Their gazes were drawn out on the water where, on a rock in front of the small island, a young man was playing. The moon was not yet full but its light was enough to make out his near ethereal beauty.

Draco wasn't sure how much time passed, but as soon as the fiddler looked up and noticed them the spell was broken. While Draco's limbs felt stiff and cold, his heart was all the richer with the otherworldly sounds.

Theo said something in Norwegian that Draco didn't understand, but the fiddler bowed and jumped into the water.

"I guess that was one of those Norwegian merfolk?" George asked, his voice still had a dream-like quality.

"Yes," Theo replied quietly. "I thanked him for the concert. You're very lucky to have heard one. I only heard them play twice before."

"I wonder how they enchant their songs," Luna said, still gazing out over the lake. "I wish I could ask him."

"I don't know much about Norwegian merfolk," Charlie spoke up. "But what I heard is that you should better avoid actually talking to them. It's somewhat safe to listen to their music, but if you speak to them they're very likely to try and drown you."

"Charlie is right." Theo pulled George up. "They are very easily insulted. They know I'm a Nott, therefore they tolerate me talking to them, to a point."

The concert had moved all of them quite deeply and Draco wasn't too surprised when Thomas came over to him while they were walking back to the clearing.

"It felt like I was back in the wards," he said quietly. "Is that how magic always feels?"
Draco shook his head. "No, only the old and primal kind. Did you feel the charm Hermione put on the cling film?"

Thomas cocked his head to the side. "Not really, just a slight tingling."

"That's how most everyday magic feels," Draco explained. "Stronger magic tingles more and dark magic is more like pinpricks, it hurts a bit."

Thomas was quiet for a moment. "You did a lot of dark magic in the last year, right?"

Draco nodded tightly. There was no sense in denying it.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that," Thomas said, putting a hand on Draco's shoulder. "I mean you told me how those curses give you a powerful feeling. But having the magic itself hurt can't be pleasant."

"Thank you, Thomas," Draco said, a small smile playing at the corner of his lips.

Chapter End Notes

I would love to have a party in a forest at a lakefront! What did you think of the presents? I'm combining movie and book canon on Hermione's and Draco's scars, because I think that the Battle of the Ministry and her ensuing scar probably influenced Hermione quite a lot. I hope you liked the chapters and weren't too concerned about the delay! I'm looking forward to your reviews! :)
Hello dear ones! I hope you're dealing well with the heat and having a fabulous summer. Just a little heads up: from August 13th to September 7th I will be on excavation and I don't know yet how much time I'll have to write! September will also be a busy month but I'll try not to leave you hanging for too long. The lovely reynardinepttr is my beta reader!

Enjoy! ;)

(tw: mention of corporal punishment and slavery (non-explicit) | I hope I portrayed the issue well, but as a white person I'm bound to make mistakes, please respectfully mention them to me if you find any so I can adjust it!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**6th June 1998, 7:43 AEST/GMT+10**

"So, did you book the flight?" Helen asked, taking the first sip of her morning coffee. It had just the right amount of sugar and milk to make her hum in contentment.

"Yes, we'll fly on the eleventh. I talked to Neil about being our stand-in for emergency patients," Richard answered while putting away the newspaper and getting up to pour more coffee for himself.

Helen waved away his offer of more toast. "What about Lisa? She already took on some of my cases after my accident, I guess it would be alright if we send some to her."

Richard nodded thoughtfully.

"You know, the doctor cleared me for work from Monday onwards. Do you think I should come in?" Helen asked.

"I think it wouldn't make much sense for you to start working those three days only to go on holiday on Thursday," Richard said, sitting back down.

"That's probably right," Helen sighed, fidgeting with her cup. "I just really miss work."

Richard put his hand on her arm and smiled at her. "I know you do, love. And as soon as we are back you can work again."

"When we arrive, should we go straight to Charing Cross Road?" Helen asked, drinking the last of her coffee.

"Maybe we should check into our hotel room first so we don't have to lug the suitcases around," Richard suggested, emptying his cup as well.

Helen nodded and stood up to start packing.

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**8th June 1998, 14:42**
"I heard Draco finally asked you to get ice-cream with him - is it true?" Pansy asked with a sly smile, half hiding behind her cup.

Hermione blushed and looked down on her plate. "Yes, he said he forgot to ask at his party."

"That's great," Pansy said earnestly. "I swear if he had waited a day longer I would have set you two up! Where are you going?"

Hermione pulled a face at Pansy for the first part. "London, I hope he doesn't get startled or something."

Pansy shook her head. "I don't think so, he was fine in Manchester and that city is no quiet wizarding village either."

Hermione contemplated the girl across from her. Had anyone told her that she would be sharing lunch with Pansy Parkinson in a muggle café in Birmingham, she wouldn't have believed them. And Pansy was actually not too terrible. She was snobby and sometimes downright arrogant, but while no stretch of imagination could describe her as 'gentle' she took care of those she liked.

"You do realise that your lip isn't something to eat, right?" Pansy asked with quiet amusement colouring her voice.

Hermione started and let her lip go. "Really? And here I thought it was." She rolled her eyes at Pansy who only smiled innocently. "Can I ask you something?"

"I'm not talking about how Draco is in bed!" Pansy exclaimed, faux-exasperated and Hermione shushed her immediately, her cheeks flaming.

"I'm not talking about how Draco is in bed!" Pansy exclaimed, faux-exasperated and Hermione shushed her immediately, her cheeks flaming.

"Not what I wanted to ask, Pansy!" she whispered, looking around.

Pansy grinned. "Alright, then what did you want to ask?"

"If I get my parents back..." Hermione trailed off. It was really too much to ask. It would be unfair.

"You want me to act as witness of how dangerous it was?" Pansy asked, all traces of laughter gone from her voice.

Hermione nodded. "I already asked Narcissa, but I thought more than one opinion would probably be good. Just in case they don't believe me, you know? Harry and Ron are coming anyway and I was thinking about asking Mrs Weasley, but I don't know whether she would be comfortable talking to my parents, now that I won't marry Ron or any of her sons really-"

"Wait, calm down, Hermione," Pansy reached over the table and put a hand on hers. "Deep breaths okay? In and out, in and out, like that, in and out."

"I'm so sorry," Hermione whispered, mortified.

Pansy moved to the chair next to her. "It's alright, you're safe. Everything will be fine, nobody will hurt you. And if somebody does they'll be faced with quite a lot of opposition. Do you know the unofficial motto of Slytherin?" Hermione shook her head, still trying to get her breathing under control. "'Protect your own.' They always forget that loyalty is just as important for us as for Hufflepuff."

Hermione took Pansy's offered hand, just as the waitress came over. "Ev'rything alright, girls?" she asked, frowning and Hermione noticed some of the other guests staring, but before she could say
anything Pansy spoke up.

"Just a panic attack, we will be paying now," she said in her poshest voice and Hermione giggled quietly.

"You sound like nobility," she whispered, keeping her eyes down. She couldn't face the stares.

"I would hope so, my governess would be disappointed if I didn't," Pansy whispered back with sparkling eyes. She paid and left a good tip.

Hermione gathered her purse and pulled the sleeves of her shirt down further. "Where to?"

Pansy looked at her calculatingly. "You never visited me at home, right? How about I show you gardens more beautiful than those of Malfoy Manor?"

Hermione smiled a little. "Sounds good to me."

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The gardens were indeed breathtakingly beautiful. Gravel paths wound themselves through flower fields and around trees, over sparkling brooks and through rose-bush archways. The seemingly wild garden was so different from the rigid beauty of the gardens at Malfoy Manor, Hermione was speechless.

Pansy had talked quietly to an elf in a mauve tunic made from a pillowcase. Hermione had to consciously breathe deeply lest she say something, but Pansy noticed her agitation anyway.

"That was Viola, she will be preparing refreshments for us," she said. "Maybe while we walk you can explain to me why you're so passionate about house elves?"

Hermione took the offered arm and tried to find a good beginning. Harry and Ron had never truly understood. "Did you know that people of my skin colour were, until some forty years ago, still considered 'less' than others in American law?"

Pansy shot her a quick look and shook her head. "No, why would they? The skin colour is totally unimportant! The best astrologists are from the African school whose name I can't pronounce for the life of me."

Hermione smiled. "Uagadou? Yeah. That's a bit puzzling for me in the Wizarding world, how you can discriminate against blood but not against skin colour."

Pansy shrugged. "Your skin colour didn't make you more of a liability I guess."

"Anyway, muggles used people from Africa as slaves for centuries. And even long after slavery was officially abolished my grandparents were still seen as second class humans. The way muggleborns were treated in the last year? Forty years ago that was everyday life for my grandparents until they decided that they'd had enough and moved to Great Britain, where the situation was marginally better." Hermione took a deep breath. She couldn't think about that now. "But I'm getting off-topic. The thing is, my great-grandma was a slave. And if she had been asked by the ruling class whether she liked being a slave she would have answered: 'Yes, ma'am or sir, Marie likes being slave.'"

Pansy swallowed heavily at her side. "What would have happened when she said no?" she asked quietly, clutching Hermione's arm tighter.
"Punishment," Hermione whispered. "Lashes or maybe no food or something like that, if she was especially unlucky it could have been her death sentence."

"The first elf you heard of was Dobby, right?" Pansy asked quietly.

Hermione nodded. "Harry told us about him and we saw him around after the second year. And then there was Winky, with the Crouchess."

Pansy sighed heavily. "I understand why you would see it as slavery then. They were mistreated, at least Dobby, I don't know about Winky. But Abraxas Malfoy was a right bastard to any living being. How much do you know about servants in the 19th century in England?"

Hermione frowned. "Some. Low pay, room and board, not much personal freedom."

"That is the situation of most house elves in Great Britain," Pansy explained quietly. "There are of course families who are cruel to their servants, but I'm quite certain it was the same in the 19th century. Their situation is bad, but not quite as bad as slavery. I'm so sorry that you had to see it as slavery. I won't pretend to understand how that feels. But I understand that it must have been disturbing."

Hermione nodded. "I talked some more with Kreacher, Tinna and Cinny since. They explained the situation to me from their point of view. They like to take care of things and those who don't, don't. I think that was the most surprising to me."

"Did Cinny tell you about her aunt who is a singer in America?" Pansy chuckled. "She's really good!"

"The situation in America is different right?" Hermione asked curiously as they were closing in on a bench with a small table and the promised refreshments.

Pansy nodded. "They are further advanced than most British families. I don't know if you noticed, but being conservative was quite 'in' for the better part of the century."

"The elves are free?" Hermione asked cautiously.

"Most are, some serve families like they do here. Some serve families, but aren't bound to them," Pansy explained. "The thing is: if a bound elf is released their chances aren't very good, the bond is quite invasive. Few are strong enough to live without bond, it's like living without corsetry after you wore it your whole life. But if the children aren't bound after their birth they can live without a bond."

"That's why Tinna wanted to be bound again?" Hermione asked. "She mentioned it, but I wasn't sure whether I understood it correctly."

"That's right," Pansy nodded.

"So freeing elves can only be done by not binding their children?" Hermione was a bit surprised.

"That, and you shouldn't just push freedom on them," Pansy said calmly, sitting down on the bench. "Give them a choice. Now that Grandfather isn't the master of our house-elves anymore, Father wants to try that."

Viola arrived with cooled water with lemon and peppermint and served it with a flourish. "It is good that miss is asking questions," the elf-lady said with a smile. "Knowing how to help right is important."
Hermione blushed. "Thank you, Viola. I will give my best."

"You were a child, now you are a child turned adult too fast," Viola said. "Mistakes are there to teach. Learn from them and do better next time."

"Yes, Viola," Hermione nodded with a smile.

Pansy smiled and turned to Hermione once Viola had excused herself. "So, what did you think of the gardens?"

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12th June 1998, 15:03

Draco waited nervously for Hermione to arrive at the Leaky Cauldron. He had been early so he could exchange some galleons into muggle money (with Pansy's advice into many papers and coins). But Hermione was a few minutes late and the patrons of the pub started whispering. Draco brushed his thumb roughly over his knuckles.

Just when the first burly man started to get up from his seat, his eyes set on Draco, the floo flared and Hermione stepped out. She smiled broadly when she saw him and the man settled back down.

"Draco! I'm sorry I'm late, I misplaced my purse for a second there," Hermione said in lieu of a greeting and quickly hugged him before she dragged him out of the pub. "I hope you didn't have to wait too long! Did anyone bother you?"

"No, you came just in the right moment," Draco said, still a bit winded from the panic and her whirlwind greeting.

"Good, I would hate for this day to begin like that," Hermione said, smiling at him. "So, let's find some ice-cream and go window shopping!"

Draco laughed. "You seem excited. Did something happen?"

"It's a beautiful summer day, I'm getting ice-cream and potentially a good conversation with an intelligent person – what's there not to be excited about?" Hermione said grinning and Draco fiercely hoped that she would attribute his blush to the sun.

"I see, so you finally admit that I'm intelligent?" Draco teased her, tugging at the hand she was still holding. But not to make her let go, so he held on tighter.

"You were always intelligent," Hermione said with a small smile. "But now you actually act like it." She made no move to let go of his hand and Draco relaxed a bit.

"I'm not sure whether I should be insulted or flattered," Draco said, eyes narrowed playfully.

"Oh, definitely flattered," Hermione said with a laugh. "I don't call many people intelligent."

Draco snorted and followed Hermione who weaved through the masses of people like an expert. When they came to an ice-cream parlour Hermione turned around to him.

"I'm so sorry, you invited me and I just took over everything!" she said, her eyes wide in surprise. "Did you have somewhere else in mind?"

Draco laughed. "No, it's fine. I'm glad you took over really," he admitted shyly. "Do you want to get a cone or a sundae?"
Hermione turned to look at the display contemplatively. "I think I'd like a cone and a walk around London. There are a few too many people in there for my liking."

Now that she had mentioned it Draco noticed as well. "Alright, then let's get cones."

Draco chose 'stracciatella' and immediately vowed to tell Fortescue's that they needed to update their flavours. His mother would love something this understated and elegant. Draco paid without problem and they turned back to the street.

Hermione had chosen raspberry ice-cream and was happily licking at her scoop. "So, what inspired you to take me for ice-cream?"

Draco shrugged, blushing once again. "I just thought you'd like it. And I know how hard you work both at your home and with my parents at the company. You deserve a break."

Hermione smiled at him. "Thank you, Draco. That's very nice of you."

"Shush, not so loud," Draco whispered, looking around frantically, a smile tugging at his lips. "I have a reputation to maintain!"

Hermione laughed and gently knocked against him. "I think you already lost it and I'm quite glad you did."

"Me too," Draco said earnestly, looking over to her. "Can I try your ice-cream?"

"Sure," Hermione held out the cone for him. "But only if I can try yours as well!"

Draco laughed. He leaned forward and steadied the cone with his own hand. The rich taste was exquisite as he had expected and when he looked at Hermione she was clearly blushing. Quickly he leant back and held out his cone for her to taste and realised why she had blushed when she licked the cone.

"We have to remember that place," Hermione finally said after a few moments in silence. "The ice-cream is heavenly."

"It really is," Draco hurried to agree. "I'd ask Fortescue's to try making stracciatella if I was still welcome there."

Hermione scoffed. "They act like animosity will make their wounds heal. It's ridiculous. Do you know why I feel better about everything that happened? Because I accepted the apologies and moved on. I probably would have never been comfortable around Dolohov-"

"He's a creep, even when he was civil," Draco interjected.

"Exactly, your father was at least polite! I didn't expect him to suddenly be nice just because he lost the war. But he is civil and we get on," Hermione said indignantly. She licked at her cone with a bit too much force and got some ice-cream on her nose.

Draco quickly reached over and stole the blob with a finger. "Can't let this wonderful stuff go to waste," he said, grinning cheekily at Hermione's mock exasperation.

"Prat," Hermione muttered, but he saw the small smile she tried to hide behind her hair.

"Wouldn't be me if I wasn't, right?" Draco asked, gently knocking his elbow against her upper arm.

"Probably," Hermione admitted. "At least I would check you for fever or something."
They walked through Covent Garden and Draco marvelled at the displays and the artists throughout the neighbourhood. It was nearly time for supper when they returned to the Leaky Cauldron. But before they could enter, Hermione froze right there on the pavement.

"Hermione? Hermione, what is it?" Draco turned back to her when he noticed that she wasn't by his side anymore. Hermione looked like she had seen a ghost, her eyes huge in her pale face.

"It's…it's…impossible," Hermione whispered. Her eyes were fixed on something behind him.

Draco put an arm around her shoulder and turned to look into the direction. "What's impossible, love?"

Hermione shuddered against him and turned her face against his shoulder. "They're here. They can't be here!"

Draco finally saw who Hermione had seen and he felt the shock like a punch in the gut. "Your parents…"

"So you see them too?" Hermione looked at him with pleading eyes and Draco nodded.

"Yes, should we go to them? They seem to be looking for something," he said quietly, gathering the trembling girl closer.

Hermione nodded shakily and started forward. But as soon as she had left his embrace she turned. "Can you hold my hand? I feel like I'm floating away."

"Of course," Draco tried to smile reassuringly. "I'll be right here, love."

Hermione didn't even notice the endearment and when he took her hand it was clammy and gripped too tight.

"Hey, Hermione," Draco said quietly, pulling her back by their linked hands. "Wait a minute, if you go to them like this they will be shocked. Breathe with me." He took Hermione's other hand and put it against his chest. "Breathe, slowly. Like that. That's it, love."

Hermione nodded and when her breathing had slowed down they turned to find the Grangers standing right in front of them, nearly as pale as Hermione had been only seconds before.

"Hermione?" Mrs Granger whispered, stretching her hand out towards her daughter. "We found you!"

Hermione nodded mutely, tears gathering in her eyes but still not letting go of Draco's hand. When Mrs Granger grabbed her and pulled her close Draco let go. Mr Granger stepped closer as well and wrapped his arms around the two crying women.

Draco watched the reunion uncomfortably. He took the time to study Hermione's parents. They looked both well-tanned and wore clothes more suitable for warmer weather, but they didn't seem to care. Mrs Granger shared her curly hair and small stature with her daughter and Mr Granger had the same straight nose and full lips Hermione had.

Draco tried to ignore the muttered apologies and reassurances, but after more than a few passers-by had taken offence at the display of emotion he gently cleared his throat.

Hermione tensed. "I'm sorry, Draco, I realise that this isn't the outcome you wanted for our date."
Draco smiled at her reassuringly. "Don't worry, I'm glad that you have your parents back. I just think that you maybe should celebrate your reunion not in the middle of a street in London."

"Oh," Hermione blushed furiously. "You're right! Mum, Dad, where are you staying?"

"At a hotel," Mrs Granger said, smiling warmly. "But maybe we could have supper together?"

"Then I will make my excuses," Draco said, inclining his head to Hermione. "I enjoyed the afternoon tremendously. Thank you."

Hermione looked torn but in the end she sighed and nodded. "I hate for it to end so abruptly, but I'm sure I'll see you on Sunday for tea."

"As always," Draco said with a smile. After a second he leaned in and gave Hermione a quick kiss on the cheek. "See you on Sunday. Enjoy the evening with your parents. Mrs Granger, Mr Granger."

He left with a nod to each and entered the Leaky Cauldron without taking notice of his surroundings. He floo'd home and arrived in the living room at Tonks Cottage in a flurry of green flames.

"Draco? Did something happen?" Narcissa asked, startled. Lucius and Andromeda looked up from where they had been playing with Teddy.

Draco looked at his mother and nodded shortly. "Hermione's parents are back."

Chapter End Notes

It finally happened! Draco and Hermione had their first date! The Grangers are reunited! Whew, what a ride! The bit with Pansy just sneaked in, I have no idea where it came from and again I hope I didn't portray it too badly. What did you think? I love to read your reviews and look forward to it every time I post! :(
Hello my dear readers! I'm back from my excavation and I actually had some time to write! But the internet connection was shitty to say the least...Anyway, here we are. This chapter is double the normal length, but there simply was no natural break possible! reynardinepttr continues to be my amazing beta reader. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

12th June 1998 18:37

Hermione watched her parents closely while she pretended to pore over the menu in their favourite restaurant. She already knew she would take the tomato soup and water. That gave her time to think about how it was possible for them to break through the spell. Hermione had of course noticed the cast on her mother's ankle and she wondered whether pain could have been a catalyst. But that wouldn't explain her father remembering.

"Hermione, what are you having?" Helen asked as the waiter approached.

They ordered the same as always, tomato soup for Hermione, pasta with chicken breast and vegetables à la Provence for her parents. It was familiar but surreal and Hermione felt her breath speed up dangerously.

When their drinks came, Helen and Richard exchanged a meaningful look. Finally Helen rolled her eyes and turned back to Hermione.

"You're probably wondering why we remember," Helen stated calmly, her eyes steady on Hermione's but her hands fidgeting with her wine glass. "A few weeks ago I fell down the stairs in our house and it felt like déjà vu. In one moment I saw our house and when I blinked it was gone and there was a small girl at the foot of different stairs that caught me without touching me. I thought, 'Last time Hermione caught me'."

Hermione swallowed - so it was a repeated action that had caused the spell to break. Her father took over.

"Later in the hospital we realised we'd had the same thought. But we didn't remember any Hermione in Britain so we put it out of our minds," Richard explained, smiling sadly. "It was a week later that Helen got restless with her ankle and decided to sort through the attic. She asked me why there were piano scores in the one of the boxes and I replied that they were yours. We went through the rest of the stuff and found a few other things. Books, mainly, and two letters."

"We wondered why we didn't remember anything," Helen took over, just as their food arrived. "So we started brainstorming, writing down everything we remembered and comparing notes. Richard remembered the professor who came to tell us about your school had talked about Obliviation. I remembered that you came home grieving last year. You seemed rattled and jumped at every little sound."

"So we assumed that someone erased you from our memory, but they didn't too thorough a job
since we started remembering," Richard said, taking a sip from his wine. "We checked with the British embassy and they told us about the Grangers. We decided that we had to find you, to make sense of this situation."

Hermione felt her hands starting to tingle and looked down in surprise. Her right hand clutched her wand tightly and her left hand was clenched into a fist. She put down her wand and shook them out carefully. Trying to breathe more deeply she grabbed her purse and summoned a Calming Draught. Hermione's only thought was 'Not again, not now.' She swallowed the potion quickly.

"I- This is so-," Hermione took another deep breath, concentrating on the warmth of the Calming Draught. "I'm so sorry," she finally whispered, tears raising into her eyes.

Helen reached out to her. "Whatever it is, you can tell us and we'll try to understand."

"I did the spell," Hermione whispered, her voice breaking. "I needed to protect you and I thought-" a sob tore from her then. "I thought you'd be safest not knowing who I am. I'm so sorry. I was blinded by fear and grief."


Hermione swallowed. "Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters. They were targeting me because of my involvement in the resistance and I thought- I thought you losing all memory of me was the lesser evil."

"But why did we go away?" Helen asked, signalling the waiter for a refill.

"I made you," Hermione confessed, voice barely above a whisper, eyes firmly fixed on the soup she hadn't touched since her parents started talking.

"Why?" Helen asked, tears palpable in her voice. But she stretched out a hand towards her daughter, which Hermione gladly took.

"To increase your chances of survival," she breathed. "They wouldn't look for you in Australia."

Helen brought her hand in front of her mouth. Richard put one arm around his wife and stretched the other out to his daughter, who took it as well.

"What was so bad that you felt that you had to do that?" Richard asked, his voice rough and he was obviously trying to keep his tears at bay.

"I don't even know where to start," Hermione admitted. "There was so much that I didn't tell you, because you'd have tried to take me away. Rightfully so, probably." She gently rubbed her thumb across her parents' hands. "If you allow me to take the spell from you it will be easier to explain."

"Can you do that safely?" Helen whispered, her eyes big and red-rimmed.

Hermione nodded. "But just in case I'll ask a friend, who is a healer, to be there. She'll be able to answer some of your questions too."

Helen sniffled. "When can we do that? I want to know as soon as possible."

"Draco will have told her that you're back, so she'll probably already be waiting for my owl," Hermione said quietly. "I think I'm too overwhelmed tonight, but if she's free we can do it tomorrow morning."
Richard squeezed her hand. "Thank you, Hermione. I hope that will make things clearer."

"I'm so sorry," Hermione whispered again, clutching her parents' hands as if her life depended on it. "I was so stupid, I should have asked you. Not just decided…"

Helen moved to her side without letting her hand go. "Shh, my poor girl, I know you would never do something deliberately cruel. You're just a child, and you can make it right again. It will be alright."

Hermione melted into her mother's embrace, whispering apologies over and over again.

Suddenly, there was a loud crash across the restaurant and a baby started crying loudly. Helen jumped at the crash and looked for its source. But when she turned back to her daughter, her arms were empty. Hermione was wedged into the corner behind the greenery, her wand raised, her eyes wide and staring far into the distance. When Helen tried to scoot closer Hermione fixed that blank stare on her and raised her wand, the defiant tilt of her head in hard contrast to the trembles wracking her body.

Richard then lowered himself to his knees in front of her, his hands raised and a small smile fixed on his lips. "Hey, Minnie, do you know who I am?" he asked quietly.

Their daughter fixed her gaze on him and nodded hesitantly. "Da?"

"That's right, Minnie," Richard said calmly.

Helen noticed a waitress approaching and slowly stood up to intercept the woman without scaring Hermione more. She couldn't think about the reasons for her daughter's behaviour, but she knew PTSD when she saw it.

"Are you alright, over here?" the waitress asked, trying to look over Helen's shoulder where Richard and Hermione were sitting and talking quietly.

"My daughter had a panic attack," Helen said. "Do you have a room for private parties that is a bit calmer?"

The waitress nodded, compassion in her eyes. "Yes, of course. I will make sure nobody disturbs you. Does she have a favourite dessert or biscuit? Something familiar and sweet often helps my husband."

Helen remembered something. "Hot chocolate with cinnamon would be perfect."

The waitress nodded. "The room is to your left, down the corridor, the first door on the right side. I'll knock when the drink is ready. Something else for you and your husband?"

"No thanks," Helen smiled at the woman gratefully.

When she turned around she found Richard and Hermione getting to their feet. Hermione was pale as a ghost, her eyes still blown wide, but at least she seemed to be back with them. Helen grabbed their bags and gave Hermione her purse, who then clutched it close to her chest.

The private room was smaller and decorated in the Mediterranean style, like the rest of the restaurant. It was flooded by light thanks to the big windows that led out to the back yard. There was a couch to one side, with a small coffee table in front of it and Richard escorted Hermione there.
Helen puffed up the cushions behind Hermione a bit and smiled when her girl immediately relaxed into them. A soft knock sounded and Richard rose to get it so Helen could put her arm around her daughter instead.

"Here, hot chocolate with cinnamon," Richard offered Hermione the mug and she took it carefully with one hand and sniffed it. The other was still clutching her purse and her wand.

Helen gathered her daughter closer and started humming an old lullaby she barely remembered singing. It worked well, together with the hot drink and when the tears came Helen just pulled out a handkerchief and told Hermione to let it all out. Richard gently took the empty mug from her hands and set it down on the table. Hermione turned into his arms, but pulled her mother's hands with her, letting herself be held by both her parents.

Helen met Richard's eyes over Hermione's riotous curls, and they were just as desperately sad as her own had to be.

Helen decided they had to know what happened in the last year and who did this to their daughter.

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Hermione had taken nearly an hour to calm down, but her parents had assured her over and over again, that it was okay, that they were there and that they weren't angry at her. If she'd had any energy left she would probably have been embarrassed by her display of emotion. But she was so very drained. Too drained in fact to write a letter to Andromeda, so she decided to just floo over when she was back at Grimmauld Place.

She had told her parents the address before they had returned to their hotel for the night, insisting that she could walk home alone. Hermione had needed the time to think. She had thought the attacks had stopped after Draco's trial and so far nobody but Narcissa had known that she had them at all. But her parents had seemed as if they dealt with something like that every day. Hermione knew that her parents, especially her father liked to keep up with the current psychological developments. So maybe he had read about something like this. She would need to ask him the next morning.

Hermione greeted Tinna before flooing over to Tonks Cottage. Andromeda and Narcissa were in the living room when she arrived, but Draco, Teddy and Lucius were nowhere to be seen.

"Hermione, I didn't expect you tonight," Andromeda said with a small smile, as she patted the seat next to her on the couch. "You look exhausted."

"I'll make tea," Narcissa put her book down and smiled at Hermione. When she walked past and into the hallway she squeezed Hermione's shoulder and she felt the rest of the tension leave her.

"You don't look too well," Andromeda remarked quietly, putting a hand on Hermione's arm.

"I don't feel so well," Hermione whispered with a chuckle.

Before Andromeda could react to that, Narcissa returned with a teapot and three mugs floating in front of her. The sharp smell of peppermint reached Hermione's nose and she smiled a bit.

"What happened?" Narcissa asked, sitting down on Hermione's other side.

"We were in the restaurant, and I had just told them that I did the spell and that I could reverse it," Hermione began, twisting her hands in her lap. "Something fell down, next thing I know my father
is kneeling in front of me, talking quietly. He called me Minnie again."

Narcissa scooted closer and put an arm around her shoulders. "Oh dear, that must have been frightening."

Hermione nodded. "They let us into one of the back rooms so I could calm down, and my parents…they acted like they knew what was happening to me."

"Maybe they do?" Andromeda suggested gently. "Muggles did a lot of research into the mind and its reactions to stress and trauma."

Hermione nodded. "I'll ask them tomorrow. We want to reverse the spell tomorrow morning, is that okay for you?"

Andromeda nodded and gave Hermione one of the mugs with a smile. "Of course, where do you want to do it?"

"In Grimmauld Place," Hermione took a sip of the tea and smiled at the warmth that grew in her chest. "It's the easiest to reach for them."

Andromeda promised to be there at ten in the morning and they fell into a companionable silence. When her mug was empty, Hermione made her excuses and left for the Black townhouse. In her room she took out a piece of parchment, writing everything down that had happened from the moment Draco had met her in the Leaky Cauldron. So much of it felt surreal and dreamlike.

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The next morning dawned bright and early, the first rays of sun prodding Hermione awake from her slumped over position. She stretched and looked around. With a startled curse she realised she had fallen asleep writing yesterday's events down. The last paragraphs were basically gibberish and the quill was still in her hand.

Hermione sighed and walked over to the mirror. As expected, she had ink in her face and she vanished it quickly. It wasn't the first time she had fallen asleep over taking notes or writing an essay - especially in third year, it had once been a very common occurrence.

With a sigh Hermione cast a quick Tempus charm and was gratified to see that at least she hadn't overslept. Her parents would arrive in an hour and she needed to shower and eat breakfast first.

When Hermione finally came downstairs, her curls still damp and bouncy even though she had applied three high effect drying charms, Tinna had already laid out breakfast in the kitchen. Surprisingly Ron was still there.

"Good morning, before you ask: I didn't oversleep, we're doing a night excursion," Ron said with a grin. "I'm so excited I couldn't go back to sleep again."

Hermione laughed. "That's good to hear. And you, Harry?"

"It's impossible to sleep if someone," he looked very pointedly at Ron, "is singing Celestina Warbeck in the shower, loudly."

"Oi, leave me alone, it's not every day I get to go on a night mission with Kingsley!" Ron exclaimed, the laughter in his eyes at contrast with his words.
"Good morning, Miss Hermione," Tinna greeted when she entered the kitchen from the pantry. "You seemed to be in quite a hurry yesterday evening."

Hermione sat down at the table heavily and started putting together her breakfast. Both Ron and Harry stilled in their seats.

"'Mione, what happened?" Ron asked quietly. "If the ferret-"

"No," Hermione said quickly. "Draco was lovely, don't worry."

Ron looked still dubious, but Harry nodded encouragingly. "Then what happened?"

"My parents are back," Hermione said, her breath leaving her in a rush. "The spell I put on them broke enough for them to find the Leaky Cauldron, or at least its general position. Draco and I met them there. We went for dinner."

Harry stood up wordlessly and came around the table to hug Hermione, and Ron stretched out his hand after putting his fork down. Hermione leaned into Harry and squeezed Ron's hand gratefully. She felt a lot better than she had the evening before, and the comfort of her best friends was very welcome.

"How did it go?" Ron asked cautiously. Hermione remembered their first dinner with the Weasleys after the Battle and decided that it could have been much worse.

"Quite well, I got scared when someone dropped something though," Hermione smiled weakly. "But my parents took it rather in stride. They wanted to know the full story before they judged my actions. So I'll lift the charm, with Andromeda's assistance."

Harry let go of her but stayed close and pulled his plate over. "When will you do it?"

Hermione looked at the clock they had bought for the kitchen. "My parents will be here in fifteen minutes and Andromeda will arrive at ten o'clock. I wanted to give them a chance to get a look at the house first."

Tinna looked up at that. "Which room will Miss use? Should Tinna prepare refreshments?"

"The living room on ground level probably looks the most inviting," Harry said, contemplating their options.

"I agree," Hermione nodded with a small smile. "And some iced tea, without sugar, and maybe some slices of fruit would probably be perfect."

Tinna nodded, already going through the pantry in her mind. "Will they be staying for lunch?"

Hermione frowned. "I don't know how long it will take to lift the spell, but it might be possible."

"Alright, I will prepare double, if they're not staying you'll have something for dinner," Tinna said, already stepping into the pantry. "What flavour for the iced tea?"

Hermione smiled. "Surprise me!"

They finished their breakfast while chatting about Harry's plans to go up to Hogwarts today. For one he wanted to be out of the way, but he also wanted to see whether the Chamber of Secrets had taken any major hits and whether those had been taken care of. Ron decided to come along once they had greeted the Grangers and welcomed them into their home. They joked that the ground
floor at least looked like a home by now, much of the dirt and grime already having been tackled by them before their fifth year.

"Pansy talked to Mrs Selwyn, by the way," Hermione said, putting the dirty dishes into the sink and setting the Cleaning Charm to work. "She'll be available to come by next Thursday and take a look around."

"And we're sure she had no Death Eater connection?" Harry asked dubiously, standing in the middle of the kitchen, marmalade and jam forgotten in his hands. Tinna sighed and snatched them before he could forget to hold them too.

"Very much so," Hermione nodded. "They fled to Italy before the war and only returned after…"

Ron sighed. "I don't like it, but 'Mione is right. I asked around at the Aurors' Office. The Selwyns haven't come up even once in anything related to the Death Eaters."

"Good, I-" Whatever Harry wanted to say was cut short by the doorbell. Hermione froze and Ron set off towards the front door with a smile to her.

"It'll be fine," he whispered reassuringly.

Harry nudged her forward when she made no move to greet her parents at the door. Finally Hermione's legs decided to work again and she made it to the door without stumbling.

"Remind me to invest in a chandelier or a window," Hermione said to Ron when she came to stand next to him. "It's way too dark in this hallway."

"Stumbled over the umbrella stand again, have you?" Ron teased her good-naturedly, and Hermione did the mature thing and stuck her tongue out at him.

Then she turned to her parents. "Mum, Dad, do you remember Ron? He's one of my best friends. Please come in!"

The Grangers shook Ron's hand and he stepped aside to let them over the threshold. Hermione smiled at Harry who was lingering by the stairs so they wouldn't block the hallway.

"And that's Harry," Hermione said with a smile. "It's his house, but we live here together."

"I admit, I just wanted the free help to make it presentable again," Harry said with a charming smile Hermione didn't know he possessed. Huh. "It's a pleasure to meet you properly, Mr and Mrs Granger."

Hermione saw Tinna and Kreacher standing at the bottom of the stairs to the kitchen and nodded encouragingly. "And I'd like to introduce you to Tinna and Kreacher, who are invaluable to keeping us fed and cleaning the house. Without them we'd be nowhere near the level we're at now."

"You flatter us, Miss Hermione," Tinna said, blushing and smiling. "But it's good to hear our work is appreciated."

Richard's eyebrows shot up and Helen had to swallow a gasp at the small house elf. But Tinna took it in stride.

"I'm very happy to meet Miss Hermione's parents, who raised her to be an intelligent and compassionate person," Tinna stretched out her hand to be shaken, and the Grangers carefully
shook it in turn. "I'm a house elf. As soon as your memory returns you'll understand better, I'm sure Miss Hermione told you about my people. If you need anything while you're here, don't hesitate to call for me. Just speaking my name will be enough."

Kreacher kept at the back, his eyes distrustful and he made no move to talk to the Grangers. Hermione realised she should have warned him about muggles coming to his home, but she had barely thought of telling Harry and Ron.

"Thank you, Miss Tinna," Helen said politely, even though confusion was written all over her face. Hermione sighed; once her parents remembered fully she'd have to tell them what she learned about house elves while they were gone.

Harry and Ron said their goodbyes and left for the front door while Hermione led her parents to the living room. Andromeda would be arriving soon and she wanted her parents to have already settled down by then.

Tinna appeared with the fruit and iced tea, putting the two trays down on the side table. She had prepared apple slices, honey melon pieces as well as fresh strawberries with cream and raspberries. There were small forks and plates for everyone.

"If you'd like something else feel free to ask," Tinna said with a proud smile. Hermione knew the elf lady loved seeing people's wonder at her creations and arrangements.

The Grangers nodded and thanked Tinna before she left the room again. Finally Richard reached for a plate and filled it with fruit.

"Kreacher didn't seem too happy to see us," Helen observed, stealing a slice of apple from her husband's plate.

Hermione nodded, pouring herself some iced tea. "To say his former mistress was prejudiced against non-magical people would be like saying Hitler didn't like Jews."

Helen gasped. "Oh goodness, that sounds awful."

"He only stopped treating me badly after Harry ordered him to, and it took him a long time to be civil to me," Hermione admitted. "He is also very old, and has heard most of his life that muggles and muggleborns aren't to be trusted. That had quite a big impression on him. But these days he makes an effort to be at least polite."

"How old is he?" Richard asked curiously and Hermione shrugged.

"He doesn't know exactly, but he remembers the later parts of the fourteenth century," she answered, smiling at her parents' surprise.

"Well, he doesn't look a day over eighty," Richard joked, eating the last of his fruit.

"The friend who will assist you, who are they?" Helen asked, changing the topic.

"Andromeda Tonks is a healer, she is very good and was trained in one of the best schools in the country," Hermione told them. "She became a friend after the war, because she is raising Harry's godson after his parents died. She's Teddy's grandma. And she took in her sister, whose son Draco you met yesterday."

"Did they lose their home during the…war?" Richard had apparently problems wrapping his head around that.
Hermione smiled mirthlessly. "No, they didn't. The story is long and complicated, I'll explain when you remember more."

Right then Tinna arrived with Andromeda and more fruit, refilling the emptying serving plates. The Grangers stood to greet the newcomer and Hermione made quick introductions.

"I'm just here to help Hermione, should she hit a blockade that she doesn't know how to deal with," Andromeda explained, sitting down next to Hermione. "But I trust that she won't need my help."

Hermione tried to smile, but the nerves started to get to her. "It shouldn't take long. I didn't remove your memories, just put them behind walls in a part of your mind you weren't able to reach. So all I have to do is to take down these walls. Since they seem to be crumbling already they should go easily."

Her parents nodded, apprehension clear in their faces and body language, but Hermione sucked in a deep breath and ignored it.

"Legilimens," she whispered and entered her mother's mind. She didn't look at the memories and the information surrounding her, just searched for the walls she had set up in the back.

As expected Hermione found them easily, and they had cracks. She carefully tapped each brick with her wand to vanish it and stepped back quickly when the flood of memories was freed. They all slotted back into the empty spaces Hermione had seen on her way and she left Helen's brain quickly.

As Hermione resurfaced she had to fight a momentary lightheadedness, Andromeda put a new glass of iced tea in her hands and Richard did the same for Helen on the other couch.

"That was quick," he remarked, sounding somewhat unsure.

"It was easily done," Hermione said with a sad smile. "The fall must have been quite impactful."

Helen chuckled weakly, leaning back against the cushions. "I might need a minute."

Hermione nodded and smiled at her father. "Dad?"

Richard shrugged. "Might as well get over with it."

The process was just as quick and easy as it had been with her mother and Hermione felt relief coursing through her veins and make her giddy. Andromeda did a quick check of everyone's vitals and declared them tired but healthy.

While the Grangers worked through their new old memories, Hermione and Andromeda chatted about the set up for the new division of Malfoy Apothecary. They had found a building that was accessible from both wizarding and muggle London and the first scientists and healers had responded to the advertisement. The biggest difficulty had been convincing the board of governors that the project could succeed profitably. But Lucius had bribed, threatened and prodded until they all had signed, and if anyone noticed that two of the governors had resigned the moment the decision was made nobody seemed too upset.

When Hermione looked over to her parents, she saw them smiling proudly at her. A small tendril of pure happiness wound itself around Hermione's heart and she blushed a little.

"You've grown up so much," Richard said with a smile. "It's really good to see you."
"Hermione, you promised to tell us why you send us away when we got our memories back," Helen said quietly. "I hate to bring it up now, but…"

"You're right, Mum," Hermione said, taking a deep breath. "I will start from the beginning, from the first time I thought about sending you away: the day I returned from the Quidditch World Cup."

Hermione told them about the muggles being tortured by Death Eaters, about Voldemort's return. About Umbridge, the rising attacks on muggleborns and Order members. She showed them the scar from the fight against Dolohov in the Department of Mysteries. She told them about training to fight, mentally and physically. Learning Occlumency and Legilimency with Ginny and Luna, because Ginny wanted to be able to keep Voldemort out and Luna loved learning. Hermione talked about the fight at the end of the school year, about Dumbledore's death.

Helen and Richard were growing paler with every second and Hermione had begun to tremble. But she couldn't stop, not now.

So she talked about Voldemort's ascent to power. The knowledge that he would hunt down every last person in order to hurt her and therefore Harry. She summarised most of the following months, living on the run, constantly moving to evade the Snatchers.

When she came to Easter, her voice finally broke and her glass nearly fell to the ground. Andromeda caught it with a wordless spell in the last minute and levitated it to the side table.

"What happened at Easter?" Helen asked, voice barely above a whisper and clutching her father's hand.

Hermione couldn't form the words. She couldn't just tell her parents that she had been tortured! That…that would break them!

"May I?" Andromeda asked her quietly and Hermione gave her a slight nod. "On Easter Hermione, Harry and Ronald were captured by the Snatchers. They were brought to Malfoy Manor where my sister tortured Hermione for information on an artefact she had with her."

"Your…sister?" Helen asked horrified and Hermione nodded, finding her voice again.

"Bellatrix was mad, and until a few weeks ago it seemed that Andromeda was the odd one out," Hermione explained, her voice hoarse from speaking for such a long time. "But Narcissa Malfoy had simply realised the truth too late. And by then she couldn't get out."

"Malfoy?" Richard asked. "As in Draco Malfoy and Malfoy Manor? Did they help you?"

"Not back then," Hermione shook her head. "They were terrified of Bella and Voldemort who was living in their house at the time. But a month later, at the Battle of Hogwarts, the Malfoys switched sides. First Draco, then Narcissa and finally Lucius, if only to preserve his life."

"Wait, didn't you call the young man Draco yesterday?" Richard asked, his eyes narrowed. "And the boy who bullied you at school?"

Hermione blushed. "He changed, a lot. I saved his life after the Battle of Hogwarts, they wanted to execute him. Nobody had told them that he had changed sides before the battle."

"They tried to execute a boy?" Helen asked, shocked. Hermione wondered whether she should tell them that they executed a few of Draco's house mates, that the youngest had just turned seventeen.
"After his preliminary hearing, which Hermione did beautifully, he and his parents lived with me," Andromeda interjected, saving Hermione. "I taught them about muggles and their culture, that they're as far from the pitchfork brandishing mob that we were taught about as possible. I know that muggles still have troubles accepting even their own if they have a different skin colour, but the witch hunts are luckily history."

"They didn't know that?" Richard asked in surprise.

Hermione snorted. "They know nothing outside the wizarding world. Pansy didn't even know what World War Two had done to the muggle world." At her parents confused frowns she elaborated. "There was a wizarding war going on at the same time and Pansy thought that had been the only thing causing trouble."

Helen and Richard looked at Hermione with matching horrified faces. Hermione stood up and knelt in front of them. "Mum, Dad, I'm learning. I wanted to protect both of you from evil forces and I deeply regret that I didn't talk to you about it."

"Oh dear," Helen whimpered. "You shouldn't have to even think about something like that, much less do it. Why didn't you ever say something?"

"I didn't want you to take me away, I wanted to fight," Hermione whispered. "I'm so, so damned sorry."

Richard gathered her in a tight hug. "Come here, love. Shh, it's okay."

Helen put her arms around Hermione too. Hermione buried her head in the crook of her mother's neck, breathing her scent in. It was different. She had always smelled like roses, now she smelled of citrus and something spicy. But Hermione wasn't overly bothered, because beneath it there was still the omnipresent smell of dentistry: peppermint.

"I think I'll excuse myself now," Andromeda said gently. "I'm sure you have much to say."

Hermione looked up and nodded. "Thank you for your support, it meant a lot to me."

Andromeda smiled and left via floo. Hermione huddled back into the embrace of her parents. "The war, that's the reason for your panic attack in the restaurant yesterday?" Richard asked quietly, petting Hermione's hair the way he did when she was younger.

She nodded quickly. "But I haven't had an attack like that in two weeks, I thought it was over."

"It will take longer than that, I'm afraid," Helen said, gathering her even closer. "Post-traumatic stress disorder isn't something that vanishes on its own like that."

"Post-traumatic stress disorder?" Hermione asked, looking up at her mum.

Richard explained. "After a traumatic event, or a series of traumatic events the mind needs some time to readjust to normal life. Sometimes it isn't able to without help, and then it will develop certain symptoms like panic attacks, flashbacks, insomnia and nightmares. Survivors of natural catastrophes get it, or soldiers. It's only been added to the index recently."

"But it's been known for quite a while," Helen took over. "They called it shell shock, or Gulf War syndrome."

Hermione looked at her parents with big eyes. "So, it's…it's okay? I'm not just…"
"Weak?" her mother supplied with a sad smile. "No, it just means your mind has trouble dealing with what happened."

"Is that bad?" Hermione whispered fearfully. "What can I do against it?"

"Normally I'd say you should go to a psychologist," Richard said smiling sardonically. "But I doubt that there are any in your world."

"No, they are very bad at psychology in general," Hermione muttered. "But what can I do if I can't go to a psychologist?"

Helen and Richard exchanged a look. "You could try what they told our neighbour Jeff after he survived a tsunami. Write it down, talk about it and try to accept that it happened. I know it sounds impossible, but Jeff swears after some time he was actually doing better."

Hermione settled down between her parents. "And the panic attacks?"

"There is an exercise that you can do if you have an attack," Helen explained. "We did a workshop on dealing with disruptive psychological problems for our patients. During a panic attack it is often important to ground oneself, so this method will help you to do that. Name five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one good thing about yourself."

"Alternatively you can ask yourself some questions about your situation," Richard took over. "Like: Where am I? What day is it? Which time is it? Which season is it? They sound silly, but they give your mind something to focus on besides the panic."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "That makes sense. Are there books about this?"

"Some," Helen said. "But you're more likely to find books on the symptoms than the PTSD itself, since it is a relatively new diagnosis."

"Thank you," Hermione smiled at both of them. "Dad..." she trailed off, losing the courage to ask.

"What is it, love?" Richard asked with a kind smile.

"Would you do my hair?" Hermione asked quietly, barely daring to breathe in case they hadn't forgiven her that much yet.

"Of course! I'd love to," Richard smiled brightly. "You didn't let me since you returned home that first Christmas!"

Hermione blushed. "I tried to wear them like the other girls at school."

Richard laughed. "That couldn't have been easy! I remember when Deidra tried to do that when we were still kids, she gave up after a week."

Helen grinned and gently tapped her daughter's nose. "Knowing our Hermione she was more stubborn than that."

"I became really good at French braids," Hermione said with a small smile and turned so her father could reach her hair.

"I'll need a brush and eight hair bands," Richard said, running his hands through her hair. "You haven't cut it in some time."
"I didn't trust either of the boys with a cutting charm near my hair and...I didn't have the energy to do it," Hermione admitted.

"I wonder if Chiara is still around," Helen said, looking at Hermione's hair in contemplation. "She'd probably take you without an appointment too."

"Chiara's been around for twenty years, that woman isn't going to stop before she keels over," Richard joked.

"Well then," Helen stopped for a moment, and cocked her head to the side. "Why don't we go and see whether she has time to give you the full works?"

Hermione chewed on her lip. Chiara had been her hairdresser since before she could remember. She always claimed that she was the only hairdresser in all of London to know how to deal with mixed race hair, since she had to learn for her own daughters'. Hermione always loved visiting Chiara, the loud and brash woman putting her at ease for some reason. But she hadn't been there over a year and she wasn't sure whether it would be the same. So much had changed, after all.

Just when Helen opened her mouth again, Hermione spoke up. "I'd- I'd like to."

Richard beamed at her and Helen grinned broadly. "Then it's settled, we'll have lunch and then we'll drive to Chiara's salon."

Chapter End Notes

So, what do you think? I hope you like the Grangers! At the moment they're very much focused on their obviously hurt daughter. What do you think will happen when they had some time to settle down? I'll have a busy month moving in with my best friend, term papers and going to London, but as always I'll try to write! I also have a new exciting project in the works for Christmas...See you soon! :)
Draco's fear

Chapter Notes

Welcome back everyone! As predicted I had a very busy September (though I got to go to London, which was amazing) and October (uni starting up again...), but! My mental health has much improved over the last weeks, and while I have a few other stories to catch up on, I'm confident I'll be writing more. I wanted to thank everyone who reads, leaves kudos, bookmarks, subscribes to and especially reviews my story! You're amazing!

Much betalove to the lovely reynardinepttr :)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

13th June 1998, 10:49

To say that Draco was nervous would be the understatement of the century. Even antsy, distressed, jittery, overwrought and worried sick didn't seem to cut it. He was pacing in front of his bed.

Five steps to the wardrobe, five steps back to the nightstand. Five steps to. Five steps back. Five steps. Five…

Draco was so agitated in fact, that the candle on his nightstand had ignited and was flickering in an unfelt wind caused by Draco's magic breaking out and swirling around him. He longed to go out, to use the pent up energy, but the Manor had not yet been cleared for their use and his broom was there.

Finally he threw open the door and ran out into Andromeda's garden, his black robes swirling around him in a way that would make the late Professor Snape proud.

Outside he finally felt as if he could breathe again, his magic settling down to swirl more gently around him, still too agitated to fit beneath his skin.

He stood perfectly still, letting his mind wander as he watched the fields beyond the trees at the back of the property.

Hermione's parents were back. Hermione had gone on a date with him, kind of. But her parents were back. Surely she would remember now. Remember why she hated him so much. Reminded by them. She had to send them away because of the likes of him. Death Eater. Scum. Filth.

Draco carefully raised the wand the Ministry had supplied him with. He didn't deserve it. He may deserve the spells on it. Keeping him from casting Dark magic, keeping track of his every move. But he didn't deserve to have it at all.

He should rot in a cell in Azkaban. He had used Unforgivables. He had tortured, maimed, killed… Draco felt ill. But he still held himself completely still, no sign of his inner turmoil showing on his face.

He knew how to conceal his fear, knew how not to show a sign of emotion, even in front of the
Dark Lord himself, or rather, especially.

His ear twitched when he heard the soft pop of Apparation on the other side of the house. A quick spell told him that Andromeda had returned from Grimmauld Place. She went inside. Draco decided that he couldn't stay here any longer. He needed to leave, immediately.

Draco reappeared with a snap on the cliffs close to their Scottish hunting lodge. The wind pulled at his robes, finding every opening and making Draco shiver violently.

But standing at the edge, hearing the waves crashing into the shore and feeling the wind pulling at his very essence, he finally let go.

All the pent up magic, the anguish, the sorrow and the self-hatred broke from him in a fractured cry. His legs gave out from under him and only the swirling magic kept him from toppling over the edge. He moaned and shivered as tears coursed down his face, his magic dancing with the wind whipping and ripping at him.

Any sense of time and space left him, too caught up in his own head. He saw the faces of all the students he had hurt, be it because of his own stupidity or at the command of others. It didn't matter. Longbottom was followed by Hermione, Abbot, Creevey, Finch-Fletchley, Potter, Hermione, Hermione, Hermione…

How could he hurt her? She'd done nothing! She only ever bested him in a few classes. What did Potter ever do to him but refuse his hand in friendship? Draco knew he had been a horrible little snob and even Theo had barely spoken to him the first weeks of first year.

For the first time since that horrible first night in the holding cells at the Ministry, Draco let himself think about Crabbe and Goyle - both dead because of him and the stupid war. They had never been the most intelligent or ambitious people, and Draco personally thought they would have been better off in Hufflepuff where they would have been supported instead of scorned. But did that mean they deserved death?

Or how about Marchand? The sixth year boy who had looked up to Professor Snape so much that he had joined the moment he turned seventeen. He was dead too, now. His family was under surveillance of the Ministry, if one could believe the Prophet, even though they themselves had been innocent.

Some days Draco truly hated his father for what he had done to him. For the way he raised him. He hated Thoros Nott for what he had done to Theo. But most of all he hated Snape for never trying to save any of them from themselves.

Sure, he had tried to help Draco in sixth year, but by then it was too late.

Draco huddled down, pulling his cloak around him and casting a small Bluebell Flame. He held the tiny flame gently in his hand, marvelling at its beauty.

Hermione loved these flames and cast them silently, without even her wand, like it was an afterthought. Hers were a deep periwinkle blue though, like the dress she had worn at the Yule Ball so many years ago. Merlin, he hadn't even recognised her at first. Too focussed on her bushy hair and the many books she always lugged around everywhere to remember her face. She had been very pretty that night, although Draco only recently admitted that to himself.

Careful not to disturb the flame, Draco put his right arm over his knees and rested his head on his
foreground. His wand dangled from his fingers, sometimes emitting small blue flames.

Focussed on the flame in his left hand, Draco started the process of pulling his magic back under his skin. His mother had told him stories of people who went crazy because they didn't control their magic. But if the book Hermione had given him on ancient magic was right his mother's stories had been not quite true.

He hadn't asked Hermione for the book after he had accidentally bonded with Thomas, she had just arrived the next day with it in hand. Draco hadn't even thanked her properly, too distracted by the opportunity to ask her to the ice cream date.

But he had devoured the book, and then he had read it a second time to make sure he caught everything. The third time he had taken notes.

The book had talked about old forms of magic. It had centred on Indo-European forms, but had mentioned others in comparison. For example it explained that the Mesopotamian wizards and witches had preferred not to control their magic. Sadly that made them more volatile and prone to conflict, but they had also been extremely powerful and very accomplished animagi.

Draco had wanted to discuss the book with Hermione, but since they had been around muggles he hadn't dared to. And now…

Draco pulled himself away from that thought. He couldn't, wouldn't think about that. Not yet. It already hurt too much. He hoped sincerely that his mother wouldn't take it too badly when Hermione distanced herself from them. Even his father would be upset, if only because he had been relying on Hermione's knowledge about muggle science.

Closing his fist Draco extinguished the flame. He needed something to distract himself. Maybe Thomas would have time or at least an idea.

Draco rose and transfigured his robes into a muggle t-shirt, glad that he wore simple trousers under the traditional wizard's garment.

With a sharp crack he Disapparated from the Scottish cliffs and reappeared in the alleyway close to Thomas's home. He hoped that the other boy was there, because he didn't know where else to look.

The normally short walk seemed excruciatingly long this time, and Draco let out a relieved breath when he reached the house of his friend. And brother. Draco was still getting used to that.

Before he could so much as knock, the door was thrown open and Thomas grabbed him in a hug. "Draco! Are you alright?"

Draco clung to the hug, even though he felt as if he should push Thomas away. "Define alright."

Thomas let go of him and gave him a critical once over. "Come on in, you look like hell warmed over."

Draco stepped into the house and pulled his shoes off. He followed Thomas up to his room and settled on the rug before the bed. The other boy offered him a bottle with an eye-wateringly bright red label that read 'Coca-Cola'. Draco accepted it, only just now realising that he had barely drunk anything all day.

"So what happened? Your date go wrong?" Thomas asked, settling down next to Draco and popping his own bottle open.
Draco snorted. "No, it was lovely right till the end, where her muggle parents suddenly stood in front of us. She freaked out and I had to calm her down. But they left with her. Apparently Hermione came over later and asked Andromeda to help her while she restored her parents' memories and that's what they have been doing all morning and I haven't heard anything from her…"

"And now you're freaking out," Thomas nodded wisely. "But I wouldn't take it too seriously. I mean it's been what? Twelve hours if you don't count the time you were both asleep?" Draco nodded silently. "She's probably so caught up with having her parents home that she simply hadn't time to contact you yet."

"I kissed her," Draco whispered. "Before I left, on the cheek and she promised to come to tea tomorrow. But…"

"You think you went too far?" Thomas guessed when Draco didn't continue his sentence.

"I think now that her parents are back she will remember why she hates me," Draco mumbled, picking at the label of his bottle. The drink was sweet, like pumpkin juice, but more refreshing.

"You do realise you aren't the arsehole you were even a few months ago anymore, don't you?" Thomas asked incredulously. "He would never have shared a coke with a muggle, much less come to a muggle because he's freaking out over a girl whose guts he hated back then."

Draco had to smile a bit at Thomas blunt words. "But that doesn't erase what I did to her."

"Did you ever apologise properly? Like face to face?" his kind-of brother asked him as he drained the last of his drink.

"I-" Draco stopped to actually think about it. "No, I don't think so. I- Well, my mother wrote her a letter that first day in the holding cell and I added my gratitude for saving me. But I don't think I actually ever apologised to her."

"Well then, try that tomorrow when she comes over, if she accepts it you can stop worrying and if she doesn't…" Thomas trailed off with a shrug. "I don't think she won't accept it."

Draco joined the Tonkses for lunch at Mary's insistence. When he returned home he got an earful from his mother about worrying her, but Draco happily carried out the 'punishment' task of caring for Teddy that evening while his parents and Andromeda went to meet a real-estate broker for a house-viewing in London.

Draco would miss living with Andromeda - she always had an open ear for him, and her house was very comfortable and comforting.

14th June 1998, 9:04

For the first time in who knows how long, Hermione woke up well rested and content. She felt happy even though nothing special was going to happen today. With a slight smile on her face she rose and started to go about her morning routine. Now including the actual care for her hair.

Hermione did her hair with new-found precision and passion. The moisturising spray allowed her to brush her hair without much cussing and for the first time in over a year Hermione decided to leave it fully open.

On the run she simply hadn't had the energy and since…since she just hadn't felt right. Wrong in
her skin, wrong in her habits.

Hermione wondered whether Draco would be surprised to see her like this. Narcissa would certainly be delighted, since she had been nagging Hermione for some time to wear her hair open again. To be proud of her heritage, not just her immediate parentage.

Once her hair was done, Hermione went downstairs into the kitchen to be greeted by a low whistle from Harry, who was preparing breakfast.

"Wow, you look great 'Mione!" he said with a big grin, pushing his glasses up his nose with his wand.

"Thank you, Harry," Hermione smiled happily, glad that her famously unobservant best friend noticed the change. "Is Ron back yet?"

Just then the fireplace started roaring with green flames and Ron tumbled out, his cloak tattered, his face looking like he walked headfirst into a rose bush and his hands clutching a newspaper.

"Speak of the devil," Harry laughed. "Mate, you don't look so good!"

"Haven't slept yet and Kingsley is a bloody slave driver, but look at this article! It must have come through last night!" Ron exclaimed, pushing the paper into Hermione's hands and collapsing on a chair, trying to catch his breath.

Harry stepped closer to read over Hermione's shoulder.

**Official notice after the extraordinary Wizengamot session of the 13th June 1998:**

The Wizengamot hereby declares its decision on the matter of the investigation of one Ms Rita Skeeter, journalist for the Daily Prophet and author: The investigation into the allegations of multiple cases of coerced statements, illegal use of potions and possible violation of the Animagus Registration Act will be taken up by the Auror Department immediately. During the course of this investigation Rita Skeeter is prohibited from publishing any and all articles, commentaries or books. Anyone publishing her work in defiance of this order will be charged for aiding and abetting a criminal. Ms Skeeter is required to stay in Great Britain at all times during the investigation.

Hermione looked up at Ron, having finished reading the short article. "This is amazing, even if it took them long enough to decide."

"I know, right?" Ron asked grinning. "I knew I had to buy the Prophet for once! By the way, did you do something with your hair?"

"I was at the hairdresser with my parents yesterday," Hermione said distractedly, rereading the article and trying to read between the lines of the official statement.

"So, what did you end up doing tonight?" Harry asked, turning to Ron who was currently pouring himself some tea and grabbing a bread roll.

"Went with Kingsley and Davis on a stake-out of a smuggling ring, only they noticed us because of a damn owl," Ron told them with an exasperated sigh, still grinning and obviously high on adrenaline. "We had to fight and we recruits were allowed to take some of them into custody!"

"That sounds like a busy night," Harry commented with an amused glance to Hermione.
She looked up from the article and took in the cuts and hex-burns on Ron's face and hands. "I'll get the Dittany for your cuts. How did you enjoy your first stake-out turned raid?"

Ron launched into an exciting tale of the last night's heroics while Hermione tended to his cuts and Harry started on the eggs and the baked beans. Now and then Harry asked a few questions and Hermione noticed one name being mentioned more often than the others: Alice.

"Who is Alice?" she finally asked curiously. "She sounds pretty important."

Ron's ears instantly turned red. "She's a recruit like me, she studied at Beauxbatons, but she's our age."

"And?" Harry asked, levitating the pans on the table.

Ron shrugged and fiddled with his cloak. "She's pretty and amazing, she likes Quidditch a lot, curses like a sailor sometimes."

"Ohh, that sounds really good, Ron!" Hermione said, a big smile on her face. "Have you talked to her yet?"

"Nah," Ron looked down, his smile slowly vanishing. "She's way out of my league."

"Well, since I don't know her, I can't really say anything about that. But I know you're pretty amazing too, Ron, don't forget that, yes?" Hermione said, putting her hand on her friend's arm.

"Mione's right, as always," Harry said with an encouraging smile. "You're a great guy. Maybe you should try to talk to her next time you see her."

"Yeah, maybe," Ron mumbled, but his smile was returning. "Thank you for cooking Harry, I'm starving!"

"I would be worried if you weren't," Hermione teased and Ron rolled his eyes at her, but he was fully smiling now.

Hermione turned back to the newspaper article, while Ron put away his cloak and Harry started eating. She was taking notes in the margin now, questions she could ask Andromeda or Lucius, but soon she was done and grabbed some food of her own.

"Are you coming to the dinner at Mum's tonight?" Ron asked just as Hermione had taking the first bite of her eggs.

She looked up, swallowed and thought about the question. "I'll meet my parents after breakfast and later I'll have tea at Andromeda's but I think I should make it to the Burrow in time."

"Great," Ron said, sounding rather relieved. "Apparently George wants to bring Nott with him today, we could use someone who can keep a cool head about them."

"Oh, you don't have to worry about Theo, he is very polite and quiet," Hermione assured him with a quick smile.

"I'm not really worried about him, he seemed alright at Malfoy's acquittal party," Ron elaborated, frowning a bit. "But Mum and Dad might be not very happy with him there. He isn't Malfoy, but Dad did never believe that Nott wasn't a Death Eater…"

Hermione swallowed, sometimes she forgot the Weasleys were also biased, if not as obviously as
the Malfoys. "Alright. But I think between George, you and me we should manage."

"I'll be there too and..." Harry hesitated and flicked a quick look at both of them. "I talked a lot with Pansy, about the last year, you know. Nott - he did what he could to protect the halfblood Slytherins, but he had it bad at home. Pansy thinks it was nearly worse for him than for Malfoy because it wasn't Tom, but his own father. You probably shouldn't mention that to him though."

Ron nodded, pushing the last of his beans around on his plate. "Last week we were given reports to study. We aren't allowed to talk about the contents, but I can tell you this: If I was Nott, I'd burn the whole damn manor down and salt the grounds. It's a bloody wonder he didn't go crazy like his old man."

"I didn't know it was that bad," Hermione whispered, shaken badly. She had of course known that Nott Manor had a dark and bloody history, but to hear it from her two best friends made it somehow more real than when she had been in the Entrance Hall for a moment before flooing to the lodge. Hermione had to swallow down the bile and took a huge gulp of her tea.

"Oh, 'Mione, McGonagall wants to speak to all theoretically graduating seventh years," Harry said in an obvious effort to change the topic. "Something about the organisation of the next school year and the NEWTs."

"Did she tell you when? I had to leave before she had decided," Ron explained at Hermione's confused look.

"Sometime this weekend, definitely before the summer solstice celebration on Sunday night," Harry told them.

"Why do they want to celebrate the summer solstice?" Hermione asked surprised, after all she hadn't heard of any such celebrations before.

"To do a thorough cleansing of the castle of dark magic," Ron explained in Harry's stead. "They want to do it the old way, and the solstice strengthens such spells. They'll probably repeat it at the winter solstice to make sure that everything is gone."

"That's what McGonagall told me too," Harry nodded along. "She wants everyone there, even, or rather especially, those who used dark magic last year. I mean, it's right, many students were forced to and were too afraid to refuse."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "That makes sense. I'm glad they want to include everyone. Are the parents invited too?"

"Yeah, although I dunno how many'll come," Ron said quietly. "The old magic has a bad reputation, especially with the older folks. I don't know why."

"Well, much old magic required blood, and not always your own, so it was labelled dark magic," Hermione shrugged. "I guess people just assume that it's true for all old magic."

Once they were done with eating, Ron started yawning and Harry and Hermione shooed him off to bed. Hermione got her purse and made sure her wand was securely holstered on her arm, under the long sleeved shirt she was wearing. Slowly but surely it became harder and harder to always wear long sleeves because it was too warm, but Hermione had yet to find a spell that really hid her scar.

Harry was off to visit to Neville and bid her goodbye in the hallway. Hermione stepped out of the front door and apparated into her parents' house.
When Hermione reappeared in the hallway of her old home she was overcome by a wave of nervous nausea. Quickly she turned and walked into the kitchen, getting out the cleaning supplies and started dusting the muggle way to calm her nerves.

Her parents now had had time to think about what she did, both to them and during the war. Would they judge her now? Hermione caught herself thinking that it would be a relief. Their easy acceptance the day before had made her extremely nervous, she had waited the whole time for the other shoe to drop.

But it never happened and it drove Hermione crazy.

Just when Hermione had finished dusting the ground floor, her parents arrived at the front door. She saw them through the window and took a deep breath before she went and opened the door for them.

Chapter End Notes

Some bonding time for Thomas and Draco, and our Golden Trio. What did you think? How will Molly and Arthur handle having the son of Thoros Nott in their house? What else will the investigation of Rita Skeeter bring to light? I'm looking forward to your reviews! :)
14th June 1998, 14:36

After over four hours with her parents, Hermione was suitably certain that they were starting to realise what she had done and that they weren't happy about it. At least they'd restricted themselves to strange looks and quiet whispers so far.

But Hermione was bloody exhausted from keeping up her smile. To never let herself falter, to never let herself flinch. The first time her parents had called for her from upstairs Hermione had let the vase she had been holding drop, to pull her wand out and go into a fighting stance. Luckily she had caught the vase before it could shatter on the floor.

Her parents hadn't seemed to notice, but Hermione didn't fully believe that. Maybe they wanted to give her space, maybe they weren't so sure about dealing with her anymore. Who would want a child that had invaded your mind? A child that they could only remember in bits and pieces. A child that was broken from a war they hadn't noticed. A child that flinched at loud noises and when an ambulance drove past.

Hermione grabbed her purse with shaking hands and wandlessly summoned the Calming Draught she always kept in there. Along with all her clothes, enough food for a week, the tent, her books… Hermione didn't want to think about that. Didn't want to think about what it said, that she was always ready to flee but that she didn't carry Harry's and Ron's things with her anymore.

The Draught worked its magic and Hermione's breathing returned to normal. She dropped the empty vial back into her purse and returned to magically sort the books into the shelves in her parents' study.

"How many of those do you take per day?" her father asked suddenly. Hermione hadn't noticed him leaning against the door jamb. She searched his face for any negative emotion, but she found only concern.

"One, if at all," Hermione answered quietly, turning to look at the books again. "Before Friday I hadn't taken one in weeks."

Her father sighed deeply. "Your mother and I were talking. We want to return to the UK. To be honest, we never really grew roots in Australia, every weekend we'd go on some kind of trip, somewhere. We understand the danger has passed, so we'd like to move back home."

Hermione smiled a little, it was bigger an effort than it should be with the artificial warmth of the
Calming Draught in her veins. "I figured as much, I'd love to have you back here. I missed you, sorely." Hermione didn't miss the wince. "Maybe we could do regular dinners? To patch things up. You could meet my new friends."

Her mother appeared next to her father in the doorframe. "That sounds like a good plan, Minnie. But for now I think we should get going, your father and I have to drive back into the city and we have dinner plans."

Hermione smiled, a bit easier this time. "That sounds good, who are you meeting?"

"Lucas and Suzanne," Helen said with a relaxed smile. "We reached out to them shortly before we came and of course they wanted to see us, learn why we dropped off the map for nearly a year."

This time it was Hermione who winced. That was her fault. She cut off her parents from their friends…

"We'll use our remaining time here to organise our move back. But maybe we could have dinner before we return?" Richard asked and Hermione took it for the olive branch it was.

"That would be amazing," she said truthfully. "How do we get in contact?"

They decided to meet for breakfast on Wednesday and decide then. Hermione's parents left soon after and she collapsed on the armchair in her old room, promising herself a few minutes of rest.

But before Hermione could drift off she felt cold tiles under her side and the burning pain from the Cruciatus in her middle.

She jumped up before her eyes were fully open. No, no, no, I can't…this can't happen, not again, I don't know, it's fake, I swear! No!

Hermione found herself staring into her own eyes in the faint reflection on her window, her breath was going heavy and she was curled in on herself. When she slowly removed her hands from where they were clutching at her side she saw that they were trembling. She closed them into fists until her nails were biting into the palms of her hand. But she relaxed them just as fast, when she felt the pain.

She was still staring at her reflection, more to focus on something than to look at herself. But she couldn't help but notice the look in her eyes. Hermione had no words to describe it, and the closest approximation she came up with was 'haunted'.

Hermione sat back down on the armchair and drew her legs to her chest, clutching them close.

What had just happened? She hadn't even slept yet, she had been somewhat aware that she was sitting, and yet…and yet her mind had convinced her that she was back at Malfoy Manor, on the cold tile floor, Cruciatus coursing through her.

Shaking her head violently Hermione extracted herself from the memory. Awake, she barely even remembered what it had felt like. But apparently, some part of her brain had kept the memory and chose this moment to replay it.

Sighing Hermione stood up and collected her wand that must have fallen from her hand at some point. She went downstairs and checked on the wards she had put on the windows and doors. Everything seemed in order and Hermione nodded to herself before apparating back to Grimmauld Place to change before she went to Andromeda. Her current outfit of old jeans and a long-sleeved shirt might have been fine for her parents, but not for tea with a wizarding family.
Hermione finally settled on a simple red skirt she hadn't worn in a year and a light, cream blouse. She wasn't one for dressing up, but after that thing in her parents' house she needed everything that could cheer her up, including looking pretty. It was rather irrational and on any other day Hermione probably would have scolded herself for thinking that way. But not today. Today she didn't care.

Harry stepped out of the floo just when she was about to leave through it. "Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to run you over!"

Hermione laughed, funny how easy that was suddenly. "It's fine, you couldn't have known. How was Neville?"

"Good, but I'll tell you more at the Weasleys', you look like you're off to Andromeda's," Harry smiled at her in return and Hermione was suddenly very glad that she had chosen to live with her two best friends.

"Yes, I think they'll be delighted to hear that the Wizengamot finally came through," Hermione replied easily. She hesitated a moment and then threw caution in the wind and her arms around Harry's neck. He stiffened for a few seconds, but then he hugged her back just as fiercely.

"What was that for?" Harry asked, straightening his glasses when she let go. "Not that I'm complaining, of course."

"I'm just glad we decided to move in together," Hermione said as lightly as she could.

Harry laughed. "I'm glad too."

Hermione checked the time. "Oh, I must be going, see you later Harry!" she called and vanished into the floo.

Draco very nearly gaped when Hermione stepped out of the floo. Only his rigid self-discipline, learned over the last year, kept him from acting like a fool.

Hermione looked positively vibrant. Her hair open for the first time in who knows how long, the cream blouse complimenting her darker complexion perfectly and the Gryffindor red skirt hugging her hips and flaring out at her knees. The outfit was modest and yet Draco was struck with the desire to touch, feel and maybe…

No. He hadn't done anything yet to deserve something like that. Draco shook himself out of his trance and looked away.

"…my parents insisted," Hermione was just saying to his mother and Draco had to focus on reciting all healing spells he knew (which were quite a few) to keep himself from staring too openly.

"Draco, can you take Teddy while I get the scones out?" Andromeda asked, very obviously taking pity on him.

"Yes, of course," Draco answered immediately, glad to have something to do with his hands and to focus on. Teddy was rather fussy today since he hadn't slept well.
While Draco tried to calm down the unhappy baby, Hermione and Narcissa finished talking and the latter left for the kitchen.

"Hey, Teddy," Hermione came over and smiled at the little boy in Draco's arms. "You don't seem too happy today. Was Draco mean to you?"

Draco scoffed. "I'll have you know that I was perfectly well-mannered, unlike this one."

"What happened?" Hermione asked, looking up to him with sparkling eyes and a small smile on her lips.

"He normally sleeps while Andy is doing her morning gardening, but for some reason he wouldn't fall asleep today," Draco explained, changing the position of his arms yet again so Teddy wouldn't fall. "Andy tried everything, and even my mother was at a loss."

"Although my knowledge about childcare is very limited," Narcissa said as she returned to the sitting room, a tea service floating in front of her. "At least I'm not the one who tried to bribe my son into silence," she added with a pointed look at his father who just raised a sceptical eyebrow.

"Remind me, princess, who insisted on sending him sweets to school every week for the first two years?" Lucius asked acerbically, but Draco saw the smile lurking in the creases around his eyes.

Narcissa only laughed. "Might I remind you, my dear husband, that you bought his whole team the newest and fastest brooms?"

"It's still so strange to see them like this," Hermione whispered next to him and Draco looked over to see her watch the back and forth closely.

"I'm glad that they're bickering again," Andromeda said, stepping up to Draco to take Teddy again, he was still squirming like mad. "When we were still in school they were constantly trying to one up each other, be it in class or on the Quidditch pitch."

"Narcissa played?" Hermione asked, shocked.

Draco snorted. "As if her parents would have allowed that."

Andromeda laughed too. "No, Mother would have had an aneurysm had she known. Cissa usually borrowed one of the Rosier twins' broom and challenged Lucius."

"So they married out of love?" Hermione asked, smiling slightly.

Draco winced and Andromeda sighed heavily. "To a point, if their parents hadn't approved…"

"Oh," Hermione's face fell a bit. "Well I'm glad they did."

"We all are, the pining would have been awful," Andromeda said the last bit a bit louder and Narcissa looked up at them.

"I wouldn't pine," she said with a scowl.

Lucius smirked. "Oh, I think you would have, quite terribly so."

Draco had the sudden desire to bury his head in his hands. "Do you have to be this way?"

His father raised an eyebrow at him and settled down on the couch. "Andromeda, I'll take Edward while we eat."
Andromeda gave Lucius the squirming baby and nearly snorted when he calmed down immediately, touching Lucius' hair with big eyes. "Careful, he might pull."

Draco sat down on the couch on the other side of the table. Hermione took the seat next to him and smiled at the sight of Lucius Malfoy cooing at a currently blue haired baby.

"So, did you read the Prophet today?" Hermione asked when they started eating.

Andromeda shook her head. "I'm afraid we were all rather busy this morning. Why? What's in it?"

Hermione grinned like the cat that got the canary. "They decided to investigate Rita Skeeter and she isn't allowed to publish anything until the investigation is over."

"Oh, well if that isn't good news!" Narcissa said with a smile. "I hope they send her to Azkaban."

Draco frowned. "I don't think the public would take it very well. Too many Death Eaters who again didn't have to go to Azkaban, and then Skeeter is sent there? They'll not be happy about that."

"But even if she isn't sent to prison, the trial will discredit her," Hermione pointed out. "She'll probably have to work really for anyone to believe her again."

His mother and Hermione started discussing possible charges, with his father mentioning comparable cases and how they were handled. But Draco couldn't join the debate. He was too nervous.

Finally Hermione drank the last sip of her tea and before she could refill the cup Draco spoke up. "Hermione, could I talk to you for a moment?"

She looked up, startled. "Yes, of course."

"Maybe outside?" Draco asked, uncomfortably aware of his parents eyes on him.

Hermione nodded and he stood up to go into the back garden to his favourite tree by the pond. After a moment's contemplation he conjured a blanket on the ground. He sat down and motioned for Hermione to join him.

"Draco, what's up?" she asked quietly when he didn't start talking.

Draco heaved a deep sigh. "I want to apologise. I need to. No, please. I need to get this out." Draco sent Hermione a small smile when she audibly closed her mouth. "Thank you. I...I was an utter arsehole to you for years. I hurt you, I mocked you, I didn't help you."

He shook his head to try and forget her screams for the moment. "I thought I was superior and had the right to do all that. But you rescued me. Twice. First when you grabbed me in the Vanishing Room and then when you kept me from getting executed by invoking the life debt. You probably saved me again when you decided to take over my defence. You saved me, even though I was, am, not deserving and I never once apologised."

"Draco-" Hermione whispered, but he shook his head again.

"Not done yet. I'm sorry for my behaviour over the years, there is no excuse. I'm sorry that I didn't do anything when Aunt Bella tortured you. I'm sorry that I took so fucking long to understand, to learn that I was wrong. I'm sorry that I took so long just to say sorry."
Hermione looked at him with big eyes, her hands clasped before her mouth. "Draco...I-, I don't know..." she trailed off, her eyes filling with tears.

Draco felt his own eyes starting to burn and he sniffed, trying and failing to keep his composure. "It's okay if you can't forgive me for all that stuff. But I needed to say it, you know?"

Hermione slowly and carefully reached her hand out to him, putting it on his shoulder and gently pulling him to her. "I forgive you, Draco. How couldn't I? You showed me how much you changed in the last few weeks." Her tears were freely falling from her eyes now.

"Why?" Draco whispered, hating how broken his voice sounded, a stark contrast to the sunny, warm Sunday afternoon.

"Because you worked for it," Hermione answered just as quietly, squeezing his shoulder. "Andromeda wouldn't have introduced you to Thomas if she didn't think that you got over the worst of your prejudice. You suggested going to Muggle London for ice cream as if it were the most normal thing to do!" Hermione smiled at him through her tears. "I won't pretend I didn't notice that you hadn't apologised before. But I understood. I knew you had to work through a lot of stuff first. I know that your upbringing and the upbringing of your friends influenced a lot of your actions. But I think you're starting to see past that, and that's the important part."

Draco stifled a sob but couldn't hold back the renewed tears. "Thank you. Thank you so, so much. You have no idea what this means to me."

She forgave him! After everything he did! After all those years of torment and barely concealed distaste she forgave him. Draco buried his head in his arms and startled only slightly when an arm snaked around his waist and Hermione scooted over to lean against him. She used her other hand to gently pet his hair while he sobbed like a little boy.

"Shh, that's it, let it all out," Hermione whispered right next to his ear, her voice soft and oh so gentle.

Draco lost track of the time, but when he looked up he felt his eyes burning and the dried tear tracks on his cheeks cracking. "I'm so sorry, Hermione."

"I know, and I forgive you," she said with a small smile. "I don't care who else does, I think you deserve forgiveness. You're making an effort to overcome and atone for your past, aren't you?"

Draco nodded wordlessly, looking over at her to meet her earnest look. "I am, I really am."

"Good, keep on doing that and others will forgive you in time," Hermione said, sounding a lot more certain than Draco felt. "Can I hug you?" She bit her lower lip, as if she wanted to take it back.

But before she could Draco nodded. He opened his arms and Hermione turned to envelope him in a warm hug.

"Thank you for your apology, it means a lot to me too," she murmured.

Draco held her close, unable to comprehend his luck and leaned his forehead against the crown of her head. They stayed like that for a while and Draco was rather startled when Hermione moved to sit up.

"I have to go," she said quietly with a small smile. "Theo's invited to the Weasley dinner and Ron asked me to come mediate."
"Is he worried that Theo will try and hex his family?" Draco asked, a sneer creeping into his voice.

"No," Hermione laughed. "He's worried his parents will treat Theo badly."

"Like he didn't do it for years," Draco groused, but it was lacking real heat.

"Which is exactly why he knows how his parents might react to a Death Eater," Hermione said, looking down on Draco's left arm. "I don't know why Ron cares, but I think he mostly wants to protect George from getting hurt."

"That sounds more like Weasley," Draco admitted. "But Theo is more likely to leave the moment he notices that he isn't welcome."

"But that would hurt George, would it not?" Hermione asked, getting up. "He'd hate for Theo to feel uncomfortable."

Draco had to concede her point and followed her back inside the house where she said goodbye to the rest of his family. Just when Hermione left through the floo Draco realised that he hadn't told her, that he and his parents would be moving to London soon. Apparently his parents were anxious to have their own home again and felt like they were starting to become a burden for Andromeda.

Draco thought Andromeda rather appreciated their help with Teddy and the chores around the house.

"What did you and Hermione talk about, it looked rather intense," Andromeda asked casually while levitating the rest of the scones and biscuits back into the kitchen.

Draco felt heat creeping into his cheeks. "I apologised to her."

"Oh, finally, I was starting to think the two of you would return to Hogwarts before you apologised," Andromeda commented lightly which elicited a very unladylike snort from his mother.

"Quite aptly put, Andromeda," Lucius drawled, gently bouncing Teddy on his knees. "Although my estimate was late August."

Draco felt himself grow irritated. "How lovely to hear that you all have such high opinions of me," he sneered, making to leave the house again.

"Draco, wait," Andromeda called, sending the china into the kitchen with an impatient flick of her wand and coming towards him. "That's not what I meant. I know you've changed, I know you like Hermione a lot. But I thought you'd need more time to come to terms with your past."

Draco sneered. "You can hardly call it 'coming to terms', I just apologised for being an arse to her. It doesn't mean I feel any better about it."

"That will come with time," Narcissa said quietly. She had remained silent so far. "Do not think I don't feel guilty about Andy had to go through. I could have changed her situation for the better earlier. I could've stayed in contact. I could have tried to protect Ted and Nymphadora and even Remus. Only time will help to deal with that. Only time will help you accept that you cannot change the past. It's not your fault that the world is how it is; it'd be only your fault if it stayed like this."

Draco nodded tersely, bidding his family a quiet goodbye and apparating away.
So...how did you like this apology? I'm a bit unsure about it, but reynadinepttr assured me it was good. Well, the next chapter won't be the Weasley dinner but a Christmas special, which isn't going to be very fluffy I'm afraid... I hope you're still enjoying this story despite its irregular updates because all your reviews mean the world to me!
Merry Christmas to everyone who celebrates!  
This is a Christmas special, because I felt like writing something for Christmas for this story. I have to warn you, this isn't very fluffy. It is quite angsty actually. Read with care!  
My lovely reynardinepttr took some time out of her own Christmas preparations to beta this, thanks for that!  
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

21st December 1997 21:14

Pansy worried her lip between her teeth - Draco and Theo should have been back an hour ago! She was sitting in front of the big fireplace in the common room, together with Blaise and the sister of a sixth year. The Death Eater students got the 'privilege' to use the common room floo to go to the revels.

"Pans, you're hurting me," Blaise said calmly, but he didn't let go of her hand. "They'll be back. They're both too precious as leverage to be killed."

"You really know how to cheer a girl up," Pansy grumbled, but she loosened her grip somewhat. "Sorry."

Blaise only shook his head and looked back down at his book. Even though he was turning pages periodically Pansy was certain that he hadn't read a word for over an hour.

Pansy tried to steer her thoughts away from her worry about the boys. She tried to think about anything else. But her mind always ended on one thought that she didn't even want to acknowledge: if the Dark Lord didn't exist, she wouldn't have to worry about her friends.

The Dark Lord wanted to cleanse their world of all those mudbloods who didn't even try to conform to their traditions and rules. He wanted to eliminate the danger they posed. It was a good and noble goal, but he seemed to have an awful aversion to actually using that damn brain of his to reach said goal.

Pansy thought she wasn't questioning the Dark Lord per se, because that could get you flogged even as a pureblood Slytherin; she was just questioning his methods. Which really weren't goal oriented at all. Sure, they banned mudbloods from Hogwarts, but that didn't stop them from having magic, did it? Pansy remembered something she had read for Care of Magical Creatures. That sometimes young wizards and witches tried to suppress their magic and that it turned them into a creature called an obscurus. What if that happened? They were said to be quite violent and vicious. Then wizardkind would be found for sure! And that meant torches and pitchforks at best…

"Pansy," Blaise's voice pulled her out of her thoughts just as the flames turned green and Theo stumbled out with the sixth year slung over his shoulder.
"Get Daphne, now!" he whisper-yelled, his voice rough.

Pansy immediately ran into the girls' dorms and got Daphne, who was best at healing charms and by now had a kit in her handbag that rivalled any healer's kit.

When they returned Draco still hadn't returned and Pansy was starting to panic. She offered to go to the kitchen and get broth and a light dinner for Theo since they had been called in the early afternoon.

"Don't get anything for Draco," Theo called after her. "He'll stay till the end of the holidays."

Pansy nodded curtly and left for the kitchens. But before she arrived there she had to go into an abandoned classroom and sit down on the dusty floor. Her heart was racing, and her hands shaking. She was gulping in huge breaths and still feeling like she couldn't get any oxygen. Her thoughts were tumbling wildly through her mind. Why was Draco staying? He hated the Manor now! Why did Theo sound like he went through multiple rounds of the Cruciatius? What happened to the sixth year? Why? Why? Why!

Pansy was so out of it that she didn't notice someone slipping into the classroom until they were kneeling in front of her.

"Parkinson, get it together," a sharp voice commanded. "You'll get yourself caught by the Carrows!"

Pansy looked up into the hard face of Susan Bones and nearly groaned. Of all the people…

"Good, I was afraid you'd gone insane," the other girl stated drily. "Whatever you're doing here, get out of Hufflepuff territory."

"I just wanted to go to the kitchens," Pansy found herself whispering. "They tortured him…"

Bones looked back at her sharply. "Why would you think I care what happens to you damn snakes? You got my family killed."

Pansy got angry so fast it surprised even her. "I did not. I'm seventeen, Bones! I was one year old when they got killed! I know you don't fucking care, otherwise we wouldn't have to fight on two fronts in this bloody war!" She glared at the Hufflepuff. Fair and kind…as if. "Now get out of my way, or I'll hex you into next year."

Bones only scoffed. "As if you could."

Pansy didn't even care anymore that she was antagonising the girl further but shot off a 'Strangulare' and 'Expelliarmus' before Bones could so much as move. Pansy caught the wand and put it down on the teacher's desk. She watched coldly as Bones was clawing at her neck.

"Please consider judging me only for my own actions, and not for actions of people who you think might be connected to me in some way."

Stalking out of the room she cancelled the spell with a flick of her wand and locked the door with a rather illegal locking spell.

Arriving in the kitchen Pansy had calmed down somewhat, but she was still fuming quietly. The house elves hurried to comply and offered her a tea while she waited, which she declined. Within ten minutes she was leaving the kitchen again, one bowl with broth and one with stew floating in front of her.
When she walked past the classroom the door was ajar, and Pansy was satisfied that Bones was at least not too stupid to break the locking spell.

Before Pansy re-entered the common room she took a deep, fortifying breath. It wouldn't do to seem in anyway agitated. Pansy quietly said the password, 'Reinheit', and stepped into the cavernous space that made up the common room.

The lake outside the floor length windows was calm and dark, no living being moving out there. Pansy liked watching the lake, especially late at night when the low common room lights didn't scare away the inhabitants. The merpeople weren't interested in humans, but the fish and sometimes tiny squids swam past.

Pansy stepped up to the big fireplace on the left side of the room, lowering the two bowls on the table. The sixth year was sitting, aided by his younger sister and nodded gratefully at her as he slowly started to eat the broth.

Theo motioned for her to sit down on his left side, the right already occupied by Blaise. Daphne was sitting on the table in front of him, moving her wand up and down his right leg.

"What happened, Theo?" Pansy whispered when she took in the amount of blood on his and the sixth years' clothes.

"The Dark Lord was very much displeased that we didn't like torturing a classmate," Theo hissed around clenched teeth. "They've snatched Lovegood, Morgana knows why, and Lyall didn't want to hurt her too badly. I tried to keep them from killing him. Father was disappointed."

Pansy pulled in a sharp breath. "What did Draco do?"

Theo laughed harshly. It sounded more like stones grating against metal and Pansy shivered. "Draco asked for Lovegood as his present for becoming a Death Eater. You should have seen the looks Dolohov sent him."

"Is that why he stayed? To protect Lovegood?" Blaise asked quietly, his usual aloof tone replaced by a harsh whisper. "Has he gone mental? They'll kill him before the end of Yule!"

"They can't hurt him too openly," Theo grinned, showing too many teeth and a manic glint in his eyes. "The Dark Lord is very pleased with dear Draco and has ordered us to leave him alone. After all Lovegood is a halfblood from an old line."

"What do they think he'll be doing with her?" Daphne asked, putting her wand away and giving Theo a few vials from her bag. It looked like a pain relieving potion, a calming draught and a Cruciatius counter.

"What do you think?" Theo asked, a new edge to his voice. "Imagine the worst and triple it."

Pansy swallowed heavily. "But he won't do it, right?"

Theo scoffed before swallowing the three potions in quick succession. "You know him, he's all talk. He'd never actually hurt Looney. I mean come on, he saved her."

"Don't call her that," Daphne said quietly. "She doesn't deserve it."

Theo seemed to deflate. "You're right, sorry," he said, grabbing for the bowl with stew. "This time was pretty intense. Thanks, Daph."
Daphne nodded and packed up her kit wordlessly. Ever since the start of term she hadn't talked much and Pansy knew for a fact that Daphne went to check in on Tracey at least once per night, whether the other girl had been hurt that day or not.

"Will you join us for the celebration in an hour?" Blaise asked Theo quietly when he put down the bowl.

"Sure," Theo nodded. "I wouldn't miss it. If only because you'll mangle the Old English so badly that you'll probably conjure a demon by accident if I'm not there."

A quick smile flitted over Blaise's face. "You're our saviour then."

"If you say so," Theo shrugged, his face an impassive mask.

"Really, we would prefer good luck for the new year over conjuring a demon," Pansy said mock-seriously. "Demons are always so demanding."

Pansy was dead tired by the time midnight finally rolled around. Mostly because she'd had the wonderful task of cleaning and setting up the location. Which was in the lowest level of the dungeons and only used once a year for the Yule ritual. Pansy didn't think that even the Hufflepuffs, who shared the dungeons with them, knew the room.

A few select Ravenclaws were invited every year, but no Hufflepuff or Gryffindor. Because the Yule ritual was forbidden.

It was old magic, blood bound and primal. If you weren't one-hundred percent comfortable with the ritual it could take your magic and your life.

Pansy shook her head vehemently. Theo was very good at the Old Magic. He wouldn't have offered to take over this year if he wasn't confident that he could do it.

Checking the altar and the athame on it, Pansy nodded to herself. She would never have the confidence these rituals demanded, but she knew how to prepare them properly.

Theo strolled in about five minutes after she had rearranged the things on the altar again. Pansy noted that his bored-and-arrogant mask was still firmly in place and wondered just what Nott Sr. had done to his son this time.

"Everything ready?" Theo asked quietly, hesitant voice at odds with his face.

"Yes, I think I cleaned the floor three times," Pansy said with a small smile. "There shouldn't be any magical residue left."

Theo nodded and sent her what passed as a smile for Theodore Nott and the twitch of a corner of his lip for anybody else.

The other upper year Slytherins and two Ravenclaws trickled in over the next fifteen minutes and once everyone was there, Theo started the Yule ritual.

Pansy watched as he carefully lit the wood in the fire basin behind the altar. As soon as the first log caught on fire Theo started chanting in Old English. And while Pansy didn't understand a word she felt the magic beneath her skin hum in response.

All the hardships of the year, all the fear, the pain and the apathy falling off her mind, Pansy's lips started to curve into a smile as she raised her hands to meet those of her neighbours. Daphne on her
left side seemed to be crying soundlessly, but smiled at the same time. Blaise had one of his rare true smiles dancing on his lips and in the corners of his eyes.

When Pansy's hands stopped inches from theirs she felt her magic starting to seep out of her palms, mingling with Daphne's and Blaise's.

Theo was still chanting, tracing runes on the floor with his wand and levitating a candle to every attendant. Pansy was impressed by the concentration he was displaying and admired Theo's strength. The circle was positively glowing by now and Pansy thought she had never seen a sight more beautiful.

The colour of magic had resisted more than once any and all description, as scholars tried to find the right words, even the right language to express its beauty.

Even knowing that, Pansy was surprised again. She conceded that it must be hard to describe a colour that was mostly experienced through magic and not through the eyes. Because while Pansy felt the magic she could only see the blazing light it emitted in the closed circle.

Theo started walking around the circle, speaking blessings for everyone and if he lingered a bit longer with Pansy and Blaise, added a sentence and an archaic rune, nobody would mention it.

With a last turn around the circle Theo led the fifth year closest to the altar over to the bowl, showing her how to nick her fingertip and let a droplet of blood fall into the small bowl. With a whisper from Theo the blood shimmered and the wound on the girl's finger closed.

This part of the ritual was the reason why they had to hide so deep under the castle to perform it. Blood magic was so very forbidden, that they could not chance to be even seen by one of the more rule abiding students, not to speak of the teachers.

When Dumbledore had still been alive only the sixth and seventh year Slytherins had been invited at all. But now that the old coot was gone they had opened the circle for the fifth years and interested Ravenclaws.

Theo, Blaise and Daphne had argued about that decision fiercely. They had only shut up when Pansy had pointed out that the current headmaster was a Slytherin himself, who would have taken part in the ritual in his own sixth and seventh year.

When it was Pansy's turn to drop blood into the little bowl she didn't hesitate and focussed on her wishes for the new year. She wished for peace, in whichever way it'd come. She wished for her friends to stop hurting. She wished for safety.

Theo whispered the closing formula to finish the spell on her and Pansy felt the magical rush as the spell settled into her. Her smile for Theo was so much more radiant than normal that she probably looked half demented, but Pansy couldn't bring herself to care.

She stepped back to the others and watched Daphne and Tracey whispering happily in one corner of the room. Pansy joined Millicent on the bench at the back of the room.

"Blessed Yule," Millicent said quietly when Pansy settled down next to her.

"Blessed solstice," Pansy answered with a small smile. She was not friends with Millicent, who preferred to hang out with Crabbe and Goyle when Malfoy wasn't around, but they had been sharing a dormitory for nearly seven years now.

Soon Theo finished the ritual, the last words, "Eádeg Iúla!" repeated by everyone as Theo emptied
the bowl with the blood into the fire.

The second rush of magic they received from that was much bigger and Pansy was very glad that she was sitting. She saw a few younger students sway a bit, trying to regain their balance.

Once the ritual itself was finished Daphne gave the house elves the signal to send up the feast they had prepared. It had many dishes that a normal Hogwarts feast would never present. Because tonight they'd be traditional.

Pansy grinned when she spotted hummus and pita, grabbing a plate and spooning a generous heap on it. The first taste was incredible, the house elves had managed to recreate her grandmother's recipe perfectly and Pansy felt all of three years old again. Another look around assured her that everyone was happily munching away.

Blaise was daintily eating small pieces of bread with olives and couscous, while Theo was tearing into his meatballs (What was the name again? K-something?) and Tracey was carefully ripping her Knödel open.

A sixth year girl of Asian descent was happily munching on something that looked like chicory, if Pansy wasn't mistaken. A boy from the same year was wildly gesturing with a stuffed wrap.

Pansy felt herself relax. This was how traditions and descent should be honoured. Together. Everybody as equals. She knew for a fact that she was going to have to fight Daphne for the hummus if she wanted another helping, because everybody was free to try other food. Pansy was wondering whether she would dare to try the chicory because while it smelled rather questionable it looked tasty enough for her to get curious.

Daphne came to stand next to her. "Is the hummus as good as last year?"

Pansy swallowed before answering. "I swear it's even better. How's your Shepherd's Pie?"

"Just like grandpa always made it," Daphne answered with a small, happy smile. "It's like I'm ten again."

"I'm glad this worked so well," Pansy said, hunting for the last bits of hummus on her plate. "I think I'm going to try the chicory next."

Daphne laughed quietly. "I had some when I was in Shanghai a few years ago, it tastes better than it smells, promise."

"I'll hold you to that," Pansy said, already making her way over to where the Chinese dish was. She struck up a friendly conversation with the girl and was positively surprised at the taste. Daphne was right, it tasted better than it smelled. When Pansy mentioned it, the girl laughed.

"Grandma always complains that British food stinks, I think you just have to be used to it," she answered with a wink and Pansy had to agree.

She continued down the table, trying new food and talking to the other Slytherins. This was an important chance to network and learn about other customs. It wouldn't do to seem ignorant, should she ever visit one of the many countries that were represented here.

Pansy thought it was rather fascinating how many there were. Even people like Theo, whose entire family has been living in England for centuries, still felt connected to their ancestors' country of origin.
Pansy had been to Syria a few times, to visit her family's old home, marvelling at the beauty of the mosaics and the gardens. She hadn't anticipated their splendour, knowing that Syria was mostly desert land.

Her great-aunt had taught her how to wrap a hijab and had taken her to the Friday prayer once. Pansy hadn't understood a word, but the sound of the language had motivated her to try and learn Syrian Arabic. But once she had started at Hogwarts she hadn't had time to continue her studies and by now she barely knew enough to understand her grandma.

Her grandma who had fled the second rise of Voldemort in the same summer. Her grandma who had returned to Syria. Pansy missed her and wished she could have sent Violet to go with her.

But as much as Pansy wanted to protect her little sister she knew that it wasn't in her power.

"You're looking glum, have some pizza bread with olives," Blaise basically shoved the thin slice with half an olive at her and Pansy took it before it could fall.

The bread reminded her a bit of pita with tomato sauce and the sharp tang of the olive rounded it nicely. "Thank you, Blaise."

"What were you thinking about?" Blaise asked quietly, helping himself to some pita and couscous. A combination Pansy would never understand but that he seemed to like. Strange guy.

"I was thinking about grandma and Violet," Pansy said quietly, snatching a German chocolate praline from the table.

"Your little sister? What about her?" Blaise asked, surprise colouring his voice.

"I wish I could protect her from all this," Pansy replied, trying not to sound too depressed. "It's her first year! She should be able to concentrate on school and not learn how to fake being under the Cruciatcus." Pansy was incredibly proud that her voice only broke on the last word.

Blaise put his hand on her shoulder. "Maybe you can convince your parents to send her to Beauxbatons for the rest of the year?"

Pansy shook her head, clenching her eyes shut. "I wrote Father in the first week, he said Beauxbatons won't accept transfers in the middle of the year."

"Merda," Blaise whispered, wrapping his arms around her in a hug.

Pansy buried her face in his shoulder. "I'm not going to sleep with you Zabini."

"Likewise, bella," Blaise answered with a soft chuckle. "I like you too much."

Pansy snorted but didn't answer. She finally stepped out of the embrace and gently blew her nose, glad that she had remembered to take a tissue with her.

They turned back to the others and a fifth year girl asked Pansy about the hummus. The rest of the night went off without a hitch, most of the food eaten and the rest sent back to the kitchens with compliments to the cooks.

It was closing in on three in the morning when Pansy finally crawled under her covers. She pulled out the shawl her grandma had gifted her before leaving England and buried her nose in it. It barely smelled of her anymore, but the soft fabric felt so much like her jida that Pansy could barely stifle the sob rising in her throat.
That night Pansy wished for the first time that there was no blood prejudice. She wished that all magical people could live as equals the way they had celebrated their ancestors equally this night.

Pansy would make mistakes. It would take her months to realise that her wish might come true, but only if she worked for it.

One fateful night she would know fear, fear for her life, for the life of her sister and her friends. And she would make her worst mistake.

Nevertheless that isn't the end of her wish for equality. One fall, one mistake doesn't define you.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked this little interlude. I certainly enjoyed writing it! Next chapter will be the family dinner at the Burrow. I look forward to your amazing reviews! Enjoy the holidays :)
Hello my dear readers! I hope you had a good start into the new year! All my love to reynardinepttr for her excellent beta work. Enjoy!

14th June 1998, 19:23

George was admittedly quite nervous when he apparated to the Burrow with Theo. Living at Nott Manor couldn't exactly be described as relaxing, but it was the closest he had gotten since the war had taken his twin. But now that he knew how the other half lived, George was suddenly very conscious of how the Burrow must look to someone like Theo. Somewhere along the way a Weasley had decided to make a former barn his home and extended it whenever more rooms were needed. There was so much magical power holding the house together and more or less upright that he could feel it when they crossed the wards that kept the house hidden from muggles.

A quick look over to Theo told him nothing and before George could ask his opinion, the front door opened to his mother trying to look welcoming.

In George's opinion she didn't have too much success with that since she didn't manage to conceal the frown tugging her lips down. But maybe he just noticed because she was his mother and George had known her for all his life.

"Hey Mum, I hope we aren't too late?" George asked her cordially when they were in talking distance.

"No, you're just right to help Percy with the tables," Molly said, her lips finally tugging up into a proper smile. "It's good to see you, George." She pulled him into a short hug and thankfully pretended not to feel him stiffen. "And you Theo, I'm glad you could come." That she said with a lot less warmth but she stretched her hand out nevertheless.

Theo carefully shook it. "I have to thank you for the invitation." George nearly snorted at the choice of words. "I'm very curious about George's childhood home."

Molly thankfully didn't seem to notice anything amiss and told them that Percy was around the back.

As soon as the door closed behind her Theo turned to George. "She really doesn't act like she's a Prewett." He sounded surprised.

"I did warn you," George said clapping him on the back. "Nice choice of words by the way."

Theo grinned. "Guessed you'd catch that."

They helped Percy set up the tables and soon Ginny came outside with the plates floating in front of her. She greeted Theo with a nod and a smile, but before she went back inside Ginny came over to them.
"Ron's bringing reinforcement, Hermione and Harry both will be here in a minute," Ginny said quietly, throwing a look over her shoulder to the open kitchen door.

"What about Bill and Fleur?" George asked, matching Ginny's tone.

"They're already here," Ginny answered. "Fleur's helping cook and Bill is off with Dad doing something or other."

"You mean hiding from your mum?" Theo asked faintly curious, a slight curl to his lips.

George grinned at the sharp humour. "Probably, quiet before the storm and all that."

Ginny snorted and Theo smiled innocently. "I wonder why they'd think there's going to be a storm, the sky is quite clear," he commented idly and George had to suppress the impulse to hug Theo. He'd gotten really good at ignoring that by now.

Ginny went back inside to collect the cutlery and Percy came over next. "Please tell me you're not going to blow up anything."

George looked at him with mock-hurt. "Why would you think I'd do such a thing?!"

"I don't know, maybe because you two seem to be the worst tricksters, especially when combined?" Percy commented drily, cleaning his glasses with his sleeve.

"You really do flatter us," Theo said sweetly. "But we're not going to blow anything up, promise."

"I wouldn't even believe you if you swore on your magic," Percy sighed heavily. "Do not think that I'm unaware of your mischief making at school, Theo."

Theo grinned sharply. "Whatever are you talking about? I was the poster boy for quiet composure!"

Percy raised his eyebrow at him and George had to bite his lip to keep from laughing. Granted, no one of the other house seemed to have known but Percy was living with Gemma Fawley, former Slytherin prefect.

"Well, let's just say I have my sources which say that you were nearly as bad as George and Fred, and much better at not getting caught," Percy said with superior smile.

George did not flinch at his twin's name. He did not. But when Theo's hand found his and squeezed it, George felt at least some of the tension drain out of him. He squeezed back and let go again.

Percy looked between them. "Be careful with that. Mum's having a good day, but Dad not so much."

George nodded mutely and was saved from having to say anything to that by Fleur's arrival.

The next thirty minutes they didn't have much time to talk. They were called in to help set the table with the food Molly and Fleur had cooked and George grinned at Theo's mounting surprise every time they were saddled with a new platter to take outside. Somewhere along the line Ron had arrived with Harry and Hermione and they had been immediately set to taking pitchers of pumpkin juice, butter beer and elf wine outside.

Only when they were finally sitting down at the table was George able to properly greet Ron and his friends. Hermione seemed to have had a very good day and Ron was talking excitedly about his
first raid.

After his second glass of elf wine Theo stopped him from topping up his glass, giving him the pumpkin juice pitcher instead. George rolled his eyes at him, but didn't complain. He was used to it by now, even if it was very infuriating that Theo got the elves on the case too. Cinny did not put up with any of his bullshit and Grank had spelled the wine cellar shut so that only an elf could enter it.

But since George wasn't drinking he noted who else was, and he was worried when he realised that his father, who was overall not a drinker, was on his third glass of elf wine and already turning quite red.

Percy had gotten quieter as the evening progressed, Bill was talking to Molly, and Fleur to Hermione and Ron (who finally had gotten over his reaction to her). Harry and Ginny were arguing about Quidditch and Theo seemed to be listening intently, but George was eighty percent certain that he was actually keeping an eye on George's father.

Which turned out to be a good idea when Arthur began talking, his words heavy with alcohol and prejudice.

"I don't understand it, you know," Arthur said to no one in particular, staring down into his glass. "Why'd they let anybody go? I mean…they were bloody wankers, the whole lot of them. Always so high and mighty with their backwards thinking. Feeling so much better because they're pure."

Theo flinched next to George and Molly hissed a scandalised "Arthur!" while Bill tried to take his father's glass away.

"Don't pretend like you're not thinking the same, Molly, I know you are," Arthur pointed his finger at his wife. "They stole our son and they got to bloody live while he's dead. What'd they think would happen, taking that fight to a school? D'you know how many of the children died? Twenty-six. Some of them weren't even seventeen yet. They died because those arseholes decided to take the war to a school!"

George suddenly realised that Theo had gone perfectly calm and composed, his face a mask of bored indifference. But under the table his hands were frantically checking his trouser pockets which could only mean one thing: he couldn't find his Calming Draught.

Before George could suggest leaving, Harry suddenly spoke up. "If you have to blame someone for involving children in this war, blame Dumbledore." Arthur did a double-take like he hadn't realised that he was surrounded by people.

"What are you saying Harry? Dumbledore would never-"

Harry didn't let Molly finish. "Dumbledore prepared me like a lamb for slaughter, he left me in an abusive home so I'd be starved for love and positive attention. And when I came to school he tested me with an obstacle course that, looking back, really was designed for me and my friends. Dumbledore was the one who gave the school the reputation of the safest place in Wizarding Britain and made it a strategically very important place."

Molly was gaping at Harry and Arthur seemed to be too confused to form full sentences.

It was Theo who spoke up in the stunned silence. "I see Pansy ranted to you about old Dumbles."

Harry flushed scarlet. "I- Yeah, but I also talked to Madam Longbottom when I was over at Neville's this week."
"But Harry, you can't mean that, Albus was such a great man," Molly trailed off helplessly looking around at her children for assistance.

It was Ron who spoke up, quietly and somewhat hesitantly. "Dumbledore did nothing to help Harry beyond preparing him to take down You-Know-Who, mum. It was Fred, George and me who got him out of that horrible house before second year. Harry asked Dumbledore more than once to get him out but he never did. Mum, I learned about blood wards recently. Even the wards on our house would have been able to give him the same protection."

Molly was left gaping at her youngest son and George suddenly felt very uncomfortable. Theo next to him was growing more frantic with every passing minute and he knew that he had to get them away now.

"I think I'll take a walk before dessert. Theo, are you coming?"

Theo looked up at him with a half-manic glint in his eyes and nodded mutely.

Nobody at the table reacted when they stood up and left, but when George turned back, Bill was watching him with serious eyes and Ginny nodded at him while she hurried off to the house. Hopefully she was getting Sober Up potion because George didn't think he could bear his father's drunkenness.

As soon as they were out of sight, George pulled Theo down to sit on the ground and pushed his head between his knees. Theo was excellent at covering up his panic attacks but over the course of the last two weeks George had learned to spot them from a mile away.

When Theo sat up again and leaned against George's side he half-hoped that this was it, just a little panic. But he still could feel the tension run through Theo's shoulders and his hands were clenched into fists.

"He's right, you know," Theo whispered, hiding his face in his knees. "I shouldn't be alive. They should have killed me, just like the others."

George shook his head. "No. Nobody deserves death for their actions. Especially so if those actions weren't their own choice."

"I hurt people, George." Theo's voice was a small and broken thing, so unlike his usual tone that for once George didn't resist wrapping the younger man in a hug.

"So did I," he said into Theo's dark hair. "Remember the Vanishing Cabinet? It was Fred and me who pushed Montague in there. We didn't know he'd go mad, but we damn well knew that it wouldn't be pleasant for him in any way."

"That's different," Theo insisted. "I hurt them because I was told to do so and I was too cowardly to stand up to them."

"There is no cowardice in self-preservation." George huffed and smiled a little. "I know many Gryffindors were raised to think that. But it's nonsense. Recklessness really shouldn't be celebrated so much."

"That's rich coming from you," Theo mumbled into his arms.

"I know what recklessness can lead to," George whispered around the knot in his throat. "It leads to children fighting a war because they think they have to. It leads to them dying in said war because they never learnt that it is okay to protect your own life. You protected and helped where you could
and that doesn't make you any less."

Theo turned so he was leaning against George's drawn up knees. "But I could have fought them. Isn't that the definition of cowardice, to do nothing even though you could?"

George didn't know. He wasn't even certain if he was qualified to answer that question, it was quite philosophical really. He only knew that he didn't want Theo to think that he deserved death because George knew those thoughts and where they could lead all too well. George was intimately familiar with thinking that it should have been him.

"The Wizengamot decided that your actions weren't even deserving of prison Theo," George said finally, loosening his grip somewhat so he could look Theo in the eye. "I think you did get a fair sentence. You made mistakes and you're atoning for them, that's how it is supposed to work."

Theo nodded but didn't say anything. George felt Theo's heartbeat slowly going back to a normal rate under his hands and was relieved. He really did not want to indulge Theo and give him the Calming Draught he probably craved. Another thing George had learned during the last two weeks – Theo was really unhealthily attached to the potion and he needed to speed up the development of the non-addictive version if George wanted to help him with that.

"I wanted to ask you something by the way," George started after a moment of silence. "I wanted to go to my old flat soon, get some equipment and some notes."

Theo nodded and turned his head to face him. "Sure, when did you want to go?"

George shrugged. "As soon as possible, before I lose my nerve again."

"How about tomorrow?" Theo asked, sitting up and fully turning to George, who had to let go off him in the process. "I wanted to go to Flourish and Blott's, see if they have the new publication about runic arrays in Turkistan."

"Sounds good," George nodded, feeling nervousness creep up to him.

"We probably should return to your family, before they send a search party," Theo said, standing up and reaching a hand down to help George up.

George just laughed and led the way back. Only when Theo let go of his hand shortly before they rounded the corner of the house George realised that he had still been holding it.

When they approached the table an obviously sober Arthur stood up and came to them, stretching his hand out to Theo. "I'm very sorry for my behaviour. It was very stupid and uncalled for and I hope you can forgive me, Theodore."

Theo stiffened slightly but took the outstretched hand at last. "I accept your apology, Mr Weasley. I don't think I ever gave you my condolences for the loss of your son. He was a brilliant mind taken from us far too soon, but neither his brilliance nor his bravery will ever be forgotten."

George sniffed a little. If he hadn't heard Theo say nearly the same thing to him a while back (if less stiffly formulated) he would have trouble believing it. (If George recalled the words correctly Theo had said something along the lines of 'It's a damn shame Fred's dead, he was brilliant and bloody brave.')

Arthur smiled a watery smile and nodded decisively before pulling Theo in for a hug. George cringed, he heard a sharp intake of breath to his left and saw Ginny step forward, one hand stretched out to their dad. But before either of them could intervene Arthur let go again and an
extremely flustered Theo stepped back to George's side.

"I'm sorry," George whispered, as his father turned away.

"No harm done," Theo replied with a smile that was far too broad to be real. Theo did not do broad smiles.

"Theodore, dear, I hope you're still staying for dessert?" Molly asked with a genuine smile and George really wondered if his parents deliberately botched all societal rules around Theo because he didn't remember them to be quite so oblivious around Fleur and Luna. First calling him by his first name without being invited to, then the hug and now calling him dear? Even George knew that was bad manners.

Theo answered that of course they'd stay for what looked like a dessert as delicious as the main course had been. George was once again reminded that Theo had learned diplomacy as a child, and more so after his mother died.

When they sat down Theo turned to Hermione and asked whether she happened to have a Calming Draught with her and George had to suppress a relieved sigh when she said she didn't have any.

But Molly overheard. "I should have some in the med kit in the kitchen, Ginny will you go and fetch it for me?"

Ginny looked like she might refuse and shot a short, worried look at George who just shrugged. With a sigh she accioed the potion and gave it to Theo.

"Thank you, Mrs Weasley," Theo said with one of his too broad smiles and George wished he could do more than just vow to finish the new Calming Draught.

They fell back into easier conversation over chocolate mousse and treacle tart. Arthur stayed away from the wine and told them about the rebuilding of Hogwarts that was apparently nearly finished - save for a corridor on seventh floor that would require the Unspeakables to repair. George really hoped that they couldn't save the ghastly tapestry with the ballet dancing trolls.

After they finished eating and most of the clean-up was done, they remained outside talking in smaller groups and George approached Hermione, leaving Theo to discuss ward breaking with Bill and Fleur. They were talking in French and George felt a bit left out, but he also needed to talk to Hermione about his anti-panic potion.

"Hermione, do you have a moment for me?"

"Of course, what is it?" Hermione readily followed him around the side of the house.

"I've been working on this potion and I was hoping you could help me with perfecting it," George explained, pulling out a vial of the prototype. "It's a variation of the Calming Draught commonly used to treat anxiety and panic attacks. But it's less addictive, or at least I hope so. This is still a prototype. I would love if you could look it over and tell me if you notice any major problems with it. I can send you the list of ingredients and my notes via owl if you want."

"Is it ready for human testing?" Hermione asked, taking the vial and holding it up against the fading sun.

"Probably, but I'd advise having a trained healer there to oversee the process."

"I think a lot of people could use this now. Do you plan to sell it in your shop?"
"I don't know yet," George admitted. "I just wanted to help Theo, but you're right, of course. Maybe I'll just sell the patent to a good apothecary who actually has the resources to produce it en masse."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "This is great idea, George."

"I just want to help," George said quietly, with a look over his shoulder as if he could see Theo from behind the house.

Chapter End Notes

So, Theo met the Weasley's and George is going to brave visiting his flat again. What did you like most about this chapter? What are you looking forward to?

Fair warning: the trauma related symptoms in our protagonists will get worse before they get better! Some will develop symptoms that are harder to stomach like suicide ideation, self-destructive habits and medication addiction. Some symptoms will continue to be barely noticeable thanks to unreliable narrators (Draco and Hermione for example) but will suddenly become obvious in hindsight.

Thank you for following along for this crazy story that was never supposed to be so long! I cherish each and every one of you :)
Consequences of Trauma

Chapter Notes

Hello my dear readers and welcome to a new installment of How To Torture Your Characters. Kidding, mostly.

As I said in the last chapter notes this story is going to get darker in terms of representing the consequences of severe (longtime) trauma. This chapter is one of the dark ones. There is hate speech that will remind you uncomfortably of reality. There is self-harm and disturbing nightmares. Stress induced anorexia nervosa. Paranoia. Developing medication addiction. Obsessive-compulsive behaviour. In that order - skip what you know isn't good for you.

All my betalove goes to reynardinepttr. I hope you enjoy this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

15th June 1998, 16:05

When Harry entered Diagon Alley through the courtyard behind the Leaky Cauldron he remembered the first time he saw the magical street. The sounds and colours had been nearly overwhelming with their difference to the muggle world he had then been used to.

A small smile played around Harry's lips when he set out for Gringotts, just like Hagrid and he had so many years ago. He passed shops with overflowing baskets presenting their goods to the passers-by, and properties with barred windows and 'Up for Rent - Floo Malloy's Real Estate' signs.

He was just past the boarded up windows of Weasleys' Wizarding Wheezes when someone called his name from the steps of Flourish and Blotts.

"George, Theo, good to see you!" Harry went over to the two of them with a smile.

"Likewise Harry, never mind that we saw you just yesterday," George said with a grin. "What are you up to on this lovely summer day?"

"I was going to Gringotts," Harry told them, stepping to the side to let someone past him and into the bookshop. "Arthur asked me yesterday if I ever found out what happened to Potter Manor, and Bill mentioned that my Gringotts representative should know."

George hmm'd thoughtfully but before any of them could react, they heard a hissed 'Death Eater scum' from a passing witch. Theo flinched and George turned around to look after the witch who was already hurrying away.

"Honestly, not even brave enough to say it to my face," Theo tried to joke, but even Harry could see that he was shaken.

"How often does that happen when you go out?" Harry asked, frowning.

"Let's just say she wasn't the first today and there are reasons why I prefer Owl Order," Theo answered nonchalantly, apparently having caught himself again.
"It's really annoying and he won't let me hex them," George said with a dark expression.

Harry sighed. "Well, violence shouldn't be the answer after all. But I know what you mean, Pansy's the same. She'd rather hide in the muggle world than fight this."

"We can't all be the Gryffindor hero," Theo said quietly.

"But you could have damn well tried, young man," a middle-aged witch suddenly materialising beside them said haughtily. "I don't believe this wish-wash about you being a child. Look at Mr Potter here, he was just as much a child and he fought You-Know-Who ever since he was eleven!"

Harry bristled. "So I was groomed to fight Voldemort. That doesn't exactly make it better."

"Nonsense, you just did what was right," a portly older man in robes of an eye-watering purple said, filled with self-importance. "This one should have done the same. It's not like he couldn't have fought back, I'm sure old Nott taught him enough."

"Eh, it's in his blood to be a mean little bully, he couldn't have done better," said a young man who seemed to be with Purple Robes with a sneer worthy of Draco Malfoy himself.

Harry would later say that it was that last comment that had him snap and cause a scene in the middle of Diagon Alley. But it really was the echo of Aunt Marge's voice, of the Dursley's comments about him for so many years - and the way Theo just took it, a resigned look in his eyes. Because Harry remembered that look staring back at him many years and many a summer whenever his eyes fell on a reflective surface.

For now he turned on the small crowd in front of them.

"So you're so much better? Why? Did you fight in the Battle of Hogwarts? Because I don't remember seeing you there. Did you harbour fugitives in your home? Did you fight alongside the Order of the Phoenix? Did you step in front of a Death Eater and told them that they won't win this fight, this battle, this war? Or did you just look away when Snatchers came knocking on your neighbour's door? Did you look away when innocent people got rounded up and sent to Azkaban?"

Harry relished in the scared and scandalised looks on the faces of the crowd. He ignored the photographer, he couldn't care less if this ended up on the front page of the Daily Prophet. It had to be said.

"My boy, certainly you aren't saying that we supported them," the portly man said with a genial laugh. "Why would-"

Harry didn't let him finish. "No. I'm saying you didn't actively fight him. I don't care about your reasons. I don't even really care that you didn't fight. But your damn hypocrisy makes me sick. This is not what I fought for. This isn't what my friends and school mates and fellows in the Order fought and sometimes even died for." Harry silenced the middle-aged witch with a glare. "You don't even dare to speak his name and yet you judge those who didn't dare fight him."

"Harry, please, it's okay," Theo said quietly behind him.

"It really isn't," Harry said, deflating. "Let's go, I'm sick of these people."

Harry pushed his way through the stunned crowd, George and Theo following in his wake. He saw the familiar jet of light from the 'Petrificus Totalus' heading for Theo and while turning around cast 'Protego'. 
He turned to the young man who still held his wand in his hand. Harry cast the Tickling Hex and his own Petrificus in quick succession, leaving the man unable to move. He then glared at the crowd and grabbed George and Theo to pull them away before someone could get the brilliant idea to use a more harmful curse on them.

**16th June 1998, 8:36**

Draco woke up to his mark stained deep black and writhing on his left arm. The snake uncurled and started to move up his arm, impossibly becoming bigger and longer. Draco tried to grab it, snatch it away from his arm because he knew. He knew it would kill him, strangle him in his own bed. But each time he grabbed at it, it slithered out of the way, wrapping tighter and tighter around his arm. Draco desperately raked his fingers over his own flesh trying to get a hold of the slippery animal. With each pass it got stronger, pressing on his arm until it started burning in sharp pain. The snake was still slithering up his arm, black eyes fixed on Draco's face.

Just as the snake closed around his neck his eyes flew open a second time, his own screams echoing in his ears.

Draco shot into a sitting position, looking down at himself and seeing…blood. No black snake was curling around his arm, but there were deep scratches all across his left arm going all the way up to his shoulder.

With shaking legs Draco got up out of his bed and to the mirror at the wardrobe door. His left arm was a bloody mess and there was a single line of red starting behind his left ear and going all the way down to his collarbone. His right hand was red with blood too but seemed unharmed beyond its usual bruises across the knuckles.

Sitting down happened too fast for Draco to notice and he laboured to get his breathing under control again. When he felt like he wasn't going to pass out on the way downstairs, Draco got up. He really hoped that Andromeda had Essence of Dittany in the medicine drawer. Because he wasn't sure whether the healing charm he knew would work on wounds this big.

Draco resolutely did not look at his arm until he was standing in the kitchen and rinsed it over the sink.

"Oh gods, Draco! What happened?"

Draco slowly turned around to see his aunt standing in the kitchen doorway, Teddy happily gurgling away in her arms. She turned sharply and left only to return with a raised wand, but without the baby, seconds later.

Hoping to cover up his flinch Draco turned back to the sink. "Had a nightmare."

Andromeda didn't say anything, but got to work helping him to clean the wounds. She worked a lot faster than he did so he left her to it. By the time he remembered that he hadn't glamoured his knuckles yet it was already too late.

"Draco, what's this?" Andromeda whispered sharply, raising his left hand into the sunlight streaming in through the kitchen window.

"Nothing."

"It looks more like three weeks of bruises in varying states of healing."
"Maybe."

"Draco, look at me."

Draco looked up into the grey eyes of his aunt, so different from her sisters'. They looked incredibly sad.

"Why don't you heal them? Why do you glamour them?"

Draco shrugged. "Feels right."

"This is why you keep brushing over your knuckles, isn't it? Is it to feel the pain or to reapply the glamour?"

"Both."

Andromeda sighed deeply, healing the bruises littering his hands with a gentle brush of her wand. "This isn't healthy."

"I know."

"Why?"

Draco didn't have an answer that wouldn't be too honest. Because it felt good. Because he deserved pain. Because it made his thoughts slow down. She wouldn't understand.

"It centres you, doesn't it? Gives you something to hold onto," Andromeda whispered while she gently healed the bruises on his right hand too.

Draco looked up at her, startled. "How?"

Andromeda smiled sadly. "I was young once, with too much pressure and too much guilt. Let me tell you something. Your brain lies. It doesn't make anything better. The problems are still there and the only thing to make them bearable is to work on making them go away."

"But I can't do anything," Draco whispered, his voice as weak as his knees.

"Yes, you can," Andromeda said with emphasis. She looked him in the eyes and smiled. "Yes, you can. You apologised to Hermione. That felt good, didn't it?" Draco nodded. "You can do more. You can learn to shut the bad thoughts up without hurting yourself. It takes practice, but I promise it works."

Draco felt tears build in his eyes. "I tried. I tried Occlumency, I tried not to listen, but they won't shut up!"

"Shoving them away only works for small things and never for long," Andromeda said as she applied the Dittany to his scratches. "This is about bringing logical arguments, looking at it from a different perspective or proving the bad thoughts wrong out of pure spite."

Draco flinched at the bite of the Dittany and watched as the cuts closed. "Can you show me?"

"I will," Andromeda promised with a kind smile.

17th June 1998, 9:23
Hermione honestly wondered whether she should cancel breakfast with her parents. They agreed to meet in St Pancras where their favourite breakfast spot had been whenever they were in London. Especially on September 1st.

When Hermione entered the small restaurant she was immediately assaulted by the smell of frying bacon, eggs and beans. By now she was somewhat prepared for the roll of nausea when she even thought about eating any of that, and she ignored it with practiced ease. Hermione had noticed that she could eat small portions of most food without throwing up, so she kept to that, hoping that nobody would notice.

"Minnie, over here," her mother called from a table in the back corner.

Hermione smiled hesitantly at them and went over. They looked at ease and were smiling a bit more readily than they had on Sunday.

"We already ordered your favourite," her father told Hermione.

"Thank you, dad," she said with a smile, hoping that the nausea at the thought of food didn't show on her face.

"So, we've been talking," Helen started when the food and tea had arrived. "We will return to Australia to put some things in order. Our patients will need to either get transferred or get their treatments before we close up. We'll have to sell the house and the car, and so on and so forth. It should take half a year at the absolute maximum. Two months are more likely."

Hermione nodded thoughtfully, carefully swallowing the bite of beans and chasing it with a sip of her tea. The beans were a bit too savoury but she didn't want to annoy her parents. "Should I prepare the house for late August then?"

"No, no," Richard said with a wave. "We'll come over for a week to prepare everything. We have a lot of new things that we'll need to make space for."

"Alright, but please tell me if I can help in any way," Hermione said earnestly, smiling in turn at her parents.

"Of course, love," her mum said, putting her hand on Hermione's. "So, what are you doing the rest of the week?"

Hermione squeezed her mother's hand gratefully. "I'll be working with a furniture restoration team to see which furniture in Grimmauld Place is salvageable and which isn't. They're coming over tomorrow morning and I want to clean a bit of the clutter away before they arrive."

"Oh, I hope that goes well," Richard said with surprise. "Friends of ours had their grandmother's armchair restored because she refused to have a new one bought - which would have been quite a lot cheaper."

Hermione snorted, cautiously taking a bite of her eggs. At least they were scrambled. "We'll probably get a pity discount when they see what we've been dealing with."

"That bad?" Hermione's mum asked with a smile.

"The only thing I actually really trust to survive the next five years is the kitchen table," Hermione explained, taking another sip of her tea to cover the taste of the eggs. "And that's only because that thing is solid oak and Kreacher assured me that it has been in the kitchen since the 1700s."
Richard outright laughed at that and Helen snorted like Hermione had. "Alright, I see your point."

"Maybe we could come visit you again before we leave?" Helen asked somewhat hesitantly.

Hermione nodded enthusiastically. "That would be wonderful. I'd really like to show you the house. We put so much work in it, you know."

"Maybe we could come by on Friday afternoon?" Richard asked, leaning forward. "We fly very early on Sunday, so it'd be best if we had most of Saturday to pack and sleep."

"Yes, that should work," Hermione said, taking what she felt would be her last bite, even if her plate was still halfway full. "How about two o'clock?"

"Yes, that's perfect," Hermione's mother said with a broad smile.

"Are you full already?" her father asked in surprise when she set down her cutlery.

"Yes, I don't eat as much in the morning," Hermione said easily, willing them to believe the lie.

"Noted," her father said with a smile and her mother nodded.

Hermione felt awful for lying to them, but they couldn't know the truth. Over the last weeks she had lost all appetite and she barely even felt hungry at all. Of course Hermione knew that it couldn't be healthy. She mostly blamed it on the stress of the trials and how busy she had been, working on the house and with the Malfoys. It also didn't help that she got nauseous even thinking about food and that she didn't like to eat strongly flavoured foods anymore.

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17th June 1998, 20:04

Ron didn't understand why Concealment and Stealth had to start at six pm. Why couldn't it take place during the day like all the other courses? It was smack in the middle of dinner time and while Ron wasn't particularly hungry before the course began, he was starving by the end of it. He wasn't even the only who had inadvertently given away their position by the growling of their stomach.

Alice had caught a Stunner for a particularly loud request for food from her body. As if she had any control over that, seriously!

Suddenly Ron noticed a shadow out of the corner of his eye. He kept walking without faltering, but his awareness of his surroundings grew exponentially. Ron had taken the stairs because he didn't feel like standing squeezed in a lift with all his fellow Auror trainees.

A look over his shoulder as he was rounding a corner had the shadow melting away. But when Ron hesitated behind the corner he thought he heard soft footsteps approaching from the corridor he had just left.

Jumping from his hiding place, his wand drawn and in a perfect duel position, Ron turned to find the hall empty. He cast a Lumos Maxima, but it didn't reveal anyone crouching in the shadows.

With a shrug Ron turned to walk away. But he couldn't shake the feeling that someone was following him through the empty, echoing corridors.

Ron arrived at the lifts at a jog and slipped into the left one which was just leaving, only one older wizard on it. When he looked back into the empty room Ron wondered whether there really had been anyone. And why should they follow him? Maybe one of the other trainees trying out the
skills they were learning? But Ron was pretty sure that everyone but him had gotten on the other lift.

Leaving the lift in the atrium, Ron cast a cursory glance around, but nobody caught his eye and he left for the floo with another shrug.

Later that night when he was just getting ready for bed, Ron thought of Alastor Moody and his paranoia. He shook his head to clear it of the disconcerting thought and went to sleep. When he woke up Ron decided to ask George if it would be possible to attach the Hominum Revelio Charm to a wrist band or something similar; that would certainly be helpful on missions.

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**18th June 1998, 11:43**

Theo stared down at the fifteen vials on his bed spread. That was all that was left of his stash after George had decided to confiscate half of it so Theo wouldn't overdose one day.

It was probably fair. After all, Theo had made sure that George could only drink when he was with him and he didn't allow his friend more than two glasses at a time. But this…fifteen vials would barely get him through the next week and George had said he should be fine for two! Theo was aware that one was only supposed to take a vial per day at the maximum, but he hadn't survived with a vial a day since March.

Theo cursed under his breath. He could of course order more Calming Draught via owl, but what if George found it and took it too?

Maybe if he hid it? George surely wouldn't search his room and Theo knew a few subjects in the library that George wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole. Yes, that could work. He'd order a new batch of thirty vials and hide it so he wouldn't have to rely on George.

He'd have to be careful so George wouldn't see him taking more than one vial a day. Maybe he could take it mid-morning so that George thought it would last most of the day. Maybe Theo would be able to convince him that he couldn't sleep without the Draught (which wasn't far from the truth). Maybe he'd understand then.

Resolve hardened, Theo began scouring his room for hiding places were the vials wouldn't be found by the elves (who were on George's side, the traitors) or by George himself. It was harder than he would have thought to find a proper place but in the end he had hidden all but three vials which would last him till his order arrived.

Theo was careful never to order from the same apothecary in too quick a succession, since that could get him banned from ordering Calming Draught at all and that would be a disaster. He doubted that Draco'd be happy to order for him and Pansy had to be careful too. Although Theo assumed that she didn't take as much as he did.

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**19th June 1998, 22:37**

Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.

Pansy settled down in bed, taking her book out to read a bit. She managed to get through two full paragraphs, which was a record, before she had to put her book aside.

Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.
A quiet 'Aguamenti' filled her glass with water and she drank it, settling back into her cushions. When the glass was empty she had managed to read one paragraph. It was the same one as before.

Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.

Maybe she should go to the bathroom. Pansy carefully didn't look at her mirror as she rinsed her hands, carefully distributing the soap between her fingers. Clean, she went back to her room and sat down on her bed.

Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.

Four times. Maybe she could go to sleep now. But just as her head hit the pillow the thin, scared voice at the back of her head questioned whether the door was really locked, her windows really closed.

Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.

Oh gods forsaken spirits! This really got annoying the fifth time. But even before Pansy had fully settled under her blankets the thoughts came back. "Check the door, Pansy! Is the window locked, Pansy?"

Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.

Six times had to be a new record even for her. It wasn't as if she could shake her sister's scared voice anyway, but normally she got quiet enough to ignore after checking four times. Not today it seemed.

Because Pansy got up to check her lock. Engaged. To check the windows. Locked.

Frustrated Pansy blew out her breath through her nose and unlocked the door. She stepped out into the hall, wand firmly in her hand and quickly walked down two doors to reach her sister's room.

Entering, she found Violet asleep, but just as she wanted to close the door she heard a sleepy "Pansy?"

"It's okay, Vy, go back to sleep," Pansy whispered.

But Violet sat up in her bed, ever so inquisitive. "Is something wrong, Pans?"

With a small sigh Pansy stepped inside her sister's room and closed the door behind her. "No, Vy, I just wanted to check on you."

Violet held her arms out and Pansy couldn't resist hugging her little sister. "I'm fine, Pansy, promise."

"I know, Vy, I know," Pansy whispered, hating how small her voice sounded and how she had to fight her tears as she breathed in the comforting smell of Violet.

"Do you want to sleep here?" Violet asked quietly, carefully patting her big sister's back.

Pansy pulled back, she was just about to refuse when she saw how big Violet's eyes were. She had scared her sister, again. Pansy had vowed to do everything in her power to never let Violet be scared by anything ever again.

"I'd like that," she answered and Violet scooted over so Pansy could climb in.
"Good night, Pansy," Violet whispered with a small smile, barely visible in the low light.

"Good night, Violet," Pansy answered just as quietly.

Her sister fell back asleep quickly, but Pansy couldn't help but wonder if it shouldn't be the other way around. If it wasn't Pansy who should calm Violet down, offer space in her bed so her sister could sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry? At least a bit. I know this was really heavy. I'm struggling with stress induced anorexia and have been clean from self-harm for about four months. But I also think it needs to be addressed, because I didn't know why I couldn't eat for the longest time. I never consciously decided to stop eating or cut down on food to get thin...

I promise the next chapter will be a lot lighter, although I don't know whether I'll get it up within the week again! The summer solstice is coming and we'll be seeing a lot of people in that chapter! Now go read something fluffy and have a relaxed week ;)}
Hello everyone who is still reading!
I'm sorry that I only mange to update now, sadly mental health plus a chapter that did not want to be written was a very bad combination. But yesterday the block finally broke and my dear reynardinepttr quickly betaed it for you guys!
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

21st June 1998, 22:04

Draco had grown up in Wiltshire and he still marvelled at how late it stayed light in Scotland at this time of the year. Only now was the sun setting. To him the summer solstice had been barely noticeable when he was a child, but here in the most northern part of Scotland it was quite obvious.

His parents stepped up to either side of him as they would usually do when they were out - before the war. Now it was again important to present a united front, if for another reason entirely.

Andromeda walked past them, Teddy securely held on her hip. "Are you coming?"

"Of course, sister," Narcissa answered easily.

Draco offered his mother his arm and they started up the winding way to Hogwarts Castle. It looked much better than the last time he had seen it. The towers had been re-erected, the windows repaired and the statues had returned to their places on the facade.

There were some changes though. For example the four main towers of the castle were now flying the colours of the Hogwarts houses. The windows in the Great Hall seemed to be bigger now and what Draco thought must be the potions wing in the dungeons was no longer hidden by a mass of rock. They would have a good view over the lake during class now.

The grounds had gone through some changes too. There was a new grove of trees near the Black Lake, and where the Whomping Willow had once been, there was now a small building of stone with a small tower whose tip was crowned with a metal cross sparkling in the setting sun.

The hut of the groundskeeper had been rebuilt and looked sturdier and more suited to housing a half-giant. Draco sneered at the thought of the bumbling idiot they had made Professor in his third year. He might be kind enough to Hermione and her friends but Draco doubted he'd ever have even one sympathetic feeling towards Hagrid.

Finally his gaze reached the Quidditch pitch, or rather what had once been the Quidditch pitch.

"Why is there a bloody henge where the Quidditch pitch should be?" Draco demanded, turning instinctively to his father.

Lucius only shrugged, his eyes fixed on the building with the cross and his expression was quite dark. "Andromeda dear, do you have an explanation for that chapel on these grounds?"
Draco raised his eyebrows at the venomous sound of the word 'chapel', it sounded as if it had personally insulted his father.

"Many of the muggleborn and halfblood students were raised Christian," Andromeda said, falling back to Lucius' other side. "I imagine they were trying to create places of remembrance for the most important religions within the student body. Hence the chapel, the henge and the grove."

Lucius scoffed. "Never mind the deep-seated hatred the Christian church has for our kind. Typical."

Draco understood then the dark expression on his father's face. He found himself silently agreeing. Their notoriously bad relationship with the Church certainly made the decision to have a chapel so prominently on school grounds seem rather...strange.

"At least they remembered to include the Old Gods too," Narcissa pointed out, squeezing Draco's arm. "I know not many outside Slytherin house still worship them openly."

"I wonder where they put the Quidditch pitch though," Andromeda mused, looking over the grounds. "There are only mountains on the other side of the castle."

"I believe Headmistress McGonagall would never allow them to remove it completely," Lucius said with a knowing smirk. "She is quite, well, invested in the sport after all."

Draco grinned at the understatement. He had once seen McGonagall and Snape get into a glorious fight over an especially tense Quidditch game in second year. Nearly all the present Slytherins had betted that Snape would lose his temper and hex McGonagall first. But sadly they had been interrupted by a few fifth year Ravenclaws who were loudly debating about whether or not Love Potions should be forbidden to be sold, let alone taught.

Soon they reached the Entrance Hall where many other people were already waiting. After a short moment of consideration the Malfoys and Andromeda joined the Parkinsons and the Bulstrodes who were standing slightly apart from everyone else, to the left side under the House point hourglasses.

"Lucius, it's good to see you," Cassius greeted them warmly. His wife Posy hugged Narcissa and greeted Andromeda with a handshake. The women stepped to the side to converse in hushed tones.

Draco's eyes fell on Violet, who was standing slightly behind her bigger sister, keeping her back to the wall. When Pansy stepped forward to greet Draco with a kiss in the air next to his cheek Violet made a motion as if to follow.

"Good evening, Violet," Draco said with a soft smile, stepping around Pansy to bow slightly in front of her sister.

"Good evening, Draco," Violet answered, her voice barely above a whisper and her eyes flitting about.

Draco swallowed down the urge to ask her if she was alright, because quite obviously she wasn't. He looked up at Pansy and saw the pain flash through her eyes.

Millicent chose that moment to come over to them. "Hello Draco."

Draco looked up at his classmate and barely recognised her. Millicent had always been built strong and broad, but now she looked like she hadn't properly eaten or slept in ages – she looked more like a ghost than a girl.
"Millie, hey, good to see you," Draco said, fully turning to her. "I'm glad you came."

Millie's lips twitched into some semblance of a smile. "I'm sorry I couldn't be there for your birthday, but I couldn't bear..."

Draco slowly put a hand on her shoulder. "I'm so sorry that we couldn't be there for you."

Millie shook her head. She looked up at him with too old eyes. "It's alright, I know you couldn't." She hesitated for a moment. "Did you mourn them? Vince and Greg, I mean," Millie whispered, looking over her shoulder as if to check for someone watching them.

Draco felt put on the spot. That first horrible night in the holding cell he had decided not to show any weakness to the guards, which had included properly mourning his, well, friends. And after they had been out...he had forgotten.

Millie must have seen his thoughts on his face because she smiled sadly. "It's okay, Draco."

"It really isn't," Draco whispered hoarsely. "They were always loyal to me and...and I forgot them." He looked at Millie in horror. "How could I forget them?"

Millie shrugged. "I can't answer that. But...maybe you can include them in your prayers tonight."

Draco watched as Millie turned and walked back to her parents and he slowly sunk down to sit with his back pressed against the wall. He had forgotten to mourn Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle. His most stalwart friends. They had died as Death Eaters, and while Draco could not deny their enjoyment of cruelty that wasn't an acceptable reason for him not to mourn them.

"Draco, love, are you alright?" Andromeda's face was suddenly hovering in front of him, her brows drawn together in concern.

"I forgot to mourn them," Draco whispered numbly. Now that he thought about it, it wasn't just Vince and Greg either. He hadn't mourned anyone who had died in the battle, neither good nor bad. How arrogant, how selfish, how self-centred could he be to forget?

Andromeda's frown deepened. "Who did you forget to mourn?"

"Everyone." Draco looked up into her face. "I didn't mourn a single person. I forgot."

Andromeda looked surprised. "Did you not mourn them when you started living at my house? I understand why you wouldn't want to in the cells of course."

Draco shook his head. "I pushed it so far out of my mind..." He trailed off, unsure whether he should continue at all. Draco wished he could still feel the pain from his wounded knuckles, but Andromeda had healed them and he hadn't dared to re-injure them yet.

Andromeda sighed and sat down next to him. "Draco, love, tell me: Do you think they deserved to be mourned? The Death Eaters you knew? Your schoolmates who fought against them?"

Draco tensed, looking down at his clenched fists. "Of course, they...they were human. They were somebody's brother, sister, mother, father...But. It doesn't change that I forgot."

"I think it does," Andromeda said with a gentle smile, taking his hand. "You have been through so much, struggling with so much. Do you think you'd have had the mental strength to mourn all those who died?"
"What do you mean?" Draco frowned and chanced a glance at his aunt, who was sitting on the dirty floor in her solstice robes as if she had no care in the world.

"Remember how tired you were in the beginning whenever you had to interact with anyone who wasn't family?" Andromeda asked, squeezing his hand gently.

Draco nodded, still trying to puzzle out what his aunt meant.

"Social interaction takes mental strength," Andromeda explained. "And in the beginning you barely had the energy to do that. But you're getting better by the day now. Maybe now you're ready to start mourning."

Draco looked down at his aunt's hand for a long moment. He still thought it was rather selfish of him not to mourn his friends but maybe she was right and just didn't have the strength at first. He remembered how tired he had been after Hermione, Potter and Weasley had been over for the first time as opposed to yesterday after the Quidditch game Blaise and Ginny had given him tickets for. He had met Potter and Weasley there and was suddenly very glad that he had taken Pansy along and not Theo, even though that meant that Pansy decided they had to sit together.

To be honest Draco had been quite fascinated to see Pansy with Potter and he suddenly understood what Hermione had been on about – they were truly sickeningly cute together.

"Draco?" Andromeda asked, softly poking his arm. "Did you fall asleep?"

"No, sorry, I just got distracted by a thought," Draco said with a small smile. "Maybe you're right. I'll include Vince and Greg in my prayers today, and maybe my cousin even if I didn't really know her."

Andromeda nodded encouragingly and withdrew her hand slowly. "That sounds like a good plan to me."

They stood up and rejoined the group of former Slytherins. Many of the children and teenagers who had arrived in the meantime had only one parent or grandparent with them and all were sending wary looks towards the other occupants of the room.

Draco looked around at the familiar faces of Slytherin house and nodded at Daphne and Astoria when they caught his eyes. Tracey stood with them and Draco once again noticed how different she looked in comparison to the girl she had been before the war.

Suddenly Draco became aware of somebody approaching him from his right side and turned to find Hermione coming over with Potter, Weaslebee and Weaselette in tow. Ginny just grinned at him and went to talk to Theo and George who must have arrived while Draco was having his little breakdown. Potter and the remaining Weasley veered off to greet Andromeda and Teddy, and Hermione came to stand next to him, her shoulder brushing his.

"I'm glad you came," she said quietly. "I never saw anything like this. I've only ever read about these rituals."

Draco grinned. "Well, had you been in Slytherin or Ravenclaw you probably would have gotten invited along sooner or later."

Hermione turned to gape at him. "But they're illegal! I read there are wards on Hogwarts Castle that prevent these rituals from being done and that only because all the wards fell during the Battle it can and has to be done now to re-erect the oldest wards and cleanse the castle!"
Draco chuckled, he noticed Theo coming over, George, Ginny, Luna and Blaise in his tow. "Theo, my good friend, would you explain the concept of rule-breaking and ward-circumventing to dearest Granger here?" he called with a teasing smile to Hermione.

Surprisingly the witch blushed, her brown cheeks darkening noticeably. "Oh shut up, Draco. I simply wanted to know how you did it."

Luna smiled at Hermione. "It's good to hear that you learned to open your mind, Hermione. There is just so much to know."

Draco felt Hermione stiffen beside him. "There is a difference between open-mindedness and naïveté."

Draco winced and decided to intervene. "Let's not get off the subject. We were talking about how Slytherins and Ravenclaws can take part in such rituals."

"Well, I think since Hermione is neither one nor the other we cannot divulge the secret," Theo said with a wink. "I didn't even tell George, no matter how much he begged."

"I didn't beg!" George exclaimed indignantly.

"No, that's right, you tried to bribe me with the secret to the Portable Swamp." Theo grinned at George and Draco noticed that there was something new there, something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

Suddenly Hermione went on her tip-toes and whispered into his ear. "Don't you think they look really happy together?"

Draco nodded subtly and turned his head so she would hear him when he answered. "But something changed, I think. There's something more there."

Hermione nodded and smiled, settling back down. But before Draco could compliment her on the beautiful, burnt orange robes she wore, a magically amplified voice interrupted any conversation.

"Good evening! Thank you all for coming here on this Midsummer Night and choosing to celebrate it with us!"

Professor Babbling continued. "As many of you already know the wards of Hogwarts fell during the last battle against the Death Eaters and Lord Voldemort. Many of those wards were over a thousand years old and done with magic that is either outlawed or forgotten nowadays. And then there is all that Dark magic polluting those spells that keep the castle in one piece." Babbling stopped to take a deep breath. "Professors Sinistra, McGonagall and Firenze joined me in the task of coming up with a ritual that will not only allow us to cleanse Hogwarts of any lingering Dark magic, but also re-erect the wards. But not as they were before. We decided that some parts had to be revised. Minerva, do you want to explain our decisions?"

McGonagall nodded and stepped forward, also amplifying her voice. "In accordance with the Interim Minister of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and with the unanimous vote from the Wizengamot, we decided not to re-erect the wards that prevented the rituals for the Old Gods. Additionally there will be a revision of the anti-muggle wards that will allow parents of Muggleborn students to visit with the permission of a faculty member and the student." At that a murmur ran through the hall and Draco could not decide whether it was positive or not. On the one
hand they would let muggles in, on the other hand they needed the permission of an adult and the student they were related to which should provide some safety.

Hermione turned to Draco, while McGonagall continued to explain that there also were some outdated wards which they could easily replace with better ones. "This is fantastic. I really would have liked having my parents visit me in fifth year, when I was in the Hospital Wing. But even if it had been allowed they couldn't have."

Draco’s father hummed behind them. "If you put it like that it does indeed make more sense."

Hermione turned to him with a raised eyebrow. "What did you think?"

"I-" Lucius stopped and a tiny frown appeared between his eyebrows. "I do not know what I thought. After all magical parents have similar rules if they want to visit their children."

Cassius Parkinson next to Draco’s father snorted. "Look at that, old Lucius agreeing with McGonagall. I can't wait for the next legislative meeting of the Wizengamot."

Lucius smiled thinly. "You will find that I was forced to re-evaluate many of the opinions I carried my whole life. Andromeda and Hermione both certainly had a hand in that."

As Cassius' eyebrows shot up Draco realised what his father had just said. On the surface it seemed like a simple enough statement. But addressing Hermione with her first name and in the same breath as a family member, even if it was one you formerly despised, certainly set the picture that Hermione had become a close family friend.

Cassius looked at Hermione appraisingly. "Miss Granger, you surprise me time and again. I think I will have a very close eye on you in the future."

Hermione twitched, but quickly covered it with a small curtsey. "Thank you, Mr Parkinson. I intend to keep surprising you and others."

"You are friends with my daughter Pansy, are you not?" Cassius asked, his eyes twinkling mischievously. "You should come over for tea some time this week, don't you think Posy, love?"

"Oh most certainly," Posy Parkinson answered with a perfectly polite smile.

Hermione smiled just as politely. "It would be a pleasure, Mr and Mrs Parkinson."

They turned back to the front when Professor McGonagall announced that they'd be leaving for the grounds now.

"So, I have a feeling that Mother cornered you and taught you a few pureblood mannerisms?" Draco asked quietly when they stepped out of the Entrance Hall.

Hermione nodded. "Pansy too, and I found a few books on it in the townhouse while going through Walburga's private library. They were of course horribly racist, but a few tips and tricks were actually helpful."

"That's good," Draco said, taking her arm when Hermione stumbled over a bump on the ground. "If you still want to go into politics you'll have to learn how to charm the older generation."

"I know," Hermione sighed, not pulling her arm away, but actually hooking it through his. "I hate it, I feel like I'm bending myself out of shape when I do that."

Draco hummed. "It's probably rooted in the belief that doing whatever needs to be done isn't a good solution."
Hermione nodded thoughtfully. "And since the pureblood culture is so ripe with racism it feels like I'm, I don't know, betraying my own people? Does that make sense?"

"I think I know what you're getting at," Draco said with a bob of his head. "But I think I'm not the ideal person to talk about that, maybe you could ask someone from your side who made it far in the Ministry, maybe Percy Weasley?"

While they were talking they had reached the henge and Draco could feel it already humming with magic as they came closer. Hermione straightened some more and her eyes had gone big.

"What is this?" she whispered, as if not to disturb the atmosphere.

Draco grinned. "Pure and undiluted magic, the kind the people of a thousand years ago wielded." He felt his own magic answer the call from the henge and he wanted to laugh with the euphoria it brought. "Can you feel your magic sing?"

Hermione nodded mutely, an expression of stunned delight on her face. "This is how it should be, isn't it?"

"Wait till we're in the middle of the ritual," Draco said with a wink. "There is nothing better."

Chapter End Notes

Do you want to read the ritual in full or should we pick up after it is done? I love your reviews and they're the brightest spots on some days! Let me know what you think. I'll continue to procrastinate my term papers by writing fanfiction ;)

The midsummer ritual

Chapter Notes

Hey, I'm still alive! So many of you asked to read the ritual and I wanted to deliver the best possible version of that. But with uni and work it got quite hard to find time to write. Now I finally finished it and I'm really happy with the result. I listened to Heilung while writing this, especially the songs Norupo, Alfadirhaiti, Krigsgaldr and Hamrer Hippyer. reynardinepttr is still my incredible beta and I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

21st June 1998 23:55

As Hermione stepped between the stones of the henge and into the circle she felt more than heard a chant start in her bones, pulsing in rhythm with her heart and lighting up the magic in her veins. Her feet were itching to start dancing and for the first time in her life Hermione fiercely wanted to sing, to join the monotonous choir. Follow the unheard words in her magic and move as they commanded.

She followed the insistent tugging of her magic towards the southern part of the circle, away from Draco who was walking to the eastern part.

When Hermione came to a halt she finally surfaced from the overwhelming magic around her enough to take in her surroundings. Like Stonehenge, this henge was made from megaliths more than a man's height. But where those of Stonehenge had been rough-hewn, these stones were decorated with elaborate designs of animals, humans and plants alike. They nearly seemed alive in the flickering light of the fires. Some seemed to tell stories, while others simply showed abstract patterns.

Hermione guessed that the henge was actually as big if not bigger than the Quidditch pitch had been and could easily hold about a thousand people with space left over.

As she watched, more people joined her in the southern end of the henge, all coming over as if lead by an external power and Hermione started to wonder whether the henge was responsible. Maybe whoever would lead the ritual had cast a spell to sort them all in even groups. Though Hermione could not yet discern any pattern. All ages and houses seemed to be mixed together, and it couldn't be blood status either since Lady Abbot had just come to stand next to Hermione with a dazed smile on her face.

Hermione frowned, taking a closer look at the groups. What was their common denominator? She saw Theo standing next to Draco in the East, both their faces calm and collected. Lucius stood next to them, but Narcissa and Andromeda were sorted in the northern group. Hermione smiled when she saw Hagrid, Harry and Ron standing together in the western part of the circle.

While Hermione had taken in her surroundings and had puzzled about the groups Padma Patil, Kingsley, Fleur and Blaise Zabini had joined her at the southern group. Surprised, Hermione looked over the henge again, trying to spot Parvati. She found her in the western group, standing with Lavender who she only recognised thanks to her signature pink ribbon in her hair. Lavender's
face was so badly scarred that Hermione looked away quickly. She was reminded once again that
others had been worse off than her.

Finally the movement between the groups came to a halt. Professors McGonagall, Sinistra,
Babbling and Firenze stepped forward onto the square platform in the middle of the henge. They
each faced a group.

Professor Babbling began to speak. "Wilcuma! Tonight we shall lay the groundwork for re-erecting
the wards of Hogwarts! The oldest of those wards require us to call upon gods long forgotten, the
worship long outlawed. Their power has waned during the last millennium and it will take many
voices to wake them from their sleep. Let us start this ritual with a blot to the gods the Founders
once called upon."

A huge cauldron appeared in the middle of the platform and all four teachers turned at the same
time, taking up what looked like yew branches and put their tips into the cauldron. They turned as
one back again and started to speak with magically amplified voices.

"I dedicate to you, Odin, this mead for your knowledge."

Everyone answered as one as droplets of the mead sprayed over the gathered wizards and witches,
"To Odin!"

Hermione felt a droplet hit her forehead, making her gasp. As she breathed in she could have sworn
that she tasted winter in the air and heard the throaty call of two ravens. Hermione closed her eyes
and tried to feel, like she hadn't since her awful Divination lessons with Trelawney. Unbidden her
thoughts wandered to the Battle of Hogwarts and those hours when the fighting had been at its
peak. But something was different in her memory. Time seemed to be fluid and stagnant at once,
everything happening in the same blink of an eye. In the Great Hall where she had fought Bellatrix
with Luna and Ginny, Hermione suddenly saw an old man walking amongst the fighters. He wore
a dark cloak with a hood covering his hair, but from what Hermione could see - remember - he had
only one eye. As she watched him walk to Harry and lightly tap on his back, two ravens settled on
each of the old man's shoulders. When the old man turned away from Harry, who was now
charging at the Death Eaters with renewed energy, he caught Hermione's wondering gaze and
winked.

As Hermione opened her eyes she remembered a whispered 'Knowledge is Power', but she could
not say whether it had been said during the battle or during her vision.

Hermione swallowed. It couldn't be. She didn't have visions. Trelawney had said so in her third
year, and Hermione still firmly believed that Divination, as that witch taught it, was nonsense.

But she did not have time to dwell on that as the teachers had turned again their backs on the
cauldron and spoke in unison: "I dedicate to you, Toutatis, this mead for your courage!"

"To Toutatis!" Hermione answered, even as she wondered from which belief system he stemmed,
because she was quite certain that she hadn't heard of him so far.

This time as the drop of mead fell on her forehead Hermione heard the roaring cheer of the
Gryffindors during a Quidditch match. She felt herself swept up in the unity of her house, all
cheering for their team, for their housemates, for their win of the Quidditch trophy. Hermione
joined in the chant that had arisen and smiled at the sense of connection she hadn't experienced
anywhere else. As she was looking around Hermione noticed a young man with a wild red beard,
who seemed to be leading the chant and was decked in Gryffindor colours from head to toe. She
wondered for a second whether there could be such a thing as a god of Gryffindor, but immediately
scoffed her own thought.

Hermione opened her eyes to find her teachers already posed to give the next blessing.

"I dedicate to you, Rhiannon, this mead for your generosity!"

"To Rhiannon!" The gathered wizards and witches replied and this time Hermione was prepared for the droplet of mead on her forehead and followed the magic readily.

It carried her to a bitter sweet memory of the summer before her fourth year. Hermione had visited her father's parents on their farm near Cardiff. They had insisted she try riding the beautiful white mare they had just bought and Hermione had with some reluctance, remembering her times on a broom and somewhat cowed by the sheer size of the horse. But the mare had carried her faithfully, down to the sea and along the cliffs to the lighthouse. As Hermione looked to the side now, caught up in the memory, she saw a regal, brunette woman riding next to her with a calm smile on her face. When the woman caught her gaze she grinned and with a command in a foreign language, sped up and out of sight.

Hermione opened her eyes with a sad smile, remembering that it had been her grandmother riding next to her that summer. During the next school year her Nan had died of cancer and Hermione had only learned of her death and the funeral when she wrote home after the first task.

The teachers had raised the branches once again and Hermione wondered how many dedications they planned to make.

"I dedicate to you, Ogma, this mead for your eloquence!"

"To Ogma!"

Hermione frowned. Wisdom, courage, generosity and eloquence - were the four gods chosen for their connections to the founders? She felt the droplet hit her forehead again and this time it seemed the magic pulled her along on its own volition. She heard parts of speeches, some from Dumbledore, some from Harry. Others which she had heard on the telly. But the one the magic let her stop at was when Neville had spoken up and reignited their courage to stand against Voldemort. Hermione looked around, curious as to where she would find the god this time. She saw him standing right behind Neville as he stepped forward, with a hand on his shoulder and an angry gleam in his eyes, clearly directed at the Death Eaters. He was an older man with a full beard and curiously carried a club with him. He nodded at Hermione when he noticed her and then leaned forward to whisper into Neville's ear. As Neville spoke up Hermione saw shimmering, nearly translucent chains snake from his mouth and float to the ears of the people behind, connecting them. Curiously a few of the chains also snaked towards the Death Eaters, in particular the younger ones and the Malfoys.

Hermione extracted herself from the memory/vision and back into reality with some difficulty. But she had understood. The right words could even reach your enemies.

This time when the teachers spoke up they did not raise the branches. "We ask you to protect these lands."

Hermione hurried to repeat the sentence along with everyone else. "We ask you to protect these lands."

"From harm and unwanted detection."

"We ask you to help us cleanse these lands."
"From the death and sorrow and darkness polluting them."

The wizards and witches who had come to this celebration echoed every sentence as it was spoken by the teachers. Hermione felt strength course through her veins, more with every word that left her lips and she gasped when, as she finished the last word, a strong wind started whipping about. She felt a chill down to her magical core and Hermione could have sworn that she heard a melodic poem, battle cries, the neighing of a horse and a rousing speech without understanding the words.

Hermione looked about and saw the wonderment on every face around her. She watched as a silvery mist, much like the Patronus Charm, rose from the people within the stone circle and gathered over the platform in the middle where it started to merge together. The mist transformed into a cyclone of silver swirls, slowly spreading out at the top.

Suddenly there was a humming coming from everywhere and soon Hermione realised that she had joined in, not even recognising the tune.

The magic, because what else could it be, seemed to react to the humming and slowly spread out until it formed a dome over the grounds and the castle.

The humming became quieter and finally subsided. The dome had settled over Hogwarts and Hermione smiled, glad to see the wards protecting her second home once again.

For a few minutes the congregation was quiet, breathing in the security and the positivity the wards radiated.

Then Professor Firenze stepped forward. "We now want to invite everyone to speak up at the sumbel! Tell us heroic, or comedic, or maybe melancholic stories from Hogwarts. Toast to your family, your friends, your professors. Let's regale the gods with our words!"

People were slow to move and the first to actually dare to step up was Theo, his back ramrod straight and his eyes fixed on the cauldron in the middle of the platform. As he approached the cauldron, a drinking horn appeared in his right hand and he scooped some mead.

Then he turned to the group of people he had just left. "To Odin! For the last two years I was the Norse priest of Hogwarts, conducting the rituals as my ancestors and the previous priests did since they took over from Rowena Ravenclaw. But unlike my predecessors I want to finally open the ritual for every house. We celebrate the solstices and the equinoxes to honour the gods and receive their protection for the season. If you're interested to join us during the autumn equinox you can approach me any time after the start of the new school year. Everyone is welcome." With that Theo raised his horn in a toast and downed its contents to cheers from the gathered witches and wizards.

Others followed him more readily. Andromeda drank to family found again. Dennis Creevey stepped up to talk about his brother and offered to go through the photographs Colin had taken over the years to find pictures of the fallen and gift them to family and friends. Hermione saw people nodding at him when he passed them on his way back to his place, but nobody dared to speak up yet.

Neville thanked everyone who fought, who took in refugees, who did not let the Death Eaters reign unopposed. Harry was up next, even if he looked a bit bemused when the horn appeared in his hand. He drank to the fallen and the living, and wished that everyone could live in peace. He was followed, somewhat surprisingly, by Augusta Longbottom who renewed her vows to the goddess Frigg promising to watch over her family and never stop pursuing knowledge. The next one was Dean Thomas.
He walked up the steps slowly, haltingly. When his horn was filled with mead he turned to the
gathered people and opened his mouth, but no sound came out. He tried again and this time he
managed to speak. "I'm Dean, and I want to drink to those fallen while on the run with me. Ted
Tonks and Dirk Cresswell and Gornuk. May your names never be forgotten, your sacrifice never
discounted. And to those countless others - I fought so your deaths weren't for nothing, I hope you
found peace." With that he drank in deep gulps and left the platform as the horn vanished from his
hand.

Hermione sniffled and brushed her tears away. So many died in this awful war and she was still so
incredibly lucky not to be one of them, for her parents to still be alive.

Just as Hermione had made the decision to go drink too, Ginny stepped up onto the platform.
"To Neville Longbottom who made damn sure that we never lost hope and would have continued
our fight against Voldemort even if Harry died!" She drank decisively and as Hermione drew closer
she saw the tears in Ginny's eyes and wondered how often the girl had been close to giving up only
for Neville to reignite her hope.

A former Ravenclaw drank to new beginnings as Hermione reached the platform. As he turned to
go back to his group (Hermione still hadn't found out by which criteria they were sorted and it was
driving her bonkers) she went up the stairs. Even knowing what to expect Hermione was surprised
when she suddenly held a horn in her hand.

The texture was somewhat surprising too, smooth in some places and rough in others, as if it hadn't
been polished properly. Hermione dunked the horn in the mead in the cauldron and turned to
address what she came to think off as 'her' group.

"I want to drink to change tonight. Change for better or worse is the only way we can keep going
forward," Hermione said, trying to keep herself from shifting. She was not someone to enjoy being
the centre of attention. "I drink to new friendships and overcoming long-held beliefs." Hermione
raised her horn in a toast and drank, expecting sweet wine to coat her tongue and pleasantly
surprised when she found it to be fresh apple juice instead.

Before Hermione had time to wonder about that the horn vanished from her hand and she turned to
leave the platform, her feet curiously carrying her over to come to stand at Draco's side.

This was… new? Hermione huffed and set her mind to properly finding out what the groups stood
for. Four founders, four teachers, four groups, four goods called upon. So far so good. But what did
connect her with Padma Patil, Blaise Zabini, Fleur and Kingsley? Or rather: What had connected
her and why was she now standing with Draco, Theo, Lucius, Mr Weasley and Augusta
Longbottom?

Theo and Augusta both worshipped the old gods actively - maybe the others did too? But she was
sure Draco would have told her about it if he did.

What had the position of the teachers been? Firenze had faced the group to the west, Professor
McGonagall had faced Hermione's group in the south, Professor Babbling had faced Draco and the
others in the east and Professor Sinistra had stood in the north. Maybe it had something to do with
their subjects?

Lavender and Parvati certainly believed in Divination and they had stood in the west. Hermione
hadn't even believed in the Christian god before this ritual and had stood with Professor
McGonagall who was very no-nonsense, and Hermione had heard the Professor was atheistic
despite being raised by a minister. Professor Babbling taught Ancient Runes and was rumoured to
be a pagan, so she most likely believed in the old gods too. And from her lessons Hermione knew that Professor Sinistra believed in numbers and was able to do probability arithmancy with greater accuracy than any divination would ever achieve.

So maybe not so much the subjects themselves, but the belief in the subjects?

Hermione had to admit to herself that that may be the reason why the magic of the henge had directed her to stand next to Draco instead of going back to her place in the south. One did not simply meet four gods, each representing an important part of one's life, and ignore them. That would be rude.

Suddenly Hermione felt Draco's hand slip in hers, and when she turned to look at him he smiled and squeezed her hand gently. Hermione's breath caught and she couldn't help smiling back. Draco's hair seemed to glow in the low light from the fires and at the same time his features seemed harder in a very appealing way. The fire gave him an otherworldly beauty that made Hermione think of Tolkien's elves again. It seemed ages had passed since that evening before Narcissa's hearing when she had seen Draco sitting in Andromeda's garden, his face thrown in stark relief by the setting sun.

Hermione caught herself rambling in her thoughts and blushed. She resolved to blame the strange magic coursing through and around her and the warmth of Draco's hand in hers.

Many others spoke up that night until Hermione was ready to fall asleep standing, but finally, as the sun was rising over the horizon again the teachers stepped up to the platform for the last time, thanking everyone for coming. They wished safe travels home and as they did, the strange magic around them slowly dissipated, the fires seemingly extinguished on their own.

Just as the morning chill began to creep in, Draco put his arm around Hermione and steered her over to his father.

Lucius was curiously standing next to Arthur Weasley as if it was the most normal thing in the world, and if Hermione hadn't been so dead tired she certainly would have found that much more remarkable.

"Harry and Ron will stay at the Burrow," Arthur told Hermione in hushed tones. "I guess you're going to Andromeda's?"

Hermione nodded. "But I'll be over for lunch, Molly promised to work on my knitting charms with me."

Lucius raised an eyebrow but didn't comment. "Then we should go find Narcissa and Andromeda, I hope Edward isn't too disgruntled."

Arthur shrugged. "I think the magic may have kept him quiet. A young woman to my right had her baby with her too and it slept through the whole thing."

They walked to the north end of the circle, Bill, Charlie and George in tow, all yawning. They were soon joined by the rest of the Weasley clan, and Harry, who looked strangely at Hermione as he saw her walking with Draco. She just smiled at him tiredly.

The group left for Hogsmeade together and Hermione let Draco apparate them to Andromeda's, too tired to be certain that she would make it in one piece on her own. They went straight inside, only sharing a few tired smiles and hushed whispers.
Hermione followed Draco into his room until she realised that there would most likely only be one bed! But before she could protest Draco closed the door behind her and enlarged the bed to a king-size, with no space left between it and the walls. Hermione levitated the nightstand to the other side of the room and opened her beaded bag (her trusty little bag) to summon an additional pillow and blanket.

Draco snorted and shook his head, resuming his quest to shed his outer robes. He wore linen trousers and a muggle band shirt under them and Hermione had to grin.

She took off her burnt-orange robes and took care to hang them up, before she removed her bra in a true feat of flexibility and let it vanish into her bag. Clad in a simple t-shirt and black, opaque tights she turned back around to see Draco had already snuggled under the blankets. Hermione smiled at how comfortable he looked. She was sure that she would be positively mortified in the morning, but for now Hermione slipped under the covers on the other side of the bed.

"Good night, Draco," Hermione mumbled, turning to face him.

Against the low light streaming in through the window Hermione could only see Draco's silhouette, but his voice conveyed his smile just fine when he said, "technically it's good morning, Granger."

Hermione laughed. "Good morning then, prat."

Chapter End Notes

There was only one bed!! But they enlarged it because they can do magic. What did you think of the chapter? I'm mostly a worshipper of the Norse gods, but I tried to come up with gods that would suit the founders and relate to the area where they're from (Rowena - Scotland, which was Scandinavian dominion in the 10th century - Odin, Godric - England - Toutatis, Helga - Wales - Rhiannon, Salazar - I headcanon him Irish - Ogma). I'm looking forward to reading your lovely reviews! :)

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