Dangerous Desires

**Rating:** Explicit
**Archive Warning:** Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
**Category:** F/F, F/M
**Fandom:** Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
**Relationship:** Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy, Ginny Weasley/Blaise Zabini, Astoria Greengrass/Ron Weasley, Daphne Greengrass/Pansy Parkinson, Katie Bell/Harry Potter
**Character:** Theo Nott, Lucius Malfoy, Narcissa Black Malfoy, Minerva McGonagall, Greengrass Family (Harry Potter), Severus Snape
**Additional Tags:** Subspace, Snogging, Cheating, Slavery, Misogynistic universe, Angst, Literally so much angst, Young!Draco is a dick, Spanking, Painplay, art kink, Exhibitionism, Canon-Typical Violence, Sex Magic, Rough Sex, Oral Sex, Drinking, technically underage but not for this time period, BDSM, Bathing, Praise Kink, Fluff, Eventual Smut, Shameless Smut, Hair-pulling, Meditation, Bondage, Safe Sane and Consensual, Past Abuse, Masturbation, marking kink, Kink Negotiation, Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Mildly Dubious Consent, Alternate Universe - Fantasy, Attempted Rape/Non-Con, Eventual Happy Ending
**Stats:** Published: 2017-06-08 Completed: 2018-01-24 Chapters: 51/51 Words: 168566

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**Dangerous Desires**

by Fortem

**Summary**

His hand was warm and firm, calmly placed against the nape of her neck, wrapped into her curls and tugging, not enough to move her head, just with enough tension to trigger all sorts of hormonal reactions. It was the move of newlyweds and desperate fiancées and always expressed a kind of intimacy. But this near stranger did it all the same, he gently squeezed the back of her neck and her omega roots were purring with joy.

A deep rumble echoed in Malfoy's chest, the primal noise of pleasure igniting something she needed more of. His other hand moved to her hip, the heat of it pulsing through the fabric of her dress.

Draco Malfoy is an alpha and he is very used to getting what he wants but when his marriage negotiations begin his life gets far more complicated. Hermione Granger is an omega and just wants to be taken seriously. She'll do anything to overcome her station, even if it means making deals with a certain irritating Alpha. At least, that's where it starts.
A Fateful Encounter

Draco

When Draco Malfoy was young, he loved being an alpha. He loved the power it gave him, he loved the way betas looked at him with a mixture of awe and fear, and, in particular, he loved the ease with which he could get what he wanted. Wealth and power, what more could any adolescent boy want.

Alphas were rare and he could usually intimidate betas into doing what he wanted them to, but omegas, omegas were a different. Omegas melted under commands. Naturally submissive, all he had to do was give an order in his "alpha voice" and they'd crumple.

The power drove him a little mad, made him incorrigible, especially when his father left on business. He remembered one incident from the fall he turned ten. The Greengrass family had been visiting, and with them a litany of servants. He had been looking for trouble when he discovered a little girl about his age gaping in awe at the size of the manor's library.

"What are you doing?" He shouting in his best impersonation of his father's voice. Her knees buckled, just barely allowing her to stay on her feet, and she turned towards him slowly, staring at the ground. He recognized the tilt of her head and the natural, unfightable display of the side of her neck. Even though she was too young to present, she was clearly an omega, just as surely as he was an alpha.

He grinned with glee, there weren't any omega servants in the Malfoy household, preferring house elves and betas to keep it running, so he rarely got to observe one up close.

She was still shaking but her massive bush of chestnut colored hair kept him from seeing her face. He knew the basic biological side of a/b/o dynamics, but now he got to test it for his purposes.

"Stand on one foot" she snapped into compliance, too young to fight her instincts. She must've had very little experience with alphas. He laughed as she struggled to stay balanced and took a closer look at her.

Her robes were well made but bland and simple, reflective of the prestige of her household but the simplicity of her position. She was probably one of Daphne and Astoria's playmates, the daughter of a servant at just the right age. Why she would be by herself, he didn't know and really didn't care.

"What's your name?" He demanded, he had mastered his ability to slip into his alpha voice at will only this year and he loved using it at every opportunity.

"Hermione Granger sir." Her voice trembled and she maintained her stare at the ground, carefully avoiding the challenge of eye contact.

"Look at me." He declared firmly, standing in front of her. He was curious if his order could override her instincts.

She looked up slowly, fighting herself the whole way and the bush of hair fell back to reveal plain features marred by a violently red blush. She carefully kept her eyes directed at his chin rather than make eye contact and he catalogued every detail. She had warm brown eyes, a delicate nose, a Cupid's bow mouth. Omegas were fascinating.
"Draco!" A harsh voice cut through the silence and his nanny stuck her head into the library, the click of her sharp heels echoed off the hardwood floors. A stubborn beta, she was one of the few he never succeeded in fully manipulating. And now she was furious.

"Come here right now, and don't think I won't be telling Minerva about this, young lady!" The omega was finally able to put her foot down as the tension broke and she frantically scurried out of the room with her eyes down. He looked directly at his nanny as he reached out to grab the omega's wrist. The girl stiffened for a hair's breadth before completely relaxing, her eyes closing and head tilting in submission. He wasn't quite sure what to do with her now, he hadn't expected such a strong reaction. His nanny gasped, horrified at the impropriety.

"Draco Malfoy, you take your hand off that poor girl this instance, Merlin help me you won't sit for a year!" He casually let her go, lifting one finger at a time, and the moment the contact ceased she flew out of the room. Even as his nanny grabbed him by his ear and dragged him down the hall to be thoroughly rebuked and handed over to his mother for further punishment, he thought that it was worth it.

... Eight years later

Hermione

Hair pins and ribbons bounced off Hermione's face as she desperately tried to shield herself in the small carriage.

Daphne Greengrass was stubborn, domineering, brilliant, and decisively bold. Her dark hair was always tightly controlled and impeccably maintained by her handmaidens, and her lips were pursed into a near constant frown.

Astoria on the other hand was flighty, fickle, indecisive and frequently melodramatic. Everything was a crisis in Astoria's world. She also held the title of being the only person on the face of the earth who could ever really make her sister lose her temper.

Hermione wasn't even sure how the argument had begun, she had been intentionally tuning it out in favor of her book, until all the poetry in the world couldn't muffle the shrill barbs and protests.

It would've fizzled out quickly if Astoria hadn't been enraged enough to yank at Daphne's perfectly done hair. Then Daphne had thrown the entire sewing box across the small space, spilling out all its contents in mere moments. Then the chaos had really set in.

Her fellow handmaiden, a simple girl much like herself named Katie, made eye contact with Hermione and contorted her expression to express the exasperation that words would never do justice. They would wait for the chaos to subside, it wasn't their job to stop it and then they would clean up the mess after the sisters reconciled. They'd all be presentable enough when they arrived at Malfoy manor. A button pinged off Hermione's cuff and the metallic clang reminded her of the two main things that separated her and Katie.

She glanced down at the metal bangle locked on her right wrist, lose enough to shift but tight enough to chafe and be impossible to remove. Just below where the metal sat was the "O" that marked her as an omega. The brand appeared when she first presented as an omega at 13, and the bracelet had been there, in slightly different sizes since birth.

One marked her inferior because of biology, the other by station. Hermione rarely felt her slave status
deeply. She had no memories of her parents, only the Greengrasses, but the story went that there was a broker who had been trying to pass Hermione off for cheap as a toddler in a package deal but Daphne had shrieked that she wanted to bring the babe home with them, she was only three at the time, and Astoria, only an infant had perked up and smiled first the first time when she and Hermione had caught sight of each other. It had been the first thing that the sisters had ever agreed on and would also be the last.

The Greengrasses had raised her as their own, even if they never freed her, and were unfazed by her presentation. Where many would see it as an opportunity to make a quick buck, because omegas were rare and in high demand as the supposedly perfect slave, they refused to take away their children’s companion and began training her as a handmaiden.

The only time she had ever truly felt lesser was almost a decade ago now, standing in the library of Malfoy manor while the Malfoy brat humiliated her, taking advantage of the omega instincts she hadn’t even been aware of yet, let alone able to control.

That was the first and last time she had seen him, as they had departed the next day. She had learned to control her instincts; Daphne’s presentation had been very helpful in practicing to resist outlandish and unreasonable commands from alphas and the older girl had been more than happy to help. Now Hermione was in control, she was centered, and nothing like that had or would ever happen again.

As the carriage hit another bump, and the piles of buttons and yarns redistributed across the floor, a little twitch flickered in Hermione’s stomach at the reminder of her destination. They were heading back to Malfoy manor, staying as guests while the marriage contract for Draco and Astoria was negotiated. Duration predictions ranged between a month and a year, depending on how stubborn each side was. Astoria had other suitors but the wealth and prestige of the Malfoy name had beat them all out. They wouldn’t be engaged until the contract was signed and the date set but there was an understanding in place. Astoria was joyous. Hermione was contemplating if flinging herself out the carriage window would kill her fast enough.
The Arrival

Draco

Eight years had changed Draco in ways he couldn't have planned for. His father had gotten caught mixed in with some questionable dealings, and as result, the family name had come under considerable doubt from the ministry. The Malfoys had finally experienced real stress for the first time and his world had gotten significantly darker.

At the moment, it would do them good to be the talk of society for any reason other than his father's less than upstanding business tactics. It was his mother who had come up with the solution in true pure blood fashion. An engagement.

The clatter of a half dozen carriages and another dozen wagons on cobblestone alerted Draco to the arrival of his guests. His future in laws were moving in for the foreseeable future because the situation wasn't nearly miserable enough. In the few times that both the Malfoys and the Greengrasses had deigned to attend court simultaneously he had found both of the sisters excruciating to be around.

Daphne was an alpha, though not quite as dominant as he was, she was constantly argumentative and had the habit of looking at you as if studying you to destroy later. He feared his life each time he encountered her.

Astoria on the other hand, was the epitome of a good, agreeable pure blood wife. Though she had been rumored to be prone to mischief when she was younger, it was clearly simple childish whims. She had no strong opinions, no interests, and no remarkable qualities whatsoever. She had all of the personality of room temperature water.

Of course when Astoria first began accepting suitors his parents cajoled him into jumping in the ring for the family's sake, he expressed his interest in writing and (no doubt after his elders greased the wheel) they accepted his offer and agreed to move to the manor to pursue courtship and set about defining the terms of the marriage. It would no doubt be a painfully long and expensive process but the Greengrasses were part of the sacred twenty-eight, the closest related to the royal family in lineage, and a marriage with the Malfoys would be a powerful alliance indeed, even it would be miserable for him, unless he could find a worthwhile distraction.

A trumpeter announced the Greengrasses' arrival, as if they could be any more ostentatious. Draco straightened, standing beside his mother on the steps leading up to the manor's front door. He had to look pleasant and regal and happy. The jacket he was wearing was stiff and uncomfortable and awkward no matter how "dapper" his mother thought it made him look. He didn't want to look dapper for the Greengrasses. He didn't want to do anything for them. He didn't even want them to be here.

Unfortunately, he didn't have a choice and as the small army of servants piled out of the carriages and wagons. The daughters were in the last carriage, and as he watched them step out, highly noticeable in their massive gowns. He wasn't sure how they got their skirts to be that wide or their waists that small, but it was equal parts horrifying and impressive. He was very thankful that they would be staying in the west wing, exactly opposite from his rooms and as far away as they could get. At least his mother was willing to make some accommodations.
He casually scanned the group of servants, looking for a pretty face that could keep him occupied while he waited for his impending doom/engagement. There are plenty of mildly attractive maids, though they all look like they're exhausted from the journey. Soon enough this stupid little greeting ceremony would be over and they'd get the chance to rest, and then he could really gauge it.

**Hermione**

Hermione Granger was nothing if not stubborn. She may have been an omega but she was not a push over. As Astoria and Daphne gracefully stepped out of their carriage, the epitome of elegance and sophistication, she slipped in amongst the rest of the staff. She highly doubted that the young lord of the house even remembered the incident from eight years ago, but she wasn't willing to take that chance. Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy greeted the Greengrasses at the door, exchanging pleasantries and appreciation and words of welcome and joy at the coming alliance between these two honorable families. Hermione barely held back her smirk when she considered how quickly that would change once they got into the tricky matters of debating things like the dowry.

A soft nudge alerted her to the person standing beside her. The boy, man, she constantly had to remind herself that he was no longer a kid, just like she wasn't, smirked at her, a little bit of mischief twinkling in his green eyes behind his spectacles. It was never good when Harry Potter got that look. One of her oldest friends, there was a comfort with him that she felt with very few others. His presentation had been rocky; he had never anticipated being an alpha, and after spending years decrying people who spent all their time repressing and crushing people beneath them. He was hit with unbelievable guilt. Hermione had presented a few months before, and there was a rocky period of time where he struggled to look her in the eye, too scared of accidentally using his alpha nature to control her.

There weren't that many obvious differences between alphas and omegas. Alphas tended to be taller, broader and more short tempered. Omegas were stereotypically a little on the smaller side and were faster. More importantly, the main distinguishing feature appeared in interactions on chemical levels. Alphas and Omegas both released pheromones, and after presentation, their pheromones took on unique scents designed to attract each other.

Harry smelled like a warm day in early autumn, with hints of almond and amber and the tiniest, almost impossible to detect scent of a fresh, crisp green apple. It reminded her of days spent running through the Greengrass orchard, innocent and pure.

Harry had a unique situation; he was an orphan, left on the porch of one of the kitchen assistants. They hadn't wanted him, but they took care of him until he was about eleven and then told him to make his own way in the world. The Gamekeeper had stumbled upon the boy wandering around near the estate, and vouched for him, getting him a job as an assistant to one of the stable hands. He worked hard, grateful for the opportunity and did his best to avoid his foster mother. Hermione had bumped into him when running an errand for Daphne, and they had become fast friends.

Now, their friendship was a little bit strained, Harry had developed this insane sense of duty and heroism since his presentation, determined to use the advantage his alpha nature gave him for good. She thought he was overcompensating because of fear; just because a horse was loose didn't mean he had to throw himself underneath it's hooves. He disagreed.

He always got a look in his eyes whenever he was going to do anything stupid, and now it was shining brightly. Hermione sighed.

"Since there are so many of us, a full double staff of servants, I doubt we'll have to work as much as at home." He smirked, and she caught it out of the corner of her eye. The pair had been servants for so long that it was rare that they got to act like children, but after so many years, and being certain
that their livelihoods were secure, as teenagers, they were much more willing to take risks.

Her eyes flicked to the crowd in front of her and it only took her a moment to identify the shocking head of blonde hair. Draco Malfoy was brooding, looking at the Greengrass household with disdain. He barely spared a glance for Astoria, who Hermione knew was enamored with him and warranted much more than a glance. She spent hours on that hair and Astoria glowed with beauty. As far as she was concerned, Draco Malfoy could Avada himself.

Draco

Draco was bored, painfully, miserably bored and if this was a preview for the rest of his life, he’d have to find a productive hobby, like drinking…bleach. Astoria Greengrass nattered on as they took an excruciatingly dull chaperoned walk through the extensive Malfoy gardens. Astoria's duchess followed her, a severe woman with deep pressed frown lines from no doubt constant scowling.

Astoria had gotten prettier with age, her hair had gotten lighter, from the sun or spell he had no idea, her face had grown out of its youthful roundness, and she was impeccably painted with stylized colors (unless her lips were naturally that red?). When the wind blew, he'd catch hints of her scent, fresh pineapple with notes of peach and cucumber; an attractive scent, if a little lacking in meaning. She was pretty, maybe even beautiful, but then she opened her mouth.

"Of course, the wedding will have to be in the spring, it would be a waste to have a wedding in a garden that's not in bloom. I'll have to import dress designs naturally, only the finest, I'm thinking chiffon and tulle, perhaps with a blush undertone, it would complement your coloring so wonderfully my dear don't you think?" She turned to him, expecting an answer for the first time in over an hour.

"Yes, of course." He agreed not completely certain what he was agreeing to but he figured that it couldn't be that serious, she hadn't said anything meaningful in the first half hour before he had tuned her out.

Minerva cleared her throat from behind the couple as the rounded the last bend in the path. Draco took his cue and turned to Astoria taking her hand. He pressed a chaste kiss to her knuckles before dropping her hand and stepping back.

"Until next time, my Lady." He bowed politely and she smiled before dipping into a curtsey. The moment she turned around, he scowled.

The governess ushered Astoria indoors, and Draco sighed in resignation. He hated this, he hated Astoria, he hated his parents, he hated how powerless he felt in all of this. He always knew that he wouldn't get to marry for any reason other than political connection, but he hadn't thought that it would come this soon. Now, he knew how this would end. He'd marry Astoria, pop out enough children to insure a male and heir and then fall into a miserable and excruciatingly long marriage, where he'd eventually cheat on her, and then she'd pretend that she didn't know until she'd fall into a spiral of self-destruction and kill his mistress. It was the time honored tradition of purebloods, but that didn't mean he was happy about it. He shoved his hands into the pocket of his trousers and then loped lazily back along the path, he ignored the most ostentatious routes going for some of his more tucked away thinking spots. Collapsing lazily underneath a willow towards the outskirts of the Malfoy gardens, he closed his eyes, breathing deeply and taking in the feeling of the warm sun on his skin. It was horribly out of style to have darkened skin, but thankfully Malfoy coloring didn't tan, it burned for about twenty minutes and then with a quick spell faded easily into the same starkly white porcelain that it always was. Shout out to good genetics from aggressively selective breeding (and some inbreeding thrown into the mix too, he won't lie about it). He was about sixty percent sure that Astoria was at least his second cousin.
He was peacefully breathing in the natural scents of the flowers and the fresh air all around him, unlike the surreal, concentrated to the extreme, nature of pheromones from both alphas and omegas, when laughter broke through his peace.

"Harry!" The voice was struggling to be soft as she laughed and called out for him at the same time. "Harry this isn't funny, come on!" She was laughing too hard for the phrase to convey any heat, and Draco groaned, sitting up, since apparently, this lovers' fauxquarrel wasn't going away any time soon. Shortly thereafter, a bush haired girl stumbles into the clearing, shattering whatever was left of his illusion of peace. She blushed profusely when she saw him, and when he caught sight of the gold band around her wrist, he was even angrier.

"Really? A tasteless bint is gallivanting around, and not only is she a rude and thoughtless guest, she's also a slave." He snarled, purging the venom floating around inside of him in the only way he knew how, cruel remarks towards unsuspecting peasants. The girl swallowed and seemed to have lost the ability to speak as she stared down at her feet. "Anything to say?" He taunted, knowing he had successfully terrified her out of any and all of the pitiful intelligence that she may possess. She looked up quickly, just enough to scan to see if he was serious, and then she shook her head. She looked like she was going to be sick, and the gardener would kill him if he made another maid vomit on his petunias, they had barely recovered from the last incident. "You can go now." He called dismissively, flopping back into his prior relaxed position, even if it was no longer quite as comfortable. He heard frantic step fleeing through the garden, but could quite catch what he was sure would be a frantic and legitimate spat with the lover she had been attempting to meet. Stupid bint, there was nothing worse than a slave that didn't know her place.

Hermione

"Harry!" She hissed, sliding slightly as she skidded along the stone path, nearly colliding with the other teen. "You idiot!" She slapped him, hard, and grabbed him by the elbow as they careened out of the garden. Her first day at Malfoy manor and she had already been screamed at. The vainer part of her wouldn't let go of the fact that he hadn't recognized her. She hadn't changed all that much, was it just that common for him? Tormenting and manipulating young omegas. As despicable as it had been, she thought it was at least a onetime thing, a power trip from a young alpha just exploring his effect on omegas. She knew she had been pathetic but she thought she was at least a little memorable.

As she and Harry skidded to a stop in front of the service door, she came to a slightly painful conclusion. A small part of her thought those weird moments in the library had meant that there was something between her and the Malfoy Lord, even if it wasn't positive, it was some sort of a connection, but that wasn't true, just like everyone else, she was simply a shackle on her wrist and a warm body. It sucked to realize you weren't even good enough to hate.

She shook herself out of it, refused to focus on it any longer, it was the past, time to move on, and if the first step was collapsing into her cot and having a good cry then that was okay too.

"I hope you're pleased yourself, we could have been killed, or worse, fired. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to bed." She snapped, two or three years ago, Harry would've been a little bit scared, possibly affronted and confused but now with newfound Alpha confidence and a little bit of an invincibility complex, he just laughed and shook his head as she stormed off. It only made her angrier. Why did she bother being friends with him anyways?
A Secret Comes to Light

Hermione

The next morning Hermione felt a little raw, so, after dressing Astoria and getting her out the door, she slipped away, following the sounds of clamoring to find the kitchen the Malfoy's had repurposed so that the Greengrass cook could move in. It had been a difficult thing to negotiate but one that Lady Greengrass refused to give up, as if she would ever leave her trusted employee behind.

The Greengrasses' cook was a sweet woman, with red hair that she refused to admit was turning gray and a warm vanilla scent. She gave the best hugs, could cook for small armies with the most meager ingredients, and put up with no shenanigans in her life or her kitchen. Hermione idolized her.

She pushed open the double doors with confidence, feeling like she was coming home. The kitchen was a mass of bustling bodies, as kitchen aides ran around in a state of controlled panic. Molly had settled in well. Magic almost crackled in the air as knives flew, spoons stirred soups, and doughs kneaded themselves. Pots, pans, and bowls clattered on the white marble counter tops, as feet clicked on tile floors.

"If you're going to walk into my kitchen you better be willing to help!" Molly called over her shoulder without looking up from the dishes she was carefully inspecting, when she heard the door open, or saw it with the eyes in the back of her head. It was kind of a tossup which one.

"Of course," Hermione called back, smiling as she made her way over to the work station beside one of her oldest friends, Ginerva Weasley, Molly's daughter, and badass in her own right. Ginny had flaming red hair, just a shade brighter than her mother's, bright blue eyes, and a killer smile that screamed of mischief. She had grown up in a house with six older brothers, and had developed a loud and bold personality to guarantee that she would be heard.

Ginny laughed, waving her wand quickly to finish chopping the carrots she had started. Hermione quickly pulled out her own wand, happily charming knives to start chopping onions. The knife moved slower than Ginny's, dramatically slower. Hermione forced herself to pretend it didn't bother her. Ginny was not fooled.

"They gave you a new one, huh?" She asked, cautiously, her tone neutral. Ginny would rant and rave about the injustices of the slavery system any day of the week, but not in public. She was younger, but still very bright and very aware.

"Yeah, just before we left, the old one was starting to fade." Hermione faked a smile, raised the corners of her mouth, but felt absolutely no emotions with it. The gold band that denoted her slavery wasn't just for decoration. She was still allowed magic, but the bracelet dulled her abilities. Certain spells she was entirely incapable of, and others took inordinate amounts of focus. Over time, the bracelet's effect would dull, but as of right now, with a fresh band, she struggled with spells any more difficult than what the average thirteen-year-old could manage. She was one of the lucky ones, apparently, her magic was strong, because most slaves were trapped with spells that were possible for the average eleven-year-old. It was depressing to know that she was limited and always would be limited.

"Let's not talk about it, what's new for you? Any good gossip?" Ginny had finished her spell, scraped her carrots into the pot, and had begun crushing garlic before Hermione could finish her onions, but they both seemed determined to not give it any more attention.
"Not much, with the chaos of getting here and unpacking, the dust hasn't quite settled yet. I'm sure there will be some more soon." Ginny shrugged and then gasped quietly to herself. "I almost forgot, Pomona's daughter, the one who helps plant the flowers in the spring, finally presented, she's an omega."

"Poor girl." Hermione sighed, finally scraping the onions into the pot, and the moving on to the celery.

"Not necessarily." Ginny responded, carefully controlling her tone so that it wasn't hopeful, it wasn't sad, it was just neutral. Hermione turned to Ginny, surprised, but Ginny was staring at the knife, chopping into a potato. "She has role models to help her, people like you, people like… me." Ginny made her confession, slowly, carefully, in a way that could be shrugged off if Hermione reacted the wrong way. It was smart, and she wasn't going to get away with keeping it that simple.

"We're taking a break Mrs. Weasley!" Hermione shouted over her shoulder, dragging Ginny with her, out of the bustling kitchen, and into the hallway. When they were finally a safe distance away, Hermione spun to her friend. "What are you talking about Gin?"

"You know what I'm saying, I'm…like you." Ginny said the phrase as if it hurt her. Hermione had to try not to take it personally. She reached forward, grabbed her friend's arm. She needed proof; she yanked up the right sleeve of Ginny's dress, and there it was. The "O" that doomed her friend.

"How is this even possible? Has this always been here?" Hermione demanded, staring at her friend as if seeing her in a new light. Ginny bristled, the tears at the corners of her eyes slowing momentarily as she shot her friend a short look.

"No, I wouldn't have lied to you Mione. It only showed up three days ago, I guess I'm just a really late presenter." She shrugged, as if it wasn't even more traumatic to think she was in the clear and then be wrong. She slipped into protector mode, clasped her friend's hands tightly in her own.

"It's not unheard of, but it's really rare; I'm so sorry Gin." She could only think of three cases where anyone had presented after the age of fifteen but it seemed that Ginny was just that unlucky.

"Hey, it's not a death sentence, right? That's what you always say." Ginny looked desperate to believe her words but Hermione hadn't meant them even when she said them. "There are plus sides, right? Safety, comfort, compassion?" Those were all true but only in the sense that omegas gave them to others. Omegas accepted the worst of their alphas' anger so that they wouldn't take it out on the children. Omegas comforted their alphas to ensure that even when their egos were bruised they could still lead the world. They were compassionate to others to a fault so that they could be taken advantage of. All the positives people squawked about being an omega were bullshit, they were things other people used omegas for in this raw deal, omegas got nothing, but she couldn't tell Ginny that.

"If you don't want to tell people you don't have to. The characteristics you've always heard are stereotypes, they can be fought. Physically, any differences between you and a beta are minute. I'll help you with fighting the chemical stuff, but for right now it would probably be best to avoid alphas, until you're strong enough to resist." When she saw Ginny's overwhelmed expression, Hermione stopped her directions and pulled her friend into her a hug, holding tightly. "You'll be okay." She whispered. "I know it's scary but you will be okay."

"I was so scared." Ginny whispered in between sniffles. "I haven't told anyone else. I don't want anyone else to know."

"That's okay, Gin. We can do that." Hermione assured, rubbing her friend's back. She pretended she
didn't notice her friend's shaking, and tried to focus on Ginny's scent, fresh, bright carnations, which had only gotten stronger with her presentation.

"I'm so sorry 'Mione. You've had to deal with this for years, how… how do you not…" Ginny trailed off, at a loss for words.

"Cry all the time?" She smiled half-heartedly, stubbornly ignoring both of their misfortunes. "That takes practice too."
A heavy oak door separated them from the outside world, heavy but not impenetrable. Or soundproofed, he had to remind himself, adjusting the beta in his lap so that he could reach her mouth to kiss her and muffle some of the unnecessarily dramatic noises she was making. She relinquished the spot she had been mouthing at on his neck, instead choosing to wrap her fingers in the hair at the base of his neck and tug firmly. He hummed happily, enjoying the slight edge of pain mixing with the pleasure her other hand was bringing as it explored. She smelled rich, like lavender and amber, which shouldn't have worked together, and didn't if he focused too much on her, but was peripherally pleasant. He had a few blissful moments of being able to focus on her wandering hands and wander some on his own. Her hands were slowly tracing along his sides, across his chest, down his abdominal muscles and then back, getting centimeters lower each time. She had just begun undoing his belt and he had just managed to undo all the laces on her corset when she felt the need to moan enthusiastically, arching her back grotesquely and shoving her rather plump bosom into his face, which wasn't bad in the slightest, but a sharp and unnecessarily loud change in this progression. As if his senses hadn't received enough of a shock for one thirty second period, right then, that heavy oak door chose to fly open, thudding into the wall beside it and flying in the face of the fact that had been locked.

As if answering the unasked question of who would dare interrupt such a thing, Blaise Zabini stepped into the room, casting a highly skeptical glance at the scene in front of him before stepping over to the wet bar in the corner of the room and pouring himself a drink. The girl in Draco’s lap, Flora (Florence? Hannah?), gaped in shock at the incredibly tall man with very dark skin and very high cheek bones. Blaise made for an intimidating image, even more so when he was casual, comfortable, and relaxed, especially when the situation called for the exact opposite of all those things.

"Really Drake? I thought you had better taste in your slags," He threw out casually, making eye contact with his fellow lord, not caring the slightest about the fact that the girl was still in the room. She huffed in protest, straightening up and turning around as if preparing to rebuke him. "You could hear this one down the hallway" Blaise continued without hesitation, and took a sip while raising his eyebrows, daring her to say anything in her own defense. Blaise had the kind of mannerisms that told you that he came from money, new money, but money none the less, and he wasn't afraid to show it. His mother had been given an honorary title after the death of her seventh husband. Rumor has it she was sleeping with the King's uncle, but it had yet to be proven. Not that anyone would bring it up around Blaise.

Be that as it may, the act certainly worked on Florence, she huffed one more time and looked at Draco pointedly, who just shrugged and rolled his eyes at his friend. If Blaise really wanted to talk right that moment there was very little that Draco could do to stop it, and frankly, it wasn't really worth it, not for some mediocre snogging and maybe an even more mediocre shag with an extreme amount of convincing. Sighing, she finished the laces on her corset with an impressive speed and sashayed out the way she came, casting one final dirty look over her shoulder at Blaise.

Draco casually grabbed one of the many throw pillows from behind him, dropping it into his lap and crossing his legs while glaring at Blaise pointedly.

"Thanks for that by the way, mate, really appreciate it. Should I give you a schedule of my shags so you can plan ahead since you seem to enjoy interrupting so much?" Draco taunted, only relaxing his
exaggerated sneer when Blaise poured a second glass of scotch, handing it to him and lounging on the couch facing him with zero consideration for etiquette. Ah, the arrogance of new money.

"Well, that seems like that could get problematic, since you're getting married soon." Blaise commented, the accusation painted clearly across his face. He raised one aristocratic eyebrow, highlighting the features that always made Draco question who Blaise's real father was. Blaise looked too proper to be the son of a wealthy merchant. Not that anyone would bring it up around Blaise.

"So, what, you took a two-day trip to try to make me feel guilty for not immediately writing to you when I found out which dainty little pureblood I've been assigned?" Draco sneered. This marriage contract negotiations hadn't been exactly a surprise, but he hadn't been paying close enough attention to the preceding to be ready for when they came. He just had to get in the carriage and show up.

"Well it would've been nice to have heard from my best mate rather than a letter from my lovely fiancée," Blaise cringed, and Draco shuddered sympathetically.

"Ah, so that's what this is about, you're just bursting with joy at the prospect of being brothers?" Draco mocked in a high-pitched tone, more closely resembling what Flora sounded like when she wasn't trying to sound sultry than what Blaise sounded like when he was excited. Blaise shot him a look that told Draco that he was not amused, even though Draco knew he was. Blaise was just a big softy. Not that anyone would bring it up around Blaise.

"Hardly, coming to talk the lady out of it before she can make a terrible mistake more like." Blaise taunted mischief in his expression as he swirled the ice in his class, but Draco knew better, Blaise came for a reason and it certain wasn't Astoria Greengrass's protection. He had an inkling that he knew what it was.

"Your mother flipped out again." Draco said seriously, it was a conversation that they had had a few too many times for comfort.

"Of course," Blaise nodded. It had become so common in his life that he couldn't imagine another reality. Draco pitied him, even though he would never say it aloud.

"You used spending time with Daphne as an excuse to have an alibi when she goes after number eight." Draco continued, stating the obvious but making sure to put it out in the open. Blaise wouldn't talk about anything going on in his life unless someone else brought it up. Even if it needed to be dealt with.

"Naturally." Blaise confirmed, picking at a stray thread on his meticulously fitted coat.

"She's going to get caught one of these times." Draco reminded him, while he understood Blaise's avoidance of his problems, he couldn't always let him get away with it. It wasn't healthy, or efficient.

"Yes." Blaise nodded, showing no more concern than if Draco had commented on the likelihood of it raining.

"You'll be stripped of your title." Draco pressed on, trying to get some sort of a reaction. Blaise pressed his lips together into a thin line, a sign that he was approaching the end of his patience.

"Mmmhhhhmm." He murmured, clearly having to work to maintain an unaffected demeanor.

"The Greengrasses will not be happy." Draco pointed out, imagining Lord Greengrass's face if the man he married his eldest daughter off to ended up a pauper.
"Dowry's already been paid, and it's much larger than yours will be by the way." Blaise shrugged, throwing in the jab to try to distract Draco from his goal. It didn't work.

"They'll throw Daphne out with you." Draco reminded him, and for some reason that was the straw that broke him. Blaise's hand clenched on his glass and he spit out his reply with barely contained malice.

"And Astoria will be cut off if they ever find out about your father's more questionable practices, "He snarled, before modulating his tone, taking it down a notch. "but I won't talk if you won't." The young lords reached an understanding. Draco wanted Blaise to be prepared for the inevitable, Blaise wanted Draco to know that he wouldn't go down alone if Draco tried to speed up the process. Even if it didn't have to be explicit, they had reached an understanding. That's what friends were for.

"It's a good thing we're going to be brothers then huh?" Draco offered pleasantly, raising his glass in a mock toast.

"A very good thing." Blaise repeated the gesture, flashing a saccharine smile that didn't reach his eyes.

There was a moment of silence while ice cubes clinked in their crystal glasses. Then the tension seemed to ebb, because even though Blaise was new money, he knew the tightropes of tension and secrecy that covered the aristocratic world, and was just as good at navigating them as Draco was.

"So, Astoria, huh?" Blaise asked casually, raising an eyebrow pointedly.

"Yes, Astoria." Draco affirmed, still a little in denial at the significance of those words. He was not marrying Astoria, what kind of a cruel joke was that?

"She's… pleasant." Blaise offered optimistically.

"Very pleasant." Draco agreed.

"and nice." Blaise tried again.

"Very nice." Draco repeated.

"And dull as a post." Blaise stated bluntly.

"Very much so, yes."

_Hermione_

Being a handmaiden wasn't exactly an easygoing job, but since arriving at the Manor, Hermione's life had gone from mildly insane to positively nuts. Astoria was in a near constant state of panic, constantly fluttering about, deciding that she needed a brand-new wardrobe and had to start the new diet from Paris that Pansy Parkinson had written to her about and had to alter the spell that she had been using to lighten her hair, honey blonde was no longer on trend, platinum was the crème de la crème now a day. And those were just the big decisions.

Every conversation with any member of the Malfoy household and even Astoria's parents had to be analyzed to find some clues about the upcoming engagement. Astoria wasn't allowed to be there for any of the negotiations (one of the many gross injustices with this whole process in Hermione's opinion), and her parents were forbidden from openly discussing the details of the contract until after they were signed. Astoria had been nervous before, but now she was frenzied. The only one less amused than Hermione was Daphne. The sisters were very used to being housed in separate wings,
but now in Malfoy manor, they were being housed in adjoining rooms. It was a train wreck to say the least.

She and Katie had spent the first day at the Manor (minus one ill-fated hour running around trying to stop Harry from doing anything stupid and a brief sojourn to the kitchen after breakfast) in a frenzied panic. The girls weren't used to discomfort, or inconvenience, or, you know, anything unpleasant. Even though she loved them like they were her own sisters, she kind of resented them for that, especially when she was driven insane trying to keep it that way.

Now, Astoria was in a state of dismay with the realization that the dress she had chosen for her first formal dinner at the Malfoy household had been misplaced during travel and wouldn't be found in time. So there began the desperate search for the backup dress. It had to be alluring, but demure, bold yet coy, sophisticated but cutting edge, dramatic but not gauche, and most importantly eye catching but never desperate. After putting Astoria in over a dozen options that were swiftly rejected, a sharp rap came on the door.

"Everybody decent?" Lady Greengrass called, covering her eyes with exaggerated modesty as she stuck her head around the door. Daphne rolled her eyes, barely glancing up from her book. Daphne had chosen her dress with little fanfare, requiring much less maintenance than Astoria.

"Yes, mother." Astoria made her voice sound exasperated as she turned away from the door, but Hermione saw the smile on Astoria's face. Whatever either daughter said, they both loved their mother deeply.

"I'm sure you'll be changing that tune once you see how I am rescuing your ungrateful behind." She teased, opening the door fully to step through, and with a dramatic flourish, displaying a brand-new gown.

"My Lady," Katie and Hermione chorused in unison, dipping into low curtsies.

"Hello girls," Lady Astoria chimed happily and both maids stood. "Now what do you think?" She asked, draping the gown on Astoria's bed. Its body was ruched red satin, with side panels, a choker, and sleeves made of a beautiful white fabric with a gorgeous oriental red floral pattern. There was a moment of awed silence as the four young girls looked at each other and then at the proudly grinning lady in the room.

"Perfect." Daphne announced, speaking for the room, as usual.

There was flurry of movement as Katie and Hermione snapped into action, ushering Astoria behind a screen and systematically stripping her and then pulling the dress over her head. Astoria stood there like a doll, used to being moved around. There was a part of Hermione that was in mourning for Astoria and the box she was trapped into, just like the rest of them, but then she was reminded that the dress Astoria was wearing cost more than her life was worth and the feeling faded slightly.

When Astoria stepped out from behind the curtain, Lady Greengrass gasped and Daphne nodded appreciatively. Hermione hurriedly adjusted each seam, making sure it laid just right on Astoria as she stepped forward to consider a trifold mirror.

"Thank you." Astoria turned back to her mother, and Hermione wasn't entirely surprised to see tears in Astoria's eyes, the girl had always been overly sentimental. The Lady simply grasped her daughters hand and held it for a beat before ushering for both girls to finish getting ready. While Hermione and Katie adjusted Astoria and Daphne's hairstyles and face paints, their mother prepped them.
"So, you both know that this the first official dinner with the whole of the Malfoy family present, but we will also have an added guest, your Mr. Zabini is here to spend more time courting you, Daphne."

"How wonderful." Daphne sneered under her breath. Katie giggled.

"You will be demure and the perfect hostess." Lady Greengrass rebuked and shot her eldest daughter a scathing look. Daphne looked down at her feet in response. Daphne may have been an Alpha, and Lady Greengrass a beta, but her mother still had control of her. While the Greengrasses were very freethinking, there were still traditions that they maintained. Daphne was still a noble's daughter, she was still getting married off, and she still needed to remember her place in the world. Daphne hated it.

The girls' mother spun, directing the full force of her attention of Astoria. Astoria trembled slightly with nerves, while her mother was a loving, caring woman, she still intimidated the hell out of her daughters.

"Now you, my lovely Astoria have much more at stake here. The Malfoys are an excellent family, with a very long standing history, a dynastic union would be very beneficial to the family name. You must be absolutely lovely tonight. You look wonderful, Hermione and I have assured that, but now the onus is on you. You must be charming but not act as if you are trying to be charming. You must be submissive but intriguing. Simply put, you must be perfect. Absolutely perfect." Hermione could hear as Astoria swallowed in fear. She gently put her hands on the younger girl's shoulders as Astoria stared at her face in the mirror. "Now I must go greet the Malfoys and Mr. Zabini before dinner, you two must arrive exactly three minutes late to the second. The family is counting on you."

Astoria swallowed sharply again, Daphne gulped, and as Lady Astoria closed the door behind her, Katie and Hermione traded worried looks.

Everything about these engagements had to go perfectly.
Realizations

Draco

Draco was exhausted. He had suffered through a miserable meal with all the Greengrasses and Blaise. Where Daphne and Blaise traded barely hidden snide insults and Astoria spent the entire time talking about herself while Lady Greengrass watched him like a hawk. Apparently, he hadn't quite earned their trust yet. Not that he deserved it.

The main thing that he got from that meal wasn't that Astoria was annoying, though she was, or that Daphne and Blaise's marriage would end with one of them killing the other, though it would. No, the main thing that he learned was that his life was shaping up to be a positively miserable experience. The next couple months would just be a countdown to that misery becoming permanent. He needed to spend them doing whatever the hell he wanted to.

Hermione

Hermione Granger disappeared easily. She was not particularly tall, or short, or beautiful or ugly. Most of the time she blended in well with the crowd. This was no exception. It was easy to go unnoticed when you were unexceptional.

Hermione had a very good reason to hide. After their unfortunate interaction in the garden, Hermione was doing everything in her power to avoid Draco Malfoy. It wasn't as if she was significant enough for him to remember but she did not want to take the chance of bringing more torment on herself.

She started by memorizing his schedule. Which was easier than it probably should've been due to Astoria bribing his chambermaid to make a copy of it every morning. Astoria did everything in her power to accidentally intercept Draco's path and Hermione did everything in her power to be on the exact opposite of every one of Draco's events for the day.

The problem with that appeared in the first forty-eight hours of her plan.

Draco Malfoy was never where he was supposed to be. In fact, he was consistently in the exact opposite of where he was supposed to be. When he was supposed to be at the tailors for a fitting in the south wing, Hermione planned to drop off Astoria's clothes for the wash in the north wing. She had just rounded a corner when she stumbled upon the sight of Draco snogging with a leggy blonde, whose notable legs were wrapped around his torso. Hermione spent half a second frozen in shock before whirling back around the corner and scampering away as quickly as she could. A deep, drawn out, rumbling groan echoed down the hallway from behind her and Hermione sped up, scampering away as quickly as her heavy basket would allow her while trying desperately to cool the flush her heated skin displayed as her mind played that groan on repeat. Damn it all to hell.

And so, it went. Hermione would go to the kitchen. Draco would be standing outside being fed grapes by a brunette when he was supposed to be having tea with his former tutor. Hermione would go to grab a book for Daphne from the library, Draco would have a red head on her back on a table in the center of the aisles when he was supposed to be in a meeting to help draw up the marriage contract. She had a hard time not thinking about that image that night before she went to bed.

It was impossible to avoid him but she sure as hell wasn't giving up.

Draco

Three days after what Draco had dubbed "The Arrival of Doom," Draco found himself standing in a
hallway, staring at a door. He sighed, forced his shoulders down, and knocked on the heavy mahogany door. He stared at the ornate snake engravings for a few moments before he was given the go ahead.

"Come in!" The voice was muffled through the door but it still made Draco nervous. His father had been home for three hours before he had called for Draco. The shortest amount of time to date. When he was eight, his father had been home for a whole month before Draco had seen him. Coincidentally, it was the same month that the Greengrasses had visited, maybe Lucius just despised them as much as Draco did.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" Draco asked as he stepped into the room. Lucius did not look up from the volume he was pouring over, nothing distracted him from his work, not even... especially, his son.

"Yes, have you been enjoying your whores?" His father asked nonchalantly. Draco felt his blood run cold. This was not the conversation he had been expecting to have.

"Excuse me?" Draco swallowed sharply, hoping he had misheard, even though he knew he hadn't.

"The whores you've been fucking in every inch of this manor? Your slags?" His father repeated, still not looking up from the book he was reading.

"I'm sorry?" Draco tried, not sure what could stop this conversation, but desperately wanting it to.

"I understand Draco, I do. I just wanted to inform you that the Greengrasses, unconvinced by your character and worthless personality, are insisting on a fidelity clause for both you and your prospective bride, there will be no more whores, no more slags, and no more affairs. I understand it will be miserable and dull, but you will be loyal to your wife, no bastard children to besmirch the Malfoy name. Do you understand?" Lucius ordered, asking as if everything he had just said was normal and okay. "Enjoy your whores for now, but it has to end before you sign that contract."

Draco was standing stock still in his father's office. He watched as he turned the page, the sound deafeningly loud in the silent room.

"You're dismissed." His father said pointedly, and Draco slowly left the room, his head spinning painfully. His future had just gotten even worse, he wasn't even sure that that was possible.

**Hermione**

He found her three days after she arrived. Just like the last time, he caught her the one moment that she was vulnerable.

She laughed, the sound echoing through the empty hallway as Harry teased her, as if they were gallivanting children again. It was easy and it was silly and it was fun. Malfoy manor was so large that it was child's play to find not just an abandoned corridor but an abandoned wing. She was sitting happily on the ground, on knee tucked into her chest as Harry inspected a threadbare tapestry barely clinging to its spot on the wall.

"The sacred 28, huh. Ever heard of it?" Harry asked, peering back at Hermione curiously. Harry was always curious, it typically didn't end well.

"Only in the sense that the Greengrasses and Malfoys are two of them." Hermione shrugged, trying to not think during one of her few breaks. Astoria was at a sit-down breakfast with Lady Malfoy and Lady Greengrass, the prep had taken three hours and had started before the sun had rose. Hermione was exhausted and was taking a well-deserved mental vacation.
"Hmm some of these names are blotted out." Harry wasn't exactly on board with her plan.

"All dead I guess." She shrugged, pointedly trying to change the topic. She usually spent all her free time studying, something Minerva, the manager of the maid staff, had been encouraging Hermione to focus on since she was eleven. She knew Minerva was trying to groom her to be assistant manager at some point but she just needed it to be sooner. She was interrupted from her thoughts by the sound of footsteps echoing down the hallway. She had just enough time to trade a worried look with Harry and stand up before the intruder rounded the corner.

"Why are you never working?" One Draco Malfoy scoffed, casting a mocking smile at Hermione. Her eyes went straight to the ground, folding her hands in front of herself demurely. A draft blew down the hallway and a heavy dose of alpha pheromones assaulted her senses. Draco Malfoy smelled rich. Mint and lavender hit her first, then sandalwood and cedar, then the scent of a spring rain, and finally warm, delicious vanilla.

Draco Malfoy smelled amazing and Hermione was going to climb him like at tree in about five seconds, pheromone resistance be damned. Thankfully, the wind shifted, and as a gust of wind pushed air from behind them, Harry's scent replaced Draco's, Hermione let the brotherly scent of autumn leaves center her. Harry was not experiencing the same effects.

Harry pushed off the wall, crossing his arms across his chest. Draco's mocking of Hermione had triggered his inner Alpha, which registered it as a challenge to his dominance. Now Harry was showing all the signs of protective aggression. While they might not be a romantic couple, Harry still felt compelled to protect the omega.

"May I help you sir?" Some part of Harry's sanity must have still been there, even if the question sounded much more like a threat than anything else. Draco didn't seem the least bit bothered, even smirking in respond.

"Stable boy?" Draco had to have been making a conscious, concerted effort to sound that condescending.

"Senior Stable hand, sir." Harry corrected, his hands clenching in fists at his sides as he struggled to keep his tone deferential. Draco's smirk got wider and Hermione knew that he was planning on exploiting that weak spot for all that it had.

"Lovely, now stable boy, I want you to find me a horse, can't quite remember its name right now, Palomino, has a nick on the side of its ear. I want its name, stall number, and full pedigree information." Hermione's mouth fell open a little bit. The Greengrasses had brought over two dozen horses, and the Malfoy's were famous for their Thoroughbreds. They had hundreds. Draco's request was legitimately impossible.

Harry hesitated, bristling with indignation, and Hermione knew that he was going to snap at any moment. Knowing it was wrong but doing it any way, Hermione carefully touched the inside of Harry's wrist, still looking at the ground demurely, but projecting every inch of her rather weakened magical aura to try to get Harry to relax. Omegas were famous for their abilities to calm down offended Alphas and now she would milk that ability for all that it was worth. She watched as he very deliberately opened his hands, let his arms drop, rolled his shoulders, and forced his body to relax. The crisis seemed momentarily diverted.

"Yes, sir." Harry nodded, walking away briskly, only casting an apologetic look back at Hermione when he had safely passed Draco. Hermione's hands shook with fear, remembering her previous two interactions with him. This could only end poorly.
"You always let him speak for you?" Draco asked, leaning against the same spot Harry had previously occupied. The casual tone of his question finally tore Hermione's gaze from the floor, staring at him in shock. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to answer his question so she just stared blankly at him for a moment before he raised one perfect blond eyebrow and looked at her pointedly.

"No, sir." Her voice came out soft and shaky and a large part of her was screaming in protest, but the part of her that was still eight years old and terrified of making a mistake lest she be sold, wouldn't let her stay calm.

"I doubt it." Draco shrugged dismissively. He studied her for a moment more, and she had to be careful to avoid eye contact. He seemed to have learned something, because his tone got more pensive than casual. "Huh. How long have you worked in the Greengrass household?" He asked, his tone implying there was more riding on his question than simple small talk. She desperately wished he hadn't dismissed Harry.

"My whole life, sir." She answered, her tone carefully measured, trying to give him nothing to read into.

"I see. And is this your first visit to my family's estate?" He asked, a smirk started to spread across his face. She didn't like the look of that.

"No sir, I was here once before, about eight years ago," She answered, trying to betray nothing, but she knew her shaking hands and nervous voice gave her away. The smirk on Draco's face spread into a full-on grin, and Hermione knew nothing good was going to come from this conversation continuing. "If you'll excuse me, sir, Astoria has a few tasks that she will need me to attend to." She tried desperately, moving to step past her. He stopped her, stepping into her path without hesitation. She froze. The closeness made his scent even more powerful, and she was having a hard time focusing.

"Did I dismiss you slave?" He asked, she shook her head quickly, stepping backwards and dropping her gaze to a spot on the rug in front of her toe. "You smell sweet, syrupy almost. Omega?" Her heart stopped. It was considered incredibly rude to ask for a person's presentation in casual conversation, but Draco Malfoy didn't seem to care the slightest for what was conventional. She nodded, hoping he'd drop it. He didn't. "You see, I didn't recognize you at first, because you had that bush that you call hair up the other night in the garden." Her blood ran cold and it seemed like her lungs forgot how to function. "But the moment I saw you today, wandering where you shouldn't be, snarly mess unconstrained, I knew exactly who you were. You were the girl I found snooping through my library the last time your household visited." He paused, and she felt his eyes staring at her, awaiting confirmation. She nodded sharply, afraid what her voice would do if she permitted herself to speak. "You were the first omega servant I had ever met you know, it was entertaining at the time." She blinked tears out of her eyes, recalling just how entertaining she had found the experience. He stepped closer, and she felt a little sick. Nobles could do whatever the hell they wanted to a slave, especially an omega, and she knew enough horror stories to know that she had every reason to be afraid.

He was so close to her that with the slightest shuffle forward, their feet would be touching. Her hands were shaking more violently now and her knees felt weak. Her body was screaming at her to submit, to melt into him; her mind was screaming at her to run, consequences be damned. When Draco started speaking again, she flinched.

"You need to listen to me very closely now, because I will not repeat myself." His tone was soft, his volume barely more than a whisper. "What I did that day, all those years ago, was wrong. I know that. It will not happen again." All the signals she was getting came to a screeching halt. Her mind
felt trapped in a cycle of *wait, what?* "If you tell anyone what I just said to you, I will deny it, I will get you fired, and I will make sure you get sold off to the highest bidder, do you understand?"

She nodded quickly to prove that she did and then watched as Draco walked briskly away. She stared until he was out of sight, and then stared at the bare wall, trying to figure out what in the name of all that is holy had happened.
Draco

Draco Malfoy was obsessing. He was aware that he was obsessing. He was also aware that it was unhealthy and that it wasn't making any of his real problems go away. That didn't mean that he could stop obsessing.

His life was in the gutter and he was staring down the bleak dark hole of a miserable depression that he would probably never be able to crawl out of. He wished he had more to think about than his impending misery, but he didn't. His father refused to let him help run the business, even though Draco had undergone years of schooling so he'd be ready to take over when the time came. He could play Quidditch, but that really got dull when you were just throwing a ball into a hoop by yourself. He could force some of the younger servants to play with him, but that got quite pathetic after the age of twelve. Blaise had been locked in his room after that first formal meal, and some truly alarming noises had begun when Draco knocked. Something told him that a large portion of that room would have scorch marks and ash before his visit was done.

So, with no other acceptable diversion, Draco was obsessing. It was that slave. He wasn't even sure if it was about her. It was just, he had been such a fucked-up child. He knew he had his issues, he knew most of them were related to his father's psycho controlling tendencies with a touch of abandonment. It was when she had been staring at the ground that he had remembered lifting her face. There had been tears in her eyes. She had been hurting; she had been humiliated; she had hated him, and he had been okay with it! Because he thought it was funny? That it was neat that he could. He knew he was an asshole now, but he had forgotten just how terrible he had been. He still had a temper and he still had to have the upper hand. But that, that manipulation, that had been like rape. After that incident, he had to sit through a long lecture from his nanny about how forcing an omega to do anything against their will was paramount to abuse. Of course, the rules got blurry with slaves, you always needed the owner's permission before anything could occur with a piece of their property, but that was more etiquette than enforced law. Just looking at the girl, all that guilt had come back, he had legitimately, sincerely apologized, even if he had to couch it in insults and threats to get it out of his mouth.

Now he was feeling this weird compulsion, like he had to make it up to her. He was an asshole, and a despicable bastard, but this was the worst thing that he had ever done. Maybe if he was just nicer her, he could repair some of his karma, I mean how hard could it possibly be? He was nice to people all the time. Not like, consistently or anything, but he was nice. Since his libido was shot with the realization that his father had been keeping tabs on his sex life, it probably wouldn't be that bad of a diversion.

He sat up straight in bed, picturing the terrified maid in his mind. He was a terrible human being and that probably wouldn't change, but maybe if he could just try being decent to one human, the twisting feeling in his stomach would stop.

Hermione

Hermione's life was difficult, and challenging, and sometimes painful, but it's not as if she had much of a baseline to compare it to. Life at Malfoy manor was faster than at the Greengrass estate, everyone was always in a hurry and there was just too many people around, all of the time. Yet, it still seemed impossible to avoid the people she didn't want to see.

"Hey 'Mione, wait up!" Ron Weasley called down the crowded hallway. Hermione sighed and
looked up at the ceiling. If there was a God, he would strike her down right now before the waiter could get here.

"Ron." Hermione muttered curtly before continuing on her way, but his freakishly long legs made Ronald Weasley impossible to ditch. He grinned, blue eyes lighting up as he looked at her.

"I was wondering when we'd bump into each other, you haven't been avoiding me, have you, 'Mione?" Ron was like a puppy; he constantly repeated her name, every sentence. When they were younger, Hermione thought she wanted nothing more than to be a Weasley. She wanted to be Ginny's sister and happily settle into an easy relationship with a boy who respected her. Then, Ron noticed she had boobs, talked her into a rather dull snog, and forgot to speak to her again for three months. Yeah, that popped that sad little bubble. Two years later, Ron had apparently become satisfied with playing the field, and as Daphne predicted, had come back to Hermione, expecting her to just fall into his arms.

The problem was that Ron Weasley didn't love her, he never had and he probably never would. But he loved the idea of her. He loved the concept of a strong woman that could be the mother to his children. He loved the idea of having a cute story to tell about how hard he had to work before she said yes. He liked the fact that he could feel good about himself for treating an omega like a human being. He didn't actually like anything about her. Not that he'd listen when she tried to tell him that.

"Of course not, Ron." She forced the corners of her mouth to lift in what was only a very shallow imitation of a smile. Ron didn't seem to be able to tell the difference, he was oblivious to anything outside of his own teaspoon of an emotional range.

"Well then, in that case you won't object to a walk in the garden this evening?" The traumatic experience from her last trip to the Malfoy garden was only overshadowed by what she was sure would be an equally traumatic experience if she agreed to this trip. Ron suggested these kind of excursions at least once a week and petitioned Lady Greengrass to release her from her contract every three months.

"Sorry, I can't, tonight's the night I do Astoria's eyebrows." Hermione lied through her teeth, ignoring Ron's protests and confusion as she slipped into Astoria's room, thankful for the escape. Astoria was on the couch, looking at her pointedly for a beat while she sipped her tea. She was sure her expression showed just how harassed she felt. Astoria laughed hysterically, knowing exactly what had just happened.

"Not a word." Hermione threatened voice low, Astoria laughed so hard tea came out of her nose.

..."Hermione, have you ever wondered what your wedding will be like?" Astoria asked quietly as Hermione brushed her hair back. The soft blonde strands were still wet from the bath Hermione had drawn for her and even through the silk robe, Hermione could smell the super sweet pineapple scent Astoria radiated. Daphne smelled like it too, and the scent had always been calming to her, had always felt like sisterhood. Most of the time Astoria felt like her little sister, especially when she asked questions like that.

"We both know that I'm probably not getting married." She said softly, focusing on the damp hair running through the comb rather than the tiny twinge of sadness at the bottom of her heart. She pretended she didn't notice.

"Of course you will, you'll catch some unattached Duke's eye, and then fall in love at first sight; he'll buy out your contract and you'll ride off into the sunset." Astoria insisted, looking at Hermione in the
mirror as if she could somehow force optimism through force of will.

"It's a nice story, but it's not mine, maybe Katie's." Hermione shrugged, Katie was delicate and feminine and intelligent without being intimidating, everything Hermione wasn't essentially. Katie would end up with a nice guy, she deserved a nice guy, but Hermione's match would just be a deal sweetener in a political maneuver at best.

"Mione!" Astoria admonished, as if the truth was a crime.

"Eventually some Alpha will notice my mark and my bracelet, make an offer your father can't refuse and I'll get married off to a random stranger and never be allowed to see the sun again." She shrugged; she had been trying to convince herself for years that saying it aloud would make it easier when the time came. It didn't stop the middle of the night panic attacks but at least they didn't happen every time she spoke to an alpha anymore.

"Mione!" Astoria repeated stubbornly, even more horrified, turning to look at Hermione and snarling her fine hair. Hermione clucked, turning her back around so that she could finish her hair, starting an easy braid.

"Or if I'm lucky, Ron Weasley will finally do something to impress your father and ask for my hand as compensation." She half joked. It was sad when a loveless marriage with a dope was the better of the two options.

"Would that be such a bad thing?" Astoria asked seriously, sadness in her eyes.

"Ronald excites me about as much as a piece of toast." Hermione stated dryly, tying a ribbon around the bottom of her braid to keep it in place. Astoria turned a violent shade of red, as she always did at even the slightest possible innuendo. It was very entertaining.

"Mione! You're making me blush." Astoria giggled like a schoolgirl, and it hit Hermione how much older she was, if not physically, emotionally. Astoria was just too good for this world.

"Tori!" Hermione mimicked, before continuing sagely. "You're the one whose getting married, and to Draco Malfoy, no less, you're going to have to get used to these things."

"Draco's a perfect gentleman." Astoria asserted, straightening her shoulders as she began applying a peach face lotion. Hermione snorted, which made Astoria sit up and look at her suspiciously. "Why have you heard something?" Astoria asked desperately. Hermione couldn't find it in her to crush her hope.

"No of course not, outlandish rumors, nothing more." Hermione denied, quickly, too quickly, but Astoria didn't notice, going on to discuss how nervous she was for their scheduled tea the following morning. It was going to be a long night.

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Hermione yawned as she closed Astoria's door with care. The younger girl had asked her to deliver a note to Lady Malfoy, insisting that it had to be delivered right now, so that the older woman could read it first thing in the morning before the oh so important tea. She had seemed so nervous that Hermione couldn't refuse, so she shivered through the long walk to the opposite side of the manor despite her difficulty keeping her eyes open in the dim lighting of her weak lumos.

"Hello," a stiff voice called down the hallway from behind her, just a little too loud for the silent wing.
She spun quickly, not expecting anyone else to be awake this late.

Her blood ran cold as she took in the youngest Malfoy. He was missing his usual dress coat and tie and his hair was in a state of disarray, as if he had been running his fingers through it. She wanted to run her fingers through it. Damn it Hermione. Down girl.

"Hello sir, may I be of some assistance?" She asked carefully, schooling her features to be pleasantly blank, as if this guy was just another person she was expected to serve and they didn't have this weird twisted intimacy.

"How are you?" He asked, wincing as if it physically hurt him to be civil. Which wouldn't necessarily surprise her.

"I'm well sir, thank you for asking." She answered equally awkwardly, then waited because nobles didn't make small talk, not unless they were stalling before asking for something highly uncomfortable. If he was about to ask for an anti-pregnancy potion she might fling herself off a tower. Not that it would be the first time that had happened.

"Everything in the manor to your liking?" He asked, then he started to cross his arms over his chest before correcting himself, pulling them back down to his side. That was strange. That was a question meant for a lady, meant for Astoria. Looking at the highly uncomfortable boy in front of her, maybe he was nervous. That would make sense. He was nervous to court Astoria so he was practicing how to be chivalrous. It was kind of cute actually, Now that it made sense. Draco Malfoy didn't know how to be charming and Astoria deserved a real courtship. She could work with it.

"Oh yes, it's quite lovely here." She answered, flashing a smile and adopting Lady Greengrass's tone. Hermione had never been courted, but she could wing it. Draco smiled in relief, a genuine, well-meaning smile. He was happy she had caught on to his game.

"I'm very pleased to hear that," he grinned and she smiled back. Maybe he could make Astoria happy, by some miracle, he might turn out to be worthy of her. If he was trying this hard, it might work.

"The company's not too bad either." She grinned, biting her lip and trying to keep a straight face. This was nice, a change of pace. She wasn't normally the one watching someone else be nervous, other people usually were watching her squirm. Nervous, desperate to please Draco Malfoy was actually kind of pleasant to be around.

"Glad you think so." He laughed, and it was a nice sound, pleasant and masculine, but not coarse or harsh. She liked it; she kind of wanted to make him laugh again, even if she wasn't sure how she did it.

"Minus a few significant exceptions, had a nasty run in a few days ago." She was pushing her luck; she knew she was pushing it, but she knew if Draco was actually the asshole in the garden and not the nervous boy in front of her, he wouldn't even realize that she was referencing him, and if he did, she'd play it off. Could always blame Ron. Draco laughed again, blushing slightly to signal that he knew exactly who she was talking about.

"I'm so sorry to hear that, need me to duel anyone for you?" He asked, and normally she'd be offended, him assuming she couldn't duel (she couldn't) and she couldn't confront assholes herself (she couldn't), but he said it in a folksy kind of way that was actually kind of goofy and cute around the blush. Draco Malfoy could be cute, who would've thought it. She laughed, louder than she should've with Astoria and Daphne sleeping just a few doors away.
"I think I'll be all set, think I just caught him at a bad time." She offered generously, he smiled and she smiled back while neither of them said anything for a beat.

"That's very forgiving of you." He grinned, "I'm sure he appreciates it." He shrugged, and she wasn't surprised that this was how Draco had to communicate, in veiled double talk, it wasn't that rare for nobility to be absolutely unable to communicate like normal human beings. Everything was double talk.

"Well I do have an errand to run, and then I have to head to bed, so I'll be seeing you." She smiled, setting off down the hallway, feeling decidedly less tired. She was about half way down the hallway before she realized Draco hadn't started moving. She turned for a just a beat, calling out casually. "And Draco, I'm sure tomorrow will be fine." She repeated the assurance she had given Astoria, happy she had done her part to make both parties slightly less awkward. Draco smiled and nodded, before setting off in the opposite direction.

Draco

What was he doing tomorrow again?
**A Powerful Accident**

Chapter Summary

This chapter contains accidental O Space (concepts very similar to Subspace) and non-consensual touching, though it is not in an explicitly sexual manner.

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**Draco**

It was hot. Not the good kind of hot. Not even warm, energizing, sunlight, kind of hot. It was hot in that way that everything felt sticky and uncomfortable and bloated and sweaty. Draco did not do well in heat. He was uncomfortably perched on a hard wrought iron chair with sweat sticky hair, trying to squint through the bright sunlight. The seat in front of him was empty, waiting for Astoria to arrive. Lady Greengrass had arrived a few minutes ago and he had done the thing, kissed her hand, smiled nicely, sat back down and resumed his irritated brooding.

The conversation from the night before had been weird. Astoria's slave was almost too friendly, it had been too easy. He had expected some resentment or cool formality the first few times he tried this new "being nice" thing, but it hadn't happened. He probably could've picked her up if he wanted to, but that wasn't the goal. He was trying to be better, not the same to more people. Lady Greengrass cleared her throat, finally, and Draco stood up quickly, hoping to get this over with. Astoria floated in, in a robin's egg blue gown that was perfectly demure. Astoria was the perfect beauty, a dainty little pureblood that would make his parent happy and could happily churn out little pureblood babies. It wasn't even that she was that terrible, even though she was very shallow, she was pleasant enough. It was just that everything she represented was Draco's personal version of hell.

He forced a smile that he was sure barely stood up to a passing glance, and took Astoria's hand, pressing a simple kiss to her knuckles. She was glowing, smiling so brightly as she took her seat. He sat down across from her and then there was silence. Painful, excruciating silence. All of the color drained out of Astoria's face as she realized she was supposed to fill it. She opened her mouth a few times, only to realize nothing was coming out and then promptly closing it. He let the silence continue for a few more moments before he couldn't take it anymore.

"Rather hot out here, don't you think?" It sounded like a line, why did everything he say sound like a bad pickup line? Why wasn't he a functioning human being, the questions abounded.

"Yes! Hot! Very Hot!" She said frantically, desperate for a topic. "So hot, really very hot." Draco glanced at Lady Greengrass, wondering if this was when the "oh yes, I forgot to mention, she was hit with a few too many hexes as a child" was supposed to start. The older woman just sighed, folding her hands. Draco nodded in response, silently pouring them all tea without a word.

Astoria sipped daintily, apparently she had all of her mannerisms down, but just couldn't manage a full sentence. She put her cup down, took a deep breath as if to speak, mouthed like a fish again, and then went for the cup again.

Astoria lifted her tiny cup; it trembled violently but she refused to adjust her dainty, lady like hand. She took a delicate sip and he watched her painted lips closely only because there was nothing else to do. Normally this whole sequence would've been utterly unremarkable, until Astoria sneezed suddenly. She sprayed tea out of her mouth, all over Draco. There was a beat of silence where Draco
sat there with his eyes closed, processing just how wrong this had gone. Then he opened his eyes, took notice of Astoria's horrified face and the hand over her mouth, and stood up without a word. The sound of the chair scraping on cobblestone was the only noise in the thick silence. He bowed simply to Astoria and then to her mother before clearing his throat.

"If you'll excuse me, I must take my leave, matters to attend to and such." Draco offered weakly, and then stiffly walked away. He just barely made it to his wing before sliding to the ground, laughing at how ridiculous it all was. He laughed at how there was literally no way for that to have gone any worse. He laughed at how Astoria's innate ability to chatter endlessly had somehow failed her when she was supposed to have a meaningful conversation. He laughed at the facts that he still felt sticky and smelled like tea. But most importantly, he laughed at the fact that none of it was really funny at all.

Hermione

Hermione was sleepily shuffling off to Minerva's office to drop off the list of items Astoria needed from the market when a large tan and black blob smacked into her.

"Mione!" Harry gasped, stepping back and frantically grabbing at Hermione's shoulders. She froze, staring at him with confusion. He was frazzled; his hair was even messier than normal and he was panting as if he had been running all around the manor at top speed.

"What?!" She demanded, pushing his hands off of her shoulders and holding her hands up, gesturing for him to calm the hell down.

"I messed up." Harry confessed dramatically as if it hurt. This was a very frustrating conversation.

"What's wrong?" She said very slowly, very precisely, so he would get to the point.

"I borrowed a book." He said very quickly, quickly enough that she had to run the sounds back in her head and stitch the syllables back together in order to understand what he was saying.

"Borrowed?" She asked skeptically, knowing that this kind of panic was never the result of borrowing.

"I really planned to put it back, I just had to look something up." Harry said, guilt seeping into his tone.

"Why Harry?" This wasn't like him, a panic induced research spree with books they weren't technically supposed to have was much more her style than his. He shook his head.

"No time to explain, and I don't have time to put it back either, Lord Greengrass is already looking for me, but Lucius Malfoy is here and he's asking about the book. He thinks it's been stolen." Harry explained quickly, glancing over his shoulder as if the Greengrass Patriarch was going to pop out around the corner to ambush him.

"Well I wonder why he would think that?" She said sarcastically, tilting her head with the question.

"Listen, you can yell at me later, just put it back Lucius's office, somewhere so that he'd just think he misplaced it." Harry directed, pulling the slim book out from the inner pocket of his coat. She hesitated, not sure if she could take it. "Please Mione." He begged. She sighed deeply, dropping her shoulders in defeat as she took the book into her hands. Harry ran off, leaving Hermione with a small book and a not so small problem.

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Lucius Malfoy does not leave his office. Apparently he had been here a week. She wouldn't know as she had never seen him in all of that time. A large part of her was a hundred percent certain that he was actually a figment of everyone's imagination: some kind of specter maybe. There was never food delivered that she could intercept, he never left for the loo, she was losing hope and was about to abandon her post, peering around the corner, when Lucius flew out the door. He walked by her, and she felt the breeze. Lucius acted as if he couldn't see anyone else, as if he was ten feet tall and everyone else was beneath him. He didn't walk frantically, but quickly, with purpose, a purpose no one could get in the way of. She waited until he had turned a corner and then flew to his door, he must've been in a hurry, because the door wasn't locked as she tapped it open. She panicked as she looked around the room, the place was immaculate, Lucius was clearly not the type to misplace things, Harry was such an idiot! She frantically ran to the desk, hoping she could slide it under a stack of papers so Lucius could stumble on it. Then she heard something that made her blood run cold.

"What are you doing?"

Draco

He had been walking to his father's office, hoping to catch him to give him some warning about how much of a disaster that tea had been, when he stumbled upon a surprising sight, the omega from the night before was shifting though papers on his father's desk.

"What are you doing?" He asked, slightly surprised and just a touch accusatory. She jumped, literally jumped, and then dropped something, it hit the ground with a thump which made her cringe.

"I was j...j...just..." She stuttered, painful fear etched in her feature as color drained out of her face. Her face, more than anything else, told him that she was up to something. It was bad, and uncomfortable and confusing. And then it got worse. Footsteps echoed down the hallway. Loud footsteps. Draco looked down the hallway and, seeing it empty, kicked the door closed.

"Lucius!" Someone shouted, and Draco had seconds to make a decision. This girl would be dead if she was caught spying on her host. And not metaphorically dead, literally dead, as in Aurors on the way, Dementor's kiss sentenced, dead. He would be dead if his father knew that he was even considering not turning her in. A sharp knock rapped on the door, and he decided.

He flew over, taking long steps and careening into her space. She stiffened, surprised, and looked up at him with wide chocolate brown eyes. Without allowing himself a moment to think about it, he wrapped an arm around her waist and cupped the back of her neck, wrapping his fingers and that hair, and pulling her close.

He registered the door opening as he felt his pulse racing. Her eyes started to get less sharp, less focused, and that's when he should've realized that something was going to go wrong.

Hermione

His hand was warm and firm, calmly placed against the nape of her neck, wrapped into her curls and tugging, not enough to move her head, just with enough tension to trigger all sorts of hormonal reactions. It was the move of newlyweds and desperate fiancées and always expressed a kind of intimacy. But this near stranger did it all the same, he gently squeezed the back of her neck and her omega roots were purring with joy. She felt his breath on her face and shivered. Everything started to blur as her senses dimmed. All she could process was the feel of his hand in her hair and the frantic beat of her heart. It felt like the most amazing, most wonderful drug was being pumped into her veins. She melted. Actually melted into his side without a thought for propriety or decency or even her own chastity. Her brain was awash with an overwhelming chorus of "alpha-alpha-alpha-..." It
was so easy to lose herself, all of her training and her preparations fell to the wayside. She felt herself slipping into a warm silky oblivion. She was existing in the bliss of his strength relaxing as her limbs started to feel like melted butter. With every breath she got a little more drunk off of his smell. It was heady, spicy, rich, with notes of sandalwood and vanilla as well as something unidentifiable that just screamed alpha. It was getting harder and harder to focus on anything, her thoughts getting more jumbled. She just wanted more, needed more. Needed her alpha, needed him to ground her. Her head dipped into his chest, and she could feel him speaking, though she couldn't process the words. He was talking to someone, not her, but there was no one else here. Only her alpha mattered. She heard a sharp click, and the last shred of focus told her that it was the sound of a door closing again.

A deep rumble echoed in Malfoy's chest, the primal noise of pleasure igniting something she needed more of. His other hand moved to her hip, the heat of it pulsing through the fabric of her dress. She wondered what his hands would feel like on her body, dragging across her skin. Would it feel electric, or dizzying ecstasy like the kind she was feeling now. It just didn't end, no peaks no rises, just extended bliss. Her head fell back as his hand moved to her throat, tracing a line down the tip of her chin along her jugular with one finger. She opened her eyes to look at him, as if she could communicate how amazing he was making her feel just by staring at him, because she was so far beyond words. She watched his beautiful mouth move, and she wondered what it would feel like if he trailed that mouth across her body. A small part of her realized that if his mouth was moving it was because he was speaking. She could hear his voice but couldn't make out the words. Her alpha was looking at her and it felt amazing but he didn't look pleased with her. Why wasn't her alpha happy with her? She blinked, slowly coming up so that she could hear what her alpha was telling her, so she could please him

"Come back to me, come on, you need to come back, you need to focus okay?" She nodded, and the warmth started to recede from her body, and she didn't want that. She shook her head, and then her alpha stepped back. Why would he do that? She reached for him, but her knees buckled as she sank to the floor. Her alpha knelt down in front of her and she watched him, hoping he could push the cold away.

"You're okay, I promise, you're okay, just focus on me, it's time to come up." He murmured, and she felt his hand on her face as he brushed a piece of hair out of her eyes. She was still decidedly loopy but everything started to come more into focus slowly. She felt like an addict, getting exactly what she wanted, she was getting her mind back, control back, even as the drug kept coming in. A draft passed through the room, and fresh, alpha free air passed across her face, it jolted her awake, forcing clarity as her mind cleared.

Coherence came back suddenly. The first thing she could focus on was sharp silver eyes and when she took a deep breath, humiliation flooded through her, flushing out any lingering arousal.

"Fuck." The word fell out of her mouth without her permission, and Draco barked out a surprised laugh.

"Yeah, that kind of sums it up." He chuckled.

_Draco_

The girl was not okay; she was pale and her hands were trembling. Instantly, he was brought back to the time he had found Blaise after he had taken a potion one night. He hadn't stopped trembling for hours, and had spent a large chunk of the time hurling. Blaise had claimed it was worth it for the few minutes of oblivion, but Draco had confiscated his stash. The slave didn't look quite so bad, but she was close. He realized he should probably do something when he heard her teeth chattering.

"Do you want water? Or tea?" He asked tentatively. She paused, as if she wasn't sure what she was
allowed to answer. He had figured out that she had a pretty good grasp on saying what he wanted to hear, that was not the point here. She nodded, pulling her knees up into her chest and tucking in her chin. Her skirts fell loose around her and it probably should've been a turn on, what with what had just happened, but all he could think about was how scared she looked now. Maybe in a few hours he'd have a nice wank to the memory of a very happy omega begging for him, but for now he had to focus.

"Dobby!" He called, and the slave just watched her blankly. Fuck, he wanted to stop thinking of her as that. The sharp crack of apparition snapped him back into focus.

"Yes, Master?" Dobby was always nervous around Draco, a symptom of Draco's childhood cruelty towards everything that moved. He didn't need the extra influx of guilt right now, but it definitely killed any lingering traces of the mood.

"Would you bring some tea?" He asked, carefully, even though Dobby still flinched. God, this was hard. "How do you take it?" He asked the girl. She just shrugged, words seeming to be beyond her. "Just a teaspoon or so of sugar I guess, and some biscuits?" He asked, as an afterthought. He knew that Omega's needed to refuel after going into O-Space, a kind of all natural high from endorphins and pheromones. Dobby popped away, and Draco sighed. She was rubbing her hands up and down her upper arms, trying to get warm even though it was in the middle of summer. He sighed, then scooted around next to her in the most undignified way possible.

"C'mon, let me help you keep warm." He held up an arm, welcoming her in. She hesitated for a moment, and he nudged her hip with his. "We know each other well enough now for a warm up cuddle." He teased, hoping to cut some of the tension. A tiny half smile graced her features before she pressed her lips together, trying to hide it.

"My name's Hermione, by the way." She offered, and he stiffened with the knowledge of how little he knew her. Then, she scooted over a little closer, snuggling into his side. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders, and he could feel her shiver against him. As she came down, he came down from his own little adrenaline high. It wasn't that bringing a girl to O-Space wasn't something he planned on doing, he had even gotten close before (that neck thing was a good trick to make note of, most definitely) but he had always thought he'd know when it was coming. He hadn't been ready for that responsibility this time.

The crack again alerted Draco to Dobby's arrival, and the house elf nodded repeatedly as he handed Draco the mug.

"Thank you, Dobby, you're dismissed." Draco offered quietly, trying not to disturb Hermione. She was resting her head on his chest, and he had to nudge her in order to get her to take her cuppa. She took a sip, her shoulders rising slightly, no doubt as the warm liquid went down. She looked soft and sleepy as she nuzzled into him. It wasn't comfortable on the ground especially after spending extended time in that godforsaken chair this morning, but he couldn't even find the will to want to move. He had tried to fake it to protect her, ended up putting her in (relative) danger, and then ended up needed to protect her from the aftershocks of his protection, ironic, but not a terrible burden to bear, cuddling with a beautiful girl. As her shaking eased, he started to realize just how far they were pushing their luck by trying to stay in this office for any longer. Once her tea was almost finished and she had swallowed a few bites of biscuits, he nudged her again, and then broke the silence.

"We should get a move on, trust me, it's better if we're gone before my father gets back." He stood slowly, offering his hands to pull her up as he went. She was still a little shaky on her feet, and he resolved to keep an eye on her for a while. He let go of one hand, but then led her out the door while holding her other. She was holding on tightly as he carefully shut it. He lead her back to his room
quickly, feeling the warmth of her, centimeters behind him the whole way. He opened the door easily and ushered her in. She slipped in hesitantly, watching him carefully the whole way. He peeked down the hallway, checking to make sure no one had seen. While it wasn't as if it would be the first time he had snuck a maid into his room, it felt wrong, to have anyone assuming something innocent, and actually decent of him was really just another act of debauchery by the young lord. When he closed the door and turned back to her, he found her standing in the center of the room looking lost. Even when she had been frazzled, when she had been running around doing no doubt countless errands, she had never looked so lost.

"I don't know how to do this." She admitted, nervously looking up at him for direction.

"We're not doing anything right now, it's okay, we're just going to relax for a bit until you start to feel better." He assured her, placing a hand on her back as he led her to the sofa. She needed some time to rest, and probably a nap, before she'd fully come up all the way and be cognizant.

"I don't know how to do that; I have to go to work." She stared at him, terror on her face. He wished it was that simple, but if she left right now, she'd have terrible drop later, a kind of pheromone withdrawal that can result in severe health effects.

"It's okay, I'll take care of it." He had no idea how to do that. "All you have to do is take a nap." She nodded, her face displaying childlike innocence.

"You won't leave?" She asked quietly, and there was such worry there that he couldn't help it, without thinking about it, he pressed a quick kiss to the top of her head on reflex.

"Of course, now relax and go to sleep for a little while." She nodded, already dozing off on his shoulder. She tucked her feet under her and he crossed his legs as she snuggled nearer, closed her eyes, and slowly relaxed into sleep.
Fallout and New Beginnings

Hermione

Hermione opened her eyes to a pounding headache and a stiff neck. It was a few beats before realized what she was seeing as she sat up. An arm. And a Torso. A face. Person. Draco! The shock hit her first and for a moment she had no idea why she was there. Then it came back and she missed the oblivion. She expected to feel angry but all she could think off was how embarrassed she was. She had never felt so humiliated. She knew it wasn't totally her fault. He shouldn't have grabbed the back of neck. But she should've been able to resist! It was just pheromones! And if she had been affected, she never should've slipped onto O-Space. She was stronger than that goddamn it. A part of her was relieved that Draco had done the right thing and taken care of her as she had come up, but a larger part of her was even more humiliated. She hated how vulnerable she had been. Hated everything about it. Her head fell back and she sighed before getting up slowly. She still felt tired, but a nice kind of tired. Comfortable and soft and sleepy. Too bad she couldn't afford any of those things. She stood up slowly, carefully extracting herself. She felt a weird sensation of guilt as she slipped out of the room. Draco was still dozing and she'd prefer if it was kept that way. She stayed composed for a reasonable amount of time. Just long enough to get out the door and walk three feet before slumping down onto the floor.

She had always prided herself on her calm head, her ability to focus under pressure, and her control over her emotions. Freaking Draco Malfoy had shattered all of that. Her first time in O Space and it was with someone who thought she was lower than dirt. Not even a person. The only time he had shown any decency to her was when he was using her for practice. He did the right thing this time, even if it made her feel like shit by doing it, at least he didn't leave her alone to drop, though she didn't quite understand why. Maybe he felt guilty, maybe Narcissa deserved more credit than Hermione had been giving her, who knew?

Not that it mattered right now, as of this moment, she just had to get the hell out here. She slowly staggered to her feet, trudging to Astoria's room. The light outside told her it was still early enough in the day that she could still be forgivably late, rather it not mattering if she showed now or in the morning. Joy. She stopped a waiter moments later to get the time, and then promptly had to sprint across the castle. She was later, very, very late.

Draco

Draco woke up feeling like something was wrong. His hand shook and his skin felt tight immediately upon waking. The pain in his back was easily explained away by the couch beneath him, but his whole body was reacting as if something was missing, something he anxiously tried to figure out.

It took him longer than it should've. It took a strong whiff of delicious, syrupy cherries, and then he remembered. There was supposed to be an omega here. He groaned, dropping his head back onto the couch in a truly melodramatic fashion if he did say so himself. What a shit show that was. One thing was for sure, he should stay the hell away from Hermione.

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Hermione skidded to stop outside Minerva's office. She panted while anxiously looking towards the grandfather clock. She had thirty seconds, exactly thirty to get her breathing under control, stop sweating, and presentably greet her mentor. She shoved a couple extra pins into her hair, waved her hand over her face, and resolved to just not breathe at all as she rapped on the door, out of time.

"Come in!" Minerva's voice was stern, but not angry, and Hermione thanked her lucky stars that she wasn't THAT late.

"Did you look over the records I assigned?" Minerva asked as she entered the study. Twice a week she called the slave into her study to review the prior readings and assign new ones. Twice a week Hermione was presented with information on history, and finances, and etiquette and trade, and architecture; everything a head of household had to master.

"Of course," Hermione answered quickly, taking the seat across from the older woman when she nodded. Minerva McGonagle was a stately woman, tall with features the pulled together as if she spent extensive amounts of time carefully reading, which she did, and a thin mouth that seemed to have been pressed together by frequently reproaching of others, which was also true. She knew from the handful of personal details that Hermione had managed to glean from the woman that Minerva came from a moderately wealthy Bourgeoisie family, but was now the only surviving member.

"So, give me your analysis, where are the areas that costs can be cut?" Minerva challenges, her hands folded as she waits expectantly.

"We're using the brand cleaning solutions as an assist, wouldn't we be better off using the off brand supplies? From my estimates it would save us about forty galleons a month, and 480 a year." Hermione pitched, glad she could remember some of her conclusions, despite the insane events of the past few days.

"Good, what else?" Minerva continued, and Hermione responded with another suggestion, the pattern repeated for a tense length of time that could've been ten minutes or an hour. Hermione spent most of it with her foot twitching underneath the desk. When Minerva seemed satisfied, and Hermione's list of points was dwindling to two or three left, Minerva reached into a drawer and calmly handed Hermione a heavy book. Hermione scanned the title, "A Lady's Guide to all Situations."

"Use this as your jumping off point for next week, but be sure to do some additional research." Minerva mused simply. "Other than that, is there anything you'd like to discuss, any questions you may have?" Minerva offered, a rare occurrence.

"I understand I'm still learning, and please don't think I'm ungrateful, I'm just wondering what the time line will be for me being able to use my knowledge that you've instilled in me in a more meaningful way." Hermione spoke carefully, choosing each word very deliberately. Minerva smiled.

"I was wondering when you'd ask. My plan is that when we return to the Greengrass Estate, I will take you on in an official capacity as my assistant and apprentice." Minerva smiled and waited patiently as Hermione processed. She had a hunch that all of the training was for a reason and she hoped that Minerva would be promoting her, but this wasn't just a promotion, this was huge.

"You want me to manage the estate." Hermione declared in disbelief. It couldn't be real. It was the one hope she hadn't allowed herself to have, still seeing a future as an alpha's house pet lurking behind every corner.

"After I retire, yes." Minerva qualified, a soft smile turning up the corners of her normally frowning mouth.
"Even though…" She gestured towards her wrist, an all-encompassing signal that meant both slave and omega.

"Do you think it will hinder your ability to work efficiently?" Minerva asked, carefully evaluating her. Hermione shook her head frantically, ignoring the tiny part of her that was still stuck thinking about Draco Malfoy.

"Absolutely not, I have full control of my nature."

...  

Draco

Draco had only left his room for a few moments. Literal, honest to Agrippa, minutes. He had walked down the hallway, turned a corner, found a waiter, put in his dinner order, and then turned back to go to his room and maybe mope for a little bit more, which would be no one's business but his own.

There are things Draco expects to see when he opens the door to his sitting room. He expects to see his couch. He expects to see tea laid out. He expects to see his coffee table. He maybe even expects to see a maid cleaning up. What he doesn't expect is people on his couch. What he really, really doesn't expect is Blaise Zabini on his couch. What he really, really doesn't expect is Blaise Zabini with a bird on his couch. What he really, really, really doesn't expect is Blaise Zabini with a bird gyrating on top of him on his couch.

He was in shock for a moment, just staring at his best mate defiling his couch. The bird moaned, low and dark and happy, throwing back long, bright red hair and stretching a really, quite sexy, long, elegant neck. Blaise groaned, jerking, which was an image that would remain burned Draco's mind for entirely different reason. Yeah, it was time to say something.

"Excuse me?" Draco cleared his throat, not sure what to do in this situation. The bird thankfully stopped the rhythm that was going on with her hips, and Blaise sat up straight. He finally looked at Draco, and Draco saw a moment of casual recognition cross his face before promptly picking the bird up and setting her on the side. She squeaked in protest, promptly adjusting her blouse and pulling her skirt down as a violent blush exploded across her face.

"Sorry mate, pretty sure Dragon Lady is staking out my room after the last one, you don't mind do you?" Blaise said casually, crossing his legs to make this situation somewhat less awkward. Not that Blaise felt such plebeian emotions as embarrassment.

"You could've you know, not shagged a bird for forty eight hours?" Draco suggested, even though it was a moot point.

"No way! Plus this one just got her O, couldn't miss that." Blaise shrugged, and Draco rolled his eyes at his friend's antics. Blaise made it his purpose in life to find late presenting omegas that he could shag. He claimed that watching them discover their submissive side was the ultimate turn on.

"Excuse me!" The ginger squawked, standing up with a huff.

"You know that the new ones are the best." Blaise continued as if she hadn't spoken.

"God you're a pig, Where is my other shoe?" She demanded, peering around chairs and couch cushions.

"A broom closet wouldn't have done the trick?" Draco asked, pinching the bridge of his nose.
"You're even worse." The ginger scoffed, rounding on Draco, he just shrugged as she went back to looking for her shoes.

"It's by the door." He offered, after she got down on her hands and knees to look under the couch, but still, he offered.

"Fuck both of you, I hope you Avada yourselves." She snarled, yanking her shoes onto her feet before heading to the door and slamming it behind her.

"Spit fire. I like her." Blaise grinned like a cat and leaned back, stretching. Draco rolled his eyes.

"Like her in your own room please." He groaned, schlepping off into his bedroom, which was apparently the only place he could really be alone.
Hermione

Hermione stumbled into Astoria's room after dinner, her eyes were bleary and her limbs felt heavy. It was dark now, and if she had it her way she'd be curled up on her cot on the floor. But Astoria needed attending to, Astoria always seemed to need attending to.

"'Mione!" Astoria squeaked, flying out of bed. "Where have you been?" She was wearing a soft pink satin night gown, and her hair was still in the chignon it had been in this morning. This morning, shit. Her best friend had the most stressful experience of her life and Hermione wasn't there to support her; her gut flipped with guilt over her early twinge of guilt.

"Had some things to do," She groaned, sinking into the edge of the bed as Astoria flopped backwards. "I'm so sorry."

"This morning was such a disaster. I clammed up. I had nothing to say, nothing. I've never felt more stupid." Her voice was muffled as she dragged her hands down her face, staring up at the ceiling. Hermione sighed, taking Astoria's hand in hers to console the younger girl, it wasn't easy for her. In fact it was ridiculous that she was getting married off this young, let alone to someone as difficult to deal with as Draco. When had they gotten onto a first name basis? She supposed it was when she collapsed in his arms but she wasn't quite in the mood to think about that right now. She turned her attention back to the problem in front of her.

"Oh Tori, you are not stupid, whatever happened is not your fault, I'll help you as much as I can to get you ready, you'll be okay we'll make it work." She assured the other girl, contemplating what she could do to help. She could offer her valuable expertise in making a fool out of yourself, but it seemed like Astoria kind of had that in the bag.

"Mione! I sneezed tea on him." Astoria blurted, finally getting to the root of the problem. The image immediately presented itself to Hermione's imagination and she could honestly say it was one of the most beautiful things that she had ever pictured in her life.

"You what?" Hermione tried, she really genuinely tried, but she wasn't that strong. She burst out laughing, sputtering and gasping and clapping in the most unladylike way possible. Astoria buried her face in her hands, turning a violent purple with embarrassment.

"I know, I know it was horrible." Astoria whined. Hermione would comfort her, once she could breathe again. Astoria flung a pillow at her head, but it didn't stop Hermione from laughing for another two minutes, until Astoria joined in, then she didn't stop for what felt like hours. It wasn't a terrible way to spend an evening.

Draco

The morning after The Incident Draco spent some time with an old tutor discussing current events and politics, then he wallowed for a bit in his own uselessness, then he kicked Blaise out for being a pain in the arse, then he was prepared to do it a second time when there was a knock.

"Hello?" He asked curiously as he swung it open. Hermione was standing in the hallway, well he lasted a solid eighteen hours, seems like enough distance to him.

"I'm delivering a letter from Her Lady Astoria." She said simply, handing him the yellow envelope that he had no doubt had been scented to match Astoria's cloying pineapple aroma. She looked
down, very carefully, courteously not looking up as she held the letter out. She was being careful, reminding him of her closeness to his soon to be fiancee, which was awkward, but he spent most of his time pointedly not thinking of the youngest Greengrass daughter, he could keep it up.

"Do come in." He teased, opening his door and gesturing her inside. She froze.

"Sir?" She asked carefully, peeking up at him from beneath her eyelashes. It struck him how delicate her features were, he had clearly misjudged her.

"I'm not dismissing you until you come in, and I know you won't just leave, I don't know why, but I know you won't." He challenged, pleased when she didn't even bother responding and just slipped inside of his sitting room. She eyed the couch warily. "Just a couple questions, then I'll leave you alone." She nodded, dropping the letter on his coffee table and taking the arm chair as he took the farthest side of the couch. He wasn't even sure what questions he was going to ask at first, her just knew that he was confused. Then the questions started popping out.

"Why'd you leave?" He sounded scarily hurt before he could check it. He wasn't hurt, just curious. He swore.

"I had things to do." She answered without looking up. It was a lie, but he was used to them.

"How are you not trained?" He demanded. She flinched, so he softened his tone slightly, "You're bad at it." Okay maybe slightly was an exaggeration.

"What?" She snapped, irritation slipping into her tone. He appreciated the coarseness, it was the first hint of honesty he had seen from her today.

"Resisting." He clarified, she stiffened.

"What?" It seemed less like confusion and more like outrage at this point.

"I'd like to help you; its kind of a train wreck if that's how you react to every alpha." He didn't know who was speaking because it certainly wasn't him, he wouldn't have made such a dumb ass offer, would he?

"Daphne doesn't typically grab the back of my neck." She hissed, and that was better, she was more real when she was angry, a part of him liked getting on his nerves.

"Scent mark." He corrected easily.

"What?" She repeated, and wasn't she just starting to sound like a ripped Howler. How did she know nothing about this, it was her own biology.

"My scent, my pheromones, on your neck would've convinced whoever was coming that we were screwing." He replied sharply, allowing his language to get a little crude, maybe it would wake her up. It did. Her eyes snapped up, glaring at him.

"And how does that help me?" She hissed, her hands digging into the arm rests of his chair. That's it, angry Hermione was almost as interesting as O Space Hermione.

"You don't get killed for theft." He snarled, and the color drained out of her face. Apparently, she had forgotten the cause of their issues, her intrusion.

"I wasn't stealing, I swear on my powers as a witch, I was just delivering something for a friend. Nothing nefarious I swear." She promised genuinely, and he believed her, no one made promises on
their powers lightly, but he probably should turn her in anyway, it would be his bollocks if she turned out to be a spy and he let her get away with it. He should, but was he going to, no.

"Mmmm, it's a good thing my father and I aren't exactly on speaking terms then, huh?" He shrugged, pleased to watch the relief spread across her face.

"I guess so." She nodded timidly, doing that eyelashes thing.

"In return, you should let me help you. It's really not safe for you to be that susceptible." He pushed, and maybe he was really concerned for her safety, and maybe she was a good distraction for his impending engagement, either way, he wasn't relenting so easily.

"While I appreciate the offer, I'm afraid I have to decline." She answered formally, sliding out the door without waiting to be dismissed, leaving Draco with a sickly sweet envelope and burning curiosity.

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**Hermione**

Daphne sneezed. Blaise coughed. Hermione peered over the top of her book, and yes, Blaise and Daphne were still facing entirely opposite directions. Since the fiasco of the one and only formal dinner at the Malfoy estate, Lady Greengrass had insisted that her eldest daughter spend more time with her fiancé, naturally, Hermione was tasked with overseeing said 'quality time.' The mother had been concerned that Katie would be too easy going and Daphne's virtue would be compromised.

From where Hermione sat, that was probably a miscalculation. Daphne and Blaise hadn't looked at each other since they arrived, they had walked to exact opposite ends of the library, Daphne grabbing a set of law books and Blaise choosing a volume on natural philosophy. Hermione was reviewing some of the etiquette books Minerva had given her and worrying. The stickiness of the leather chair was uncomfortable against her, and she shifted, the quiet noise loud in the silent room. Daphne shot her an irritated look, and Hermione shrunk automatically, before reminding herself that she was the chaperone in this situation.

No matter how reluctant she was to admit it, she was bad at holding her own. In fact, she was terrible at it, utterly useless. Most importantly, she was absolutely awful at resisting Draco Malfoy. Maybe it was just that he was attractive. That simple. She had never been legitimately attracted to an alpha before this. Maybe it was the fact that she could never anticipate his next move to be ready for it. Maybe it was just that if she didn't focus she ended up daydreaming about shagging him. Who knew?

Any angle she looked at it, it was a fiasco. She was going to be a manager, an honest to goodness manager, and she had promised she'd be in control of her biology. She had to be perfect.

She prided herself on her rationality and knew that she couldn't hesitate to deal with her problems, not when the time crunch was so near. She has to go to the source.

She cleared her throat and stood up, ignoring Blaise's disgusted glare.

"Time to go Daphne, I have a matter to attend to." She announced. The other girl shrugged and left gratefully, and Hermione just barely caught Blaise sighing softly as he slumped with relief.

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**Draco**
Draco supposed he probably should’ve been expecting her.

There was a sharp rap on the outer door to his quarters when he was in his sitting room reading that night. His father didn't believe he had a brain, but that didn't mean Draco couldn't use it to study well enough so that he could prove him wrong someday.

The knock surprised him, but he set down his book quietly and carefully opened his door. The omega was standing there, chin tilted up pride fully with her arms crossed against her chest. He raised an eyebrow; she lifted one back. He smirked; her mouth slipped into a pout. He didn't say anything, sparing her the embarrassment of asking as he welcomed her into his sitting room for the second time that day.

She lowered herself onto one end of the couch and he courteously did the same; she seemed nervous enough without him helping. He caught the rich scent of cherries, and for a single beat he wondered if it would be his control that would be the problem.

"I'm going to tell you everything I'm going to do before I do it okay?" He offered quietly, this all seemed too delicate to speak loudly about.

She nodded. "I want verbal confirmation. " He stressed. He knew what the rules were now, and he knew that surprising her too badly would only end with her passed out on his couch.

"Okay." She agreed, and her hands shook a little bit.

"The key is to stay present. So I need you to identify the moment you start to feel like you're slipping by saying the least sexual word you can think of. " He used his most professional, talking to visiting nobles voice, with less charm.

"Astoria." She offered, and wow, that was a little unexpected. He didn't particularly like the reminder that she worked for his pre fiancée, but it would definitely work as a mood killer.

"Well then" He said out loud, eyeing her for the unexpected outburst.

"It will work won't it?" She challenged, a tad confrontational. He liked it.

"Yes, it definitely will." He assured her, shaking his head slightly as he did it. "I'm gonna start pretty neutral, okay?" He promised, reaching for her hand slowly, "Just touching your hands, okay?"

"Okay." She nodded, holding out her arm.

He trailed two fingers over the soft skin of her inner wrist, moving in wide circles, eventually he slipped to just one, drawing the curves of the Malfoy seal, which always seemed to be floating somewhere in his subconscious. She shivered, which prompted him to look up at her face for the first time since they had started. Her eyes were wide and he noticed again how warm the color is, with tiny flecks of gold.

"You doing okay?" He asked her carefully. She nodded, her eyes not leaving the spot his finger was tracing. "I'm going to move on, just your forearm, don't forget to focus."

"That's fine," She murmured coolly, and he chuckled to himself, he might have even believed it if she wasn't sitting ramrod straight, staring at his hand.

"Tell me about yourself." He requested, trying to break some of the tension.

"No." She snapped, and he glanced up at her with surprise at first, until he saw the tiny hint of a
"Okay, proving that you're not affected, that's good, but I was hoping to hear an answer." He smiled back, teasing her a little bit as he let his own professional exterior relax.

"You first." She challenged as the two fingers made its first pass up the length of her arm, turning back at the inside of her elbow. This was about trust, he wouldn't go any farther than exactly what she agreed to.

"Fine, what do you want to know?" He shrugged; it wasn't as if he had that many secrets. The court gossip covered most of it.

"Why are you helping me?" She asked timidly, refusing to look up at him. He wasn't sure he fully understood the answer but he figured that he had been enough of a dick in the past that she deserved an attempt.

"I've been trying this new thing lately, it's called not being an arse all the time." He offered as an answer. She laughed; he liked the way it sounded.

"This goes a little bit beyond that." She teased, before closing her eyes as he lingered on a particularly sensitive part of her arm. Huh, he didn't realize there were THAT many sensitive parts of a person's arm, maybe he should explore more often, usually he just stuck to his favorite spots on a bird.

"Still with me?" He asked casually when her eyes didn't open, her head bobbed before she sat up straight again as she blinked sleepily.

"Sorry, sleepy not Alpha Drunk, promise." She teased, a little glimmer in her eyes.

"I believe you, if you're that tired we can end here, pick up another day?" He offered, a little hesitant to stop, especially since there was no guarantee that she'd actually come back.

"Absolutely." She nodded, standing up slowly, he let her his fingers trail down the length of her arm and palm as she stood. He watched her stiffen even as she pretended not to notice.

"I'll escort you back." He offered, standing to follow her, she paused at his door and shook her head.

"Servant," She chuckled, gesturing towards herself. "No need to treat for the chivalry."

"I still should." He paused reluctantly, and when she shook her head firmly, a part of him was disappointing.

"No, really, it's just a quick walk," She nodded again, stepping out the door. "Stay."

As the door clicked shut, he felt like he had missed something about the whole experience.
Draco woke up to the sight of Blaise Zabini on his sofa. Blaise had an exquisite talent of intruding and doing it so casually that you felt like you should be apologizing to him. At that moment, he was sipping from Draco's morning tea and giving his friend a truly disappointed look.

"What Blaise?" He found that there was no point in beating around the bush or mentioning things like courtesy to Blaise, he'd just do whatever the hell he wanted to any ways.

"Why didn't you tell me about the new O?" He asked, adopting an affronted façade. Sometimes, Draco was convinced that Blaise had the soul of a ninety year old witch.

"Just because you ignore discretion doesn't mean I have to." Draco challenged, snatching up his kettle of tea and making himself a cuppa. "And since when do you care?" Sure Blaise was always an over sharer, but Draco was usually pretty tight lipped, especially since nothing had even really happened with the Omega in question.

"You're shagging your, and my, fiancées' personal attendant, how could I not care?" Blaise demanded, looking at his friend incredulously.

"Huh, didn't know that." Draco admitted honestly, sipping his tea and savoring the way the warm liquid hit his tired throat. "How did you know?"

"She chaperoned Daphne and I's 'bonding' yesterday, I smelled her the moment I walked in here. How did you not know?" Blaise explained offhandedly, before returning back to his original question.

"It didn't come up." He shrugged, and then sniffed, he could sort of pick up some left-over pheromones from yesterday, but maybe he was just too exposed to her scent to notice it anymore.

Blaise raised his hands as if contemplating choking the other alpha, before gesturing wildly, the Italian coming out.

"How do you do it? You're like a child who picks up a wand and plays with it, thinking it's a stick and then magics a unicorn into existence." Blaise gaped.

"I resent that implication, and I don't see your point, I'm spending time with Astoria's assistant, so what?" He hadn't intended to get some side benefits out of the arrangement he and Hermione had established, other than some karma cleansing, but maybe…

"So... we can do whatever the fuck we want now, we have a spy behind enemy lines." Blaise's eyes lit up, contemplating the possibilities.

"No." Draco cut him off right there, it wasn't easy to dissuade Blaise from an idea once he got it in his head, but he had every intention of trying.

"How could we not?" Blaise challenged, raising an eyebrow, "think of the possibilities, how easy it would be to sneak away, how she could keep them out of our hair, the shit we could get away with on 'chaperoned' dates."

"Yes, because both of us are so attracted to our fiancées, that's the issue that's been keeping us away,
chaperones." Draco snapped, Blaise hated Daphne just as much as he hated Astoria; shagging would
be irritating at best.

"Don't you dare complain, Daphne's going to lop my bollocks off; Astoria's annoying but she's not
insane, you got the way better sister in this deal." Blaise argued.

"She. Spat. Tea. At. Me." Draco replied through clenched teeth, earning raucous laughter from the
other alpha.

"On purpose?" Blaise asked, his eyes watering with mirth.

"I think she forgot how to properly swallow." Draco snarled, groaning. Blaise continued laughing
for another few beats before he got back on track.

"Then think about it this way, your Omega can help you get away more often, and me too of course,
it's only right, since it was my idea." Blaise suggested, the mischief painted across his expression.
Draco rolled his eyes.

"We'll see." He offered reluctantly, with no intention of following through.

"You won't regret it mate." Blaise promised, leaving his empty cup and crumbled napkin on the table
before bounding out of the room.

"Where are you going?" Draco asked, half regretting it as he did. Blaise paused in the door way just
long enough to toss his reply over his shoulder.

"Birds to pull, in laws to enrage, etc., etc." He called as the door clicked shut. Draco groaned, his
head dropping back at the reminder, they had a formal luncheon today. Why couldn't someone just
stab him with a butter knife and get it over with? At least then he wouldn't have to spend time with
his father either.

**Hermione**

"Favorite color?" Hermione quizzed.

"Green." Astoria answered immediately, flinching as the older girl nicked her accidentally with the
pin she was trying to place perfectly on Astoria's gown.

"Daphne?" Katie prodded the other girl, who seemed in danger of falling asleep standing up.

"Red." Daphne guessed.

"Not even close." The tailor reprimanded from her hunched position inspecting the hem, and Daphne
stiffened, probably as a pin was intentionally stabbed into her skin.

"Daphne, can you at least try please?" Katie begged.

"Nope." The Alpha answered, not reacting as the tailor no doubt poked her with another pin.

The group stood in the Greengrasses' tailor's temporary work room. The space had the air of luxury,
with expensive silks draped over every surface in the most vivid array of colors imaginable. The
woman hand stitched every pattern, per Lady Greengrass's request. Only the best would do. They
had been quizzing the girls through the entire fitting as they teetered on the small platforms,
desperately trying to make this dinner less of a disaster than the last one.

"Dangerous topics?" Hermione offered.
"Father, School, Crime." Astoria rattled off, her face scrunching as she concentrated.

"Father, School, Crime." Daphne answered, squeaking when the seamstress poked her again.

"Father, Mother, Crime, unlike Draco, Blaise is absolutely fulfilling his potential." Katie corrected. Daphne rolled her eyes as Hermione felt a small part of her want to jump to Draco's defense, oops, better squash that shortly.

The girls were dressed in contrasting gowns, Astoria in an emerald green gown with a deep a sweetheart neckline, gold filigree on the bodice, and full sleeves that hung off the shoulder, starting at mid bicep. The plan was to play about Astoria's beauty and sensuality, to force out the memory of the tea incident with décolletage. Hermione didn't know of a man who it wouldn't work on.

The plan for Daphne was different, she was dressed in Blaise's favorite color, grey, with a boat neck and elaborate appliques, including real flowers. The goal there was to highlight her femininity, make her look more dainty and welcoming. Hermione didn't know a man that it would work on.

It wasn't that Daphne wasn't just as beautiful as Astoria, but her features were sharper, her eyes colder, where Astoria was all sprite, a pleasant little pixie, Daphne carried the spirit of a Hippogriff, proud and unapproachable, with an edge of danger.

As the last alterations were finished, Hermione and Katie looked at each other and shrugged, if they weren't ready now, they would never be.

... 

Hermione waited in the hallway outside the dining room to cue Astoria and Daphne for the right time to arrive, her foot tapping nervously. She watched patiently as Harry came around the corner.

"I'll send it." He offered easily, leaning beside her with his arms and legs crossed as he watched a flurry of waiters and frazzled cooking assistants pass by.

"Hmm?" She questioned without opening her mouth.

"I'll send a patronus so you won't have to sprint to wherever they're waiting." Harry offered. He knew the skill was way above the level pf spell work that she was capable of. She tried to act as if the offer didn't bug her.

"Thank you." She muttered curtly, wishing she could lean back and relax like him but no, she had to be lady like all of the time. Ginny slipped out of the dining room, taking Hermione's other side silently.

Draco rounded the corner next, the last to arrive before the girls, and Hermione worked to keep her expression neutral. Draco nodded at her, showing a tiny little smile, then focused on Harry.

"Stable Boy." He said by way of greeting, smirking nastily, before slipping into the room.

"Send the patronus." Hermione ordered quickly, before Harry could react, but she was already too late.

"That self-righteous git!" Harry fumed.

"Harry!" Hermione and Ginny reproached in synchronization. The girls waited a beat, but when Harry was still angrily staring at the dining room door, Ginny sighed and cast the charm herself.
"Could you believe the way he spoke to me 'Mione? As if I was a mildly irritating flea." Harry snapped, storming off. The girls looked at each other before sighing and following. He finally stopped in the garden, melodramatically dropping down into the grass.

"That's who we are to them." Hermione reminded him, Minerva's voice strong in her mind.

"But is that true?" Ginny asked thoughtfully, her head tilted in that way that Hermione knew meant that she was carefully considering something. Ginny plopped down beside Harry, basking in the sun as it lit up her hair. Hermione shot her a warning look; Ginny's control was still even more tenuous than hers.

"I think Mione and I have experienced enough personal evidence to make it pretty obvious, Gin." Harry argued. She shook her head.

"I… I did something recently and I'm not going to tell either of you, because neither of you will be happy with me about it, and yeah, it ended really shitty, but there was some genuine shit their too. Maybe we're not the only ones who have to act differently around nobles." She mused, playing with the grass underneath her fingers. Hermione and Harry exchanged a look as she sat down on Harry's other side.

"None of what you just said made any sense." Harry spoke for the pair as Hermione nodded in agreement, before they could press for more though, another servant broke through into their clearing.

"The doves have landed." Katie announced, laughing at herself through the joke, as she sat down across from them. Harry chuckled, though Hermione and Ginny just rolled their eyes.

"I wonder how much a train wreck it will be this time?" Harry asked, ignoring Katie and Hermione's reproachful expressions. Astoria had just once forgotten Harry's name and he had never gotten over it. Sure, she had known him for nine years at the time, but they all make mistakes.

"Considering Astoria accidentally spilled the wine on Draco and Daphne intentionally spilled her soup on Blaise, I think it's going well so far." Ron answered dramatically, plopping down beside Hermione, who promptly squished up against Harry in order to get some space. Harry just rolled his eyes.

"Poor Astoria." Katie murmured, Ginny snorted.

"Poor Blaise, that soup was scorching hot." Ron corrected, Hermione wasn't sure she disagreed, for once. She laughed without realizing she was about to, and then Ron wrapped an arm around her shoulders. She stiffened, her shoulders going up to about her ears. Harry laughed, Ginny snorted, Katie pinched the bridge of her nose, and Ron simply blurted, "What?"

"Let go of the poor girl Ron." Ginny ordered, and Ron's turned pink up to his ears as he waited for Hermione to defend him, as if that was going to happen. He slowly lifted his arm and put it back by his side, and then shifted away slightly.

"How are you even here? Aren't you kind of needed right now?" Harry asked curiously. Ron shrugged.

"My poker face isn't good enough, Dad knows I wouldn't be able to stop laughing if I was in the room for one of the inevitable slip ups." Ron explained easily. "He used Percy and Charlie instead."

"What about you Gin?" Katie asked. Ginny shrugged in a gesture that was eerily similar to her brother.
"Mom had me awake before dawn this morning doing prep work. We both needed the break during the actual meal." Ginny announced, dramatically flopping back to communicate her exhaustion more dramatically. They all chuckled at her antics, Harry more than most.

"Well, how bad do you think it will be, one to ten?" Harry asked spitefully.

"It can't be going that poorly, we did all that prep!" Katie argued, and then there was a loud crash that echoed outside through two sets of walls and a wide hallway.

"Ten." Hermione answered, and they all nodded in agreement, cringing as a second, louder crash followed.

"I think we might need a higher number." Ginny suggested.

"Well, Katie and I are going to have a fun evening." Hermione announced, and Katie just sighed deeply.

...  

"Well that was an unmitigated disaster!" Lady Greengrass announced as she flounced into the room. Astoria was sitting in the arm chair with her head in her hands as Daphne calmly worked on her embroidery. "How could you two have messed that up? You were coached properly, correct?" She demanded as Katie and Hermione frantically nodded from the deep curtsies they had to hold until they were addressed.

"It wasn't their fault Mom, I'm just an idiot." Astoria slumped in defeat.

"I did it intentionally so..." Daphne shrugged, still totally unfazed.

"You two can stand." Lady Greengrass snapped. The maids slowly rose, still not lifting their heads fully, now was not the time for relaxed etiquette.

"Both of your contracts can still be terminated. Daphne, if we have to forfeit that Dowry, your father will disown you. It would break my heart to do it, but we can't have you sabotaging your sister's future," Lady Greengrass threatened. Daphne swallowed, losing her bravado in an instant. If she was disowned, she couldn't set foot in her home again, she'd be cast out onto the street, desperate to do anything to make a living. It was a horrifying future. "And Draco is the absolute best option for you Astoria, I don't understand why you can't see that well enough to stop making a fool out of yourself."

Astoria nodded slowly as her mother stormed back out of the room, apparently too disgusted to stay in their daughters presence any longer. The maids looked at each other for one brief moment before escorting their respective charges back to their rooms for a hot bath and a good night's rest. Everything else could be dealt with in the morning.
Hermione

Hermione wasn't in the mood for anybody's shit that night, particularly Draco Malfoy's. Astoria had still been crying when she dismissed the older girl. If it weren't for the feeling of the clock ticking away in the back of her brain all the time, she wouldn't be here. But as she knocked on Draco's door, there was one thought on her mind. She had to get this done now.

"Funny seeing you here." He teased; she rolled her eyes as she stepped into his inner sanctum. Draco's sitting room was ornate and luxurious, the whole space draped with black and green and mahogany. As if he need more of an announcement of the fact that he was rich.

"Listen, I'm knackered and I'm irritated. Can we just get this done?" She snapped, dropping down onto the couch with a thud, he poured them both a glass of Firewhiskey, apparently sensing that they'd both need it.

"If you're too tired, go to bed. This is for your benefit, remember?" He shrugged. The reminder pissed her off. She was only here to get this over with. She'd get control of her hormones again and then run off into the sunset to happily manage the estate.

"Sorry, it's been a tough evening." She lifted her the corners of her mouth without really smiling. He chuckled, more amused than he should be, in her opinion. She took a sip of firewhiskey to console herself. The burn hurt, but settled into a pleasant warmth as it eased.

"Yes, I will probably never get wine out of my favorite trousers." He grumbled, raising an eyebrow at what she's sure was an affronted expression on her part.

"And I'll never get the tear stains out of that dress." She volleyed back. As far as she was concerned, holding Astoria as she cried was harder than handing trousers off to be washed by a servant.

"She cried?" Draco queried, more startled than he should've been by her reckoning.

"What do you think happens to ladies who embarrass their families in front of their suitors?" She demanded, half considering the question rhetorical and half really wanting to know what he actually knew. He couldn't be as oblivious as he seemed. Could he?

"What do you think happens to me if I admit that I don't want to marry her?" He demanded in response before angstily drinking from his glass. She balked.

"You don't? Why wouldn't you?" She pressed, surprised. Why would anyone not want to be with Astoria? She was sweet and delicate and lovely and pure and would make a perfect wife for anyone. Malfoy was the one lacking, not Astoria.

"Should I answer chronologically or by degree of horror?" He snarled, taking a huge swig of firewhiskey to prove his point.

"Don't be an arse. She's more traumatized than you could possibly be." She rebuked him, needing a hearty gulp herself at the memory of how long Astoria had cried for after her mother left.

"I think Blaise wins that prize actually." Draco laughed, swirling his glass. She tried to feign a lack of amusement, and failed. It was just too funny.
"Is he okay?" She snickered, and Draco tried to keep a grave face for a beat before smirking.

"As far as I'm aware, the Zabini jewels are all safe." He promised, grinning ear to ear at his best friend's misfortune.

"Are you typically aware of the state of your friends' bollocks or is Blaise a special case?" She prodded, smirking at him and making no effort to class up the question.

"Oh, fuck off," He laughed, no heat behind the words.

"Such crass language around a lady," She joked, adopting her best Lady Greengrass impression as she slumped into her seat on the couch.

"You are so not a lady." He snorted spilling his drink in his mirth.

"Excuse me?" She demanded, only half joking. Eh, maybe a quarter.

"You are the least ladylike bird I have ever met." He announced.

"Haven't met a lot of birds then, have you?" She mocked caustically, drinking heartily to ease her wounded pride. She was very lady like! "C'mon, you cuss, you drink like a bloke, and you don't flutter." He rattled off, clearly full of it.

"Flutter?" She asked skeptically.

"Birds like Astoria flutter everywhere they go, as if they have to think about each step. You just walk like a normal person." He explained, clearly having drank too much. if he's being this honest.

"That's because my corset isn't as tight as hers, and my skirt isn't as big. It's not easy to walk in those things you know." She clarified, taking another swig even as she felt a wave of dizziness hit her. Maybe she drank too much.

"How would I know?" He asked, defending his manly manhood of manliness. Yup, too much to drink. Or maybe just enough, who knew? This was kind of fun. Like talking to Harry or Gin, except not.

"I don't judge what you do in your free time." She smirked, hiding her mouth behind her glass as she teased.

"Very funny." He rolled his eyes, but she knew he was amused. He was just hiding it, in his broody little face. Okay so the firewhiskey was a smidge more potent than she thought. "Weren't you here for a reason? I'm pretty sure it wasn't to mock me."

"Hmm yeah, lessons. What do you have in mind professor?" She asked whimsically batting her eyes at him. He paused.

"A massage." He decided, a brief flicker of surprise as if even he hadn't been expecting that to come out of his mouth. "Since you're so knackered, makes sense."

"Sounds good to me." She shifted, spinning so her back faced him on the couch, one leg tucked in while the other stayed planted on the floor. He cleared his throat, tucking one leg in as he placed one foot by her left hip and put his other foot just behind hers on the floor. She felt the heat radiating from him as they kept that distance, the inch she'd have to lean back to be up against him, the inch he'd have to shift forward before she'd be fully nestled between his thighs, wrapped in him. He cleared his throat again before delicately resting his hands on her shoulders over her blouse. She shifted into it,
arching her back to press into his hands. She was at that good stage of drunk, where everything was floaty and pleasant. He dug his thumbs in first, focusing on the knots around her shoulder blades. His touch was hesitant, clearly this wasn't something Draco did often, but deliberate, it clearly wasn't his first time rubbing a bird down. *Bad Hermione, clean thoughts, focused thoughts.*

"Still with me?" Draco asked quietly, his breath brushing across her ear and the side of her neck.

"Of course," She said haughtily. Her mind had never wandered, not even for a moment. He huffed a breath that could've been a soft chuckle, she more felt it than heard it.

His hands moved on, pressing and circling on high parts of her back, very, very deliberately not touching her neck, despite how much her inner omega begged for it to be touched. Her neck wasn't the only place the desperately needed to be touched and she had a hunch that Draco's superior alpha senses could probably smell her spiking arousal. He kept working, digging into the tense muscles until she felt more like a very happy wet noodle than a perpetually stressed out maid.

"You good?" He asked quietly. She straightened again, tilting her hips back as she stretched her neck.

"Soo good." She drawled, too relaxed and happy to stop herself from drawing out the words.

"Okay, I think it's time for you to head back." Draco said, voice hard starting to pull himself away slowly.

"No." She turned sharply, her left hand going back on reflex to steady herself. And there her hand was, dropped right on Draco Malfoy's lap. And there it was, rock hard and throbbing against her hand. "Oh," She cleared her throat while Draco was still caught in a stupor, staring at her hand in shock. It took her an embarrassingly long amount of time to realize she should take her hand off Draco Malfoy's dick unless she planned on doing something with it. It took her an even more embarrassingly long time to move her hand, turning back around quickly and slowly standing up. She didn't face him for a moment, carefully putting her empty glass on his bar first, taking the sound of him clearing his throat as her cue to turn around. She did so slowly, very deliberately keeping her eyes on Draco's face as he sat with his legs crossed on the sofa.

"I'm just going to head out." She offered, shrugging as she moved to the door.

"Sounds good." Draco muttered, voice tight. She nodded once before slipping out the door. She wasn't sure if she should be laughing or turning around and jumping him. Neither was a great option here. Leaving was probably her best bet here, until she figured out what the hell she's doing with her life, and when everything went insane.

…

*Draco*

*Well, that was a shit show,* he thought the moment the door closed. He was supposed to be in control. This wasn't supposed to be sexual. That wasn't the point, yet the girl was literally inches from his cock, shifting and twisting and wriggling and arching and moaning. Fucking moaning. It wasn't difficult to imagine shifting that position to a much lewder image. *Fuck,* could you blame a guy?

But still, he had a significant hunch that the omega was innocent. Whiskey and pheromone driven reactions aside, they weren't pursuing anything, not a simple shag or some sort of affair. He was trying to be chivalrous. He was trying to just have a normal human relationship with a female. Why
was that such a challenge? He groaned, finishing off the last of his firewhiskey as he waited for his erection to flag. He went into that lesson thinking that his day could not get any more uncomfortable, he had been wrong.

...

_Hermione_

She slipped into the servants’ quarters easily, the temporary quarters were way more run down than their rooms at home, clearly not in an area that the Malfoy’s put much effort into maintaining. Hermione followed the hallway towards the last room, where the other female slaves were housed. She always believed that Lady Greengrass never looked at her differently even though she was a slave. But there were still some shitty conventions the Greengrasses maintained. The slaves were housed at the end of the hallway, in the most drafty, uncomfortable room, even though none of them could conjure warming spells that would solve the problem. There were twelve other girls, some low-ranking maids, others kitchen aides and infirmary assistant. Hermione was the highest ranked, the one who would normally get to share a much more comfortable room with just Katie, if it weren’t for the goddamn gold band. She sighed, making her way to the back of the room as quietly as she could, flopping onto her thin cot and staring out at the drafty window beside her. The moon was bright that night, almost full, and the light pouring in seemed determined to keep Hermione awake. Well, it could’ve been worse. She could’ve accidentally groped multiple alphas that day or just Ron Weasely. Yup, could’ve been more awkward. At least Draco was attractive.

Shit, she was attracted to her best friend's fiancé and she had accidentally felt him up. That's great, just lovely. She had known that before, but not like, consciously. Shit, now she had something to feel guilty about.

...

The next morning came way too soon. Thankfully a mild headache and a twisting stomach were the only remnants from last night's alcohol. She wouldn't have been able to handle a full-on hangover with everything else she had to do. She was up after her roommates had left, probably to get breakfast, something she was utterly disgusted by now. She shimmied her way into her dress for the day, a sage green garment with cap sleeves and a white ruffled bottom. It was a favorite of hers, particularly because it was that simple and easy to move in. She had things to get done today.

...

_Draco_

The quick knocks were a surprise. He was still dealing with a touch of a hangover from the night before, and a severe case of awkward embarrassment. He hadn't been expected anyone that morning, had very deliberately owled his attendant to keep everyone away, and yet, here it was a visitor at eight in the morning. He opened the door with a sharp yank, doing nothing to mask his irritation.

"What?" He snapped before he realized who was standing in front of him. Hermione was waiting with her arms crossed, her mouth pursed pointedly.

"May I come in?" She asked, deliberately stepping forward so that saying no wasn't really an option here. He nodded, stepping back to let her while acutely aware that he was still in his silk pajamas. She was dressed primly, though appropriately for the warm weather. He always felt like a fool around her these days. And entirely not in control of his body but that was a different matter.

She didn't sit down, shooting a brief glare at her couch as if all of the problems were its fault. She
cleared her throat, rounding on him with her arms crossed. He was impressed, she had effectively boxed him in, an impressive power play that was much more alpha than omega. She sighed.

"Spit it out." She demanded without blinking.

"We shouldn't have done that after drinking." He voiced his excuse first, knowing a few power plays himself. This was a conversation that he needed to be a part of.

"No probably not." She offered, her arms dropping as the tension seemed to drop out of her body. She rolled her neck and shoulders, smiling at him just a little bit.

"You're not mad." He realized aloud, he had been expecting some sort of rebuke for compromising her virtue with his salaciousness.

"Nothing happened, what's to be mad about?" She shrugged, raising an eyebrow pointedly. Clearly, she was trying to make a point here, even if he wasn't sure what it was.

"So, did you not notice?" He couldn't help himself, and the nerdy little part of him that no one had to know about that wouldn't let him leave the answer floating in limbo. How could she have not noticed? She just shrugged, seemingly unimpressed. Which was offensive in and of itself, he didn't have anything to be embarrassed about in that department.

"Biology, Draco. Can't hold you at fault for it. I'd probably be madder if it hadn't happened." She offered, smirking, apparently at his offense.

"Huh?" He didn't get it, wasn't this a chivalry issue?

"You sent me into O Space by touching my neck," She reminded him. "Can you imagine how embarrassing it would be if you weren't biologically attracted to me, at all? She quirked her eyebrow pointedly, pride in her eyes even as she assured him. He got that, in a way, he'd fancied a bird or two in his life that hadn't returned the sentiment, wasn't pleasant. It as only when he was twelve and hadn't hit his growth spurt of course, not an issue he had to deal with now a days.

"So, if we're all good…." He wasn't sure what the point of this was.

"That's it, we're not all good." She snapped, crossing her arms again. He was getting whiplash.

"What?" He demanded. This goddamn bird needed to calm the hell down.

"I'm clearly attracted to you, and you're apparently attracted to me for some reason." She announced, a part of him wanted to correct her self-deprecation but she continued. "Nothing is going to happen; neither of us will be acting on this because you're engaged to my best friend."

"Not engaged yet." He corrected, for some reason that seemed important right now.

"Not the point. Agreed?" She snapped. He could do that, keep things kosher between them, it had been his original plan after all. Just because his prick didn't always make good life choices didn't mean Draco couldn't be normal friends with a bird. He nodded, but she waited, continuing to stare at him pointedly.

"Agreed." He offered. She nodded, dropped her shoulders and gestured for him to move.

"Good." She answered as he stepped out of the way of the door.

"Great." He said, shaking his head as he nudged it open.
"Perfect." She continued, pausing in the entry way.

"Brilliant." He added.

"Splendid. Goodbye." She finished, taking strides down the hallway.

"Goodbye Hermione." He muttered, closing the door just before he burst into laughter. Far be it from him to ever believe another omega stereotype, Hermione had balls.

"Hermione"

Managing Astoria's life was not an easy task. It was an endless process of making flashcards and running baths with oils and planning make up and hairstyles and fetching laundry and delivering messages, on top of all of the work Minerva tasked her with. So, it really shouldn't have been considered her fault when she missed one measly little appointment.

She was supposed to be there to escort Astoria back to her room after tea with her tutor, and to free her from the dreary teacher's endless monotone lectures. She ended up trapped on the other side of the castle managing a linen problem and by the time she made it back, someone else had rescued Astoria and was chatting her up outside of her room. Even from a distance she could spot Astoria's lit up smile as she touched the blokes arm and leaned into him. She was happy for a moment, before her eyes traveled up to the bright shock of orange hair on top of her companion's head. No, no, no.

Ron laughed, apparently not realizing he was about to die. Because she was about to murder him.

"Astoria! Don't you need to start getting ready for dinner? Start your face, I'll be in a minute." Hermione interrupted without hesitation, widening her eyes and tilting her head to let Astoria know that 'no' was not an option right now. Astoria nodded demurely before dashing into her room. Then Hermione rounded on Ron.

"Ronald Weasley! You will not go anywhere near that girl ever again." She snapped, poking his shoulder and pushing him back for emphasis. She would not put up with this. Astoria was screwed if anyone even thought that something was going.

"Don't tell me what to do, Hermione." Ron snarled back, looking away pointedly as if she was suddenly beneath him, after years of panting after her. She didn't know when that had changed, and while she didn't mind, she didn't particularly like this Ron either.

"Do you have a death wish or are you just more of an idiot than I originally thought?" She hissed, glancing around the hallway nervously. It wouldn't do well to be interrupted.

"Drop it." He ordered, starting to walk away, and oh no, that would not do. She followed with determination, this conversation was not over.

"That girl, she's getting engaged Ron!" She reminded him, still at a whisper.

He scoffed in disbelief. She was offended on Astoria's behalf.

"She is, and she has to be pure and perfect when she does, if you do anything to mess up this contract…" She threatened, her voice low. Messed up magic or not, she'd slit his throat if it came to that.

"Isn't that a little hypocritical of you, 'Mione?" He finally snapped, his eyes twisting with malice, as if
he actually had a valid point.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." She argued. She hadn't done anything wrong, at least not anything he would know about.

"I know you're shagging Malfoy. You were spotted coming out of his room last night." He accused sharply, the disgust plain on his features. She was offended, even if she was hypothetically shagging Malfoy, which she wasn't, it wasn't any of his business.

"I am most certainly not." She argued, even as she felt the blush burn across her cheeks at the memory that not everything was as innocent as she would like him to believe.

"So why were you there?" He demanded, and she didn't have a good answer for that. He smirked in triumph, that arrogant ass expression blooming across his arrogant ass face.

"It's none of your business, official work, way above your pay grade." She lied through her teeth, and he just shook his head in disbelief.

"You're lying, so before you start lecturing me about propriety, you might want to look in the mirror." He accused before storming away in disgusted. God, what a mess.
Draco

It was frustrating being in a manor with double the amount of people. It was mind bogglingly annoying. Especially when it was approximately nine hundred degrees in this heat wave and everyone smelled terrible. A maid from a few weeks ago, had jumped on him this afternoon, and he hadn't even been remotely interested. Part of it was the fact that it was so bloody hot, part of it was that he saw that telltale glimmer of insane that marked her as a gold digger vying for a mistress title, part of it was that every time he managed to catch a glimpse of him, his father cast him threatening looks just daring him to make a mistake. It was sufficient to say that Draco was not in the mood.

Of course, since he had sworn off romantic liaisons, everyone else on the planet had apparently decided that now was the time be going full speed ahead. Astoria was clingier than ever; she had shifted from being a useless piece of damp cardboard in every conversation to sounding like a robot who also knew way too much about him without him telling her anything. All of their official dates were chaperoned but since he had started vaguely following his schedule, she showed up exactly where he was supposed to be. It was creepy.

At the moment, he was wandering around, trying to actively avoid her, and kept walking into awkward moments. First was Hermione's little friend there, who was attempting to chat up Blaise's red headed bird. The bird wasn't buying, which was clear from literally down the hallway. He laughed, and the bloke immediately stepped in front of the girl, who just looked pissed off at the both of them.

"Lord Malfoy." He sneered, so much hate was shoved into that title. Aw how pitiful were the jealous. Nothing like heat to make a guy feel more vindictive.

"Nice to see you again, I'm glad to see you found that shoe." He directed at the bird, who stiffened and narrowed her eyes, clearly planning murder. Last time she was mad that he ignored her, now she's testy that he acknowledged her, he really couldn't win, could he? He walked away even as he heard frantic hissing whispers erupt behind him. Okay, maybe it was a little mean but that was fun for sure.

The next couple on his unintended tour of Malfoy's elicit rendezvous was a little more expected. His engaged best friend and his soon to be sister in law were angrily screaming at each other on the patio. That was kind of par for the course though, the next couple was a little more disconcerting.

He found a redheaded waiter, with a stocky, poor man's build, in a very passionate conversation with a dainty blonde girl, which wouldn't have even been notable, until he noticed as he walked by that the blonde girl was his soon to be fiancée. He stopped suddenly, perturbed when she didn't even notice his presence, too enraptured by whatever the hell the waiter was saying. It wasn't like he wanted the attention, but that was supposed to be his attention. He was publicly courting this girl, who cares if he didn't want to, how dare this miscreant stomp on his claim like this, blatantly smear his reputation? His respect was on the line here, the fact that any man thought it was okay to try and encroach on something that was earmarked for him was horrifyingly bad. Draco was definitely going to have to deal with this, he decided as he walked away, still amazed that she hadn't noticed him. Malfoys didn't take this kind of disrespect lying down. The inevitable conflict would have to wait till tomorrow though, because he had an appointment with an omega who needed tutoring.

Hermione
Whoever decided that August was the ideal time to begin a formal courtship had to have been experimenting with too many pepper up potions. Lady Greengrass had a saying, "Pigs sweat, men perspire, ladies glow." Astoria was dripping with glow at the moment. It was nearing 37 degrees and it was likely only going to get hotter as the week went on. Astoria took cool baths, positively saturated with flowers and oils to combat the inevitable glowing. Astoria cast cooling charms on herself every half hour or so, but even that wasn't strong enough to combat the heat. Astoria sunk into the bath, sighing at the feeling of the cool water as she dunked her hair. Hermione wished she had that luxury, with no ability to cast cooling charms, and no time for baths every four hours, it was safe to say that Hermione was disgusting. Her damp clothes stuck to her skin and her hair was clumped in a sticky mass at the back of her neck. She was supposed to meet up with Draco this afternoon, but it was looking less and less likely that that was going to happen.

"Go Mione," Astoria groaned. Hermione jumped. "You've been looking at the clock once every five seconds for two hours."

"No, its fine, totally fine, you need me." Hermione insisted, rinsing Astoria's hair with the bucket of clean water.

"Hermione, I'm fine. I don't know who you're running out to go meet, but I certainly have a favorite and I won't let you use me as an excuse to stand him up." Astoria insisted, batting Hermione hands away. Hermione went still.

"There's no guy." At least not the way that she was thinking.

"Hey, I'm getting married and you've got a suitor, things are looking up for the both of us, and you don't get to mess that up." Astoria chided, gesturing Hermione out the door as she slumped into the cool water. Hermione considered arguing, until she realized there was absolutely no way to get out of this without telling the truth and well, Hermione can't tell the truth, not without losing everything.

"Okay then, but only if you're sure," Hermione paused, hesitating. Astoria splashed her with the bath water and Hermione flinched.

"Go! For the love of Merlin Mione, do something fun for once in your life, I am capable of bathing myself." Astoria mocked, and Hermione raised an eyebrow as she nudged open the door. Astoria laughed, making shooing gestures in her direction.

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Draco

Draco was sweltering, literally going to die. All of the cooling charms in the world could not combat this heat wave. He sat uncomfortably in a plush couch that was only making the whole situation ten thousand times worse. At least, according to his math. The knock on his door was softer, more sluggish than usual.

He groaned out a greeting. "Come in." The omega stumbled in, looking about as worn out as he felt. Her face was flushed and her expression was miserable. He eyed the layers of draped fabric practically swallowing the girl and had a hunch that she had a more difficult time surviving this heat wave than he did. She dropped into the arm chair eyeing him with the deep resignation of a person who no longer gives a shit.

"Wanna cool off?" He asked the question before he had really thought of it himself. He grinned at the realization that he actually had a way of doing that.
"Obviously." She snapped, clearly thinking the question wasn't a plan for a solution.

"Well then, c'mon, let's go!" He ordered, jumping off of the couch with new found enthusiasm. He could feel the cool relief just waiting for him.

"Where do you think we're going?" Hermione demanded, annoyance seeping into her tone as he followed him through his sitting room to the back passage. He waved his wand briskly, easily opening the secret passage to the outside. It was intended to be used for emergency attacks in an invasion scenario, he mostly used it to duck out and avoid meetings he didn't want to intend.

"It's five hundred degrees in that manor, do you really want to sit in that stuffy room for any longer then you have to?" He asked, quirking an eyebrow as he strode out into the gardens.

"Lead the way." She shrugged, shaking her head in disbelief as she moved outside. He followed the path with glee. He hadn't actually made it here since his adolescence, and had a feeling she'd enjoy it just as much as he did. They wove their way off of the main property, walking towards the edge of the woods that the Malfoys owned. The girl stumbled over the occasional root, but kept her footing without injury thankfully. He heard it first, the sound of water trickling over rocks; he followed the noise until he heard the telltale crashing. As they broke through the lush trees, their bright green leaves rich in the summer sun, he heard Hermione gasp. It was definitely a gasp worthy view. Cool, crisp water cascaded over the rock wall, pooling at the bottom in a deep natural pond, which flowed down the rest of the hill so the water was never stagnant. They stood on a ledge parallel to the feeder river, looking down at the pond below them. It was his second favorite place on the manor grounds, and exactly where he needed to be in this moment. The omega was frozen beside him, and after a beat he turned to take in her expression. Her eyes wide and her mouth was slightly open as she took in the sight before her. He took that as a good sign.

"Now what?" She asked, her voice quavering a tiny bit.

"What do you think?" He asked, kicking off his shoes, schlepping off his jacket and reaching for his belt. She tensed immediately.

"Woah!" She jumped, turning away as she clapped a hand over her eyes. He chuckled. There had been a time when he thought that the aftermath of her accidentally feeling him up would be awkward, now he knew better. He just had to fake blind confidence and she'd go with it, yay for blatant posturing.

"Just the trousers, no funny business." He laughed, shucking his trousers without hesitation, unbutton his shirt, and throwing the fine fabrics on the ground. "I keep my pants and you keep your knickers. We'll be fine." A brilliant grin broke out across his face as he stepped closer to the edge. "That is as long as we don't fall in." He teased, eyes lit with mirth before stepping over the edge with a mocking "oops."

**Hermione**

Hermione resisted the urge to scream as the alpha disappeared over the edge. She ran over, peering down to the pool, watching as he collided with the water, desperately waiting for him to resurface. She hadn't even gotten a good opportunity to see how fit he was, for academic purposes of course, and now he was going to die.

"Draco! Draco Malfoy!" She shouted as he went down, and then didn't come back up. "Draco!" She snapped, waited a beat and then reluctantly slipped out of her dress, no use diving in if the layers of fabric would drown her. In just her sheath she leapt in, she pinched her nose nervously and jumped over. The moment she hit the water, a drenched head of blond hair popped up. She sunk for a
moment, frantically pulling herself to the surface. The bliss of the cool water barely registered as she struggled to stay where she could you know, breathe.

"Woah, easy there." Draco answered, lifting her easily by her arms even as he kept himself up with just the strength in his legs. "Took you long enough to dive in there, good thing I wasn't really drowning, huh?" He teased. She glared, still too focused on staying in air to focus on his words. "Do you even know how to swim?" He asked, floating back as he studied her frantic movements. She hadn't actually swam before, had read up on it, but it was definitely not as easy as it seemed.

"Of course I know how to swim." She snapped; Draco raised an eyebrow skeptically. "In theory." He laughed.

"This is one of those times when both oks will not help you." Draco pointed out, though he was clearly very wrong.

"Sorry Malfoy, I'm afraid I disagree with you," she said as she sunk a little bit more, water was tickling a little bit at her throat.

"Okay then... Sorry I don't know your surname?" He took a moment when he realized that. It was an uncomfortable thought for her too.

"Granger was on the paperwork, though normally I'm just Greengrass." She shrugged, and dipped a little deeper in the water, then she realized she really shouldn't be shrugging at this moment in time.

"Well then Granger," he said as he slowly released his gentle hold on her arms. "Swim." She tried, she really did, but she was too nervous that her face would be in the water. She bobbed, dipping under the water when she got irritated and he quickly floated over to pull her up again. She sighed.

"I see your point." She admitted.

Draco

He laughed at her truly petulant expression at the realization that he was right. She really was too stubborn for her own good some times. She was in a tiny little slip and it wasn't doing very much to help him focus. Unfortunately the fabric was decent and the water didn't make it see through. Which wasn't a consideration when he had made this plan, nope, not all, because that would untoward, and wrong and Draco was a gentleman (mostly).

"You're thinking too much Granger, let yourself float." He advised, bringing himself and her back to issue at hand.

"I'll drown." She snapped, a tiny bit of panic appearing in her eyes.

"You've read all about swimming but you missed buoyancy?" He demanded. She shook her head.

"Of course logically I know that but I'm not exactly great at trust here Draco." She admitted, and he had a pretty good sense of what she was talking about.

"You trust me though?" He asked, and it felt like more than swimming hung on the question.

"To a point." She answered shrugging. The answer was not what he was hoping to hear, though he supposed he hadn't exactly earned a resounding "yes!"

"That's reassuring." He ducked under the water, enjoying his own moment of bliss as he sunk into the cool depths and then easily slipped an arm beneath the omega's slim legs. She gasped, tipping
backwards as he surfaced, he caught her, his left arm sliding beneath her shoulders as she lay back. She grabbed his arm, holding on with a painfully tight grip as she tried to hold herself out of the water.

"Bloody Hell Hermione you're like a cat." He hissed and her fingers dug into him, and apparently she was a raptor in another life because he was pretty sure she was going to break skin.

"I'm sorry, I don't want to drown, is that a crime?" She snapped. Why was he always arguing with this bird?

"Relax, alright, I've got you." He assured her, a little irritated now. He didn't realize he had let his alpha voice slip in until she started to relax compulsively before snapping out of it. "Sorry!" He apologized frantically; she sighed.

"You're fine, it wasn't intentional, and hey, I resisted right?" She chuckled, but the sound was hollow. She pushed off of him, and he easily let her go. She sighed deeply once more before finally actually laying back in the water. He put a hand under her back at first, and held it there as he felt her core engage, finally moving back when she was level and floating easily.

"Not so bad, huh?" He asked her, bobbing in the constant, slow flow of the water. A cool breeze drifted over his skin, even as the sun pounded down.

"No, not bad at all," She said, spreading her hands out through the water, seemingly just to feel it. The tension had left her body and he watched while she smiled, her brown locks spreading out around her head like a bronze halo. He had to turn away before she noticed him staring. He laid back, the cool water washing over his sun warmed skin like the perfect kind of balm. He floated beside her, a strange kind of contentment and peace settling into his bones. A calm silence filled the air, too comfortable to shatter. He felt her presence beside him, could easily have reached out and touched her, started something with both of them in such flimsy clothes, but in the water, her normally dramatic syrupy smell was hidden, and he wondered if this was like to have a bird for a friend. He kind of liked it.

"Hey, Draco?" She asked after a while just floating.

"Yeah?" He answered in a lazy drawl, too content for anything else.

"Thanks."

Hermione

As the sun started to go down, she and Draco made their way to the shallower part of the pool, pulling themselves up over the edge. It was a little more work to retrieve their clothes, having to trudge about the steep hill that Hermione never slipped down whatever Draco may say. Soon enough, they were making their way back to the manor, only a little damp from their dip. As they entered the garden, Hermione was hit with this overwhelming sense that something important need to be said. When she was unable to figure out what that could possibly be, she defaulted to duty.

"Take it easy on Astoria tomorrow at the party will you?" Hermione asked, well aware that she was stepping into dangerous ground that neither of them had touched before.

"There's a party tomorrow?" Draco asked, stiffening with surprise. Hermione sighed, rolling her eyes as she looked up at the darkening sky, pleading whatever greater power there was to keep her sane. Astoria had been prepping for this party for weeks, she wanted to prove that she would be the perfect Malfoy hostess down the line, and the person she was trying to impress had no idea it was even
"To celebrate your aunt and uncle's visit? All of the wizarding elite is invited, am I ringing any bells?" She teased as they made their way through the garden.

"Ah yes, Bella, I tend to block anything involving my aunt." Draco shuddered visibly, and Hermione studied him with surprise. Every source she could find cited Bellatrix as the perfect pureblood wife. Sister to Narcissa, she came from the highly prestigious Black line, married a Lestrange, and was by all accounts a sophisticated and highly respectable woman.

"Why?" Hermione asked in disbelief, Draco raised an eyebrow and just shook his head as they reentered his room.

"I hope you never have to find out."
Visitors and Interruptions

Chapter Summary

Depictions of Abuse in final scene, see chapter notes at the end if you are unsure if you should read it or not.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hermione

The Manor’s warmth felt like stepping into a warm bath. Draco's quiet sitting room greeted her in the darkness. No lamps had been lit in their absence and the sun had sank enough during their walk over that the moon was quickly becoming the only source of light. There was a tension in the room; her skin felt tight as she watched him carefully. He moved fluidly and now that she had seen his exquisitely defined muscles she had no reason to doubt the strength that shimmered beneath every movement.

The air against her damp shoulders was cool as her wet hair soaked through the fabric, but she felt soft and natural from the pond, stripped of oils and perfumes. Draco walked to the bar, pouring warm amber firewhiskey into a glass. She watched his cool deliberate movements, wondering for a moment what kind of lover he’d be. She knew what his member felt like, pulsing against her hand but would he be tender and considerate, as he had shown in his gentle touches to her, or would he be as cool and calculated as he was in public? Would he unravel his lover with calm control or would he lose himself to passion with frantic caresses? Would he be rough or oh so careful? Would it feel like melting, a slow simmer like magma, or fire, sudden and all encompassing?

The soft thunk of the glass bottle against thick mahogany snapped her out of her curious thoughts as color rushed to her cheeks. Draco smirk, a knowing look that she didn’t appreciate in the slightest, as he sipped from his glass. Fire flamed inside of her, though this particular flame was from an entirely different source. She closed the distance between them in a few short strides, jabbing him in the chest with a series of sharp pokes to make herself clear.

"You know Draco Malfoy for all you arrogance, you really aren't much of a teacher." She snapped, suddenly enraged with his insistence of acting like he knew everything, he knew every thought in her head, every emotion she felt, and every desire she tried desperately to hide.

"And why would you say that?” He asked with a chuckle, clearly amused with her attempts to intimidate him. She had to admit that she made kind of a humorous image. She wasn't particularly tall, in fact this close it was obvious that she only came to about his shoulder, and he was slouching. She was a songbird, a tiny blue jay, squawking at an eagle. They might share some similarities, but they were not the same species. But this blue jay bites.

"I came here for a lesson and instead you had me lazing about in a pond, what do you have to say about this terrible lapse in work ethic?” She taunted, raising one eyebrow to challenge him. He smiled, a soft, easy thing, totally unbothered by her accusations. His hands slid onto her hips, a startling heat where she hadn't been expecting it. His eyes were molten silver in this light, and she found herself caught in them before she had even noticed she was staring, but now she didn't want to
break the spell.

"I didn't think you minded." He breathed as he pulled her even closer to him. She was hyper aware of the thin, crackling space between them. She could feel the heat of his body brushing against her breasts and thought she might just explode if they broke that gap, that tiny, barely there space between them. The perfect kind of chill fluttered in between her shoulder blades as every fiber of her being told her to lean into him. She stared up into his swirling silver eyes, like a lake bathed in moonlight, as they stared back at her with equal reverence. The hands on her hips shifted, splaying across her lower back and she gasped instinctively, a sharp intake of breath that couldn't be helped even as she breathed in his rich scent, feeling dizzy with it.

"I have to disagree, I am a proper lady you know." She chastised, the words falling out of her mouth without her conscious thought. The majority of her brain was still alight with the tension their proximity was causing.

"I've said it once and I'll say it again, you are no lady." He argued, a smirk on his face as he leaned closer, so the barest breadth of space separated their mouths. Her eyes slipped closed and a woozy, entirely unlady like part of her brain rejoiced even as she rejected it.

"Then what am I?" She breathed out, forcing her eyes open. He grinned, and she melted into him, pressed lightly into his warmth as she felt his strong, firm body against her fragile one.

"Something so much better." He answered, his fingers brushed across her cheek as he moved forward, closing the distance between their lips. For the tiniest moment of time she felt Draco's soft, sure mouth against hers, and then the door slammed open with a crash.

The pair jumped, flying away from each other. The bottle crashed and shattered as Draco knocked into it and Hermione tipped over the coffee table, sending it and its contents clattering against the hardwood floor.

"Sorry, am I interrupting?" An entirely nonplused Blaise Zabini asked from the doorway. Hermione flushed, sending a panicked look at a very pale Draco and then sprinted out of the door. She had never crossed a castle in quite that short a time period before.

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Hermione

The next morning Hermione was determined to turn over a new leaf. Minerva McGonagall did not let beautiful blond boys distract her from her job. If Hermione had any intention of being half the witch Minerva was, she could not let herself be distracted. She was crossing the hall, bringing Astoria's breakfast back to the kitchen, the poor girl was too anxious to eat it, when she ran into someone she was sure would become her role model very soon.

Bellatrix Lestrange dominated the space she walked in. She was severe, her chin tilted up rigidly as her heels clicked decisively on tile. The black gown she wore was made of only the finest fabrics, though it cared nothing for the trends that would prohibit its color. Her hair was wild and untamed, a similar texture to Hermione's when she allowed it to flow freely. Oh how she wished she could do that.

Bellatrix didn't just part crowds, she disappeared them. The world raced to get out of Bellatrix's way. She impressed Hermione in just the few glimpses she caught that morning. She remained in awe even after the woman left. She wanted that; she wanted that degree of respect afforded to her, she wanted that control, she wanted that power. Hermione had spent her whole life shoved to the side.
and trampled she would give anything to be half as strong as Bellatrix was. It wasn't easy being a
witch in their world, but Bellatrix clearly chose her own path. Merlin, could anyone be more worthy
of respect?

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Draco

Aunt Bella was back, and she was just as menacing as always. In the twenty minutes that they had
interacted since her arrival she had critiqued his hair, his shirt, his taste in fire whiskey, and his honor.
Oh how wonderful is family?

His mother was more frayed than usual. Bella didn't like his father and his mother didn't like his
uncle. Draco personally thought the cold, terrifying beta, Rudolphus, was the worse pick overall but
his alpha aunt would hear none of it. At the moment, she was terrifying house elves as they scurried
to get her rooms to precisely her liking (Bella and Rudulphus hadn't shared a room in years). Draco
was making it his mission to avoid Bellatrix at all cost, and for that matter to not think about any
omegas. None. At all. No omega thoughts. Even though his goddamn room still smelled like
cherries. Not that cherries signified anything to him. Because they couldn't. Because he was not
thinking about omegas.

What he was thinking of was how to skin Blaise Zabini alive, because he clearly deserved it. He
deserved to be roasted over a pit, for reasons that Draco was not allowing himself to think about.

Thankfully, on the plus side, the ball for Bellatrix meant that he was permitted to skip any sort of
interaction with Astoria until that night.

The ginger waiter scurried by him, carrying a tray towards Bellatrix’s rooms, which reminded him of
a very important distraction which he should most definitely embark on, right now. He needed to
defend his reputation and the best way to do that was to get some plain and simple revenge.
Unfortunately he'd have to enlist some help, and that meant that the pit would have to be postponed.
Probably for the best, he was sure the smell would be horrid, among the other complications.

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Hermione

Hermione was wrong, very wrong. She had escorted Astoria to the ball, leaving her at the door after
some last minute prep and then had turned to go catch a few extra hours of sleep when she made a
mistake. The right hallway was the slower way back to her rooms, less direct, but also more
secluded, she wouldn't have to keep her head down or worry about running into Malfoy. The left
hallway was the easier and faster route, and the one she so foolishly chose.

She was in a hurry, eager to get the most sleep that she could squeeze in, and hadn't been paying
attention. She noticed the noble couple from a distance and skirted to the side and kept her head
down so she could continue on her way in peace. Unfortunately, she hadn't accounted for the way
the woman was talking, which apparently had included vivid hand gestures because with a swing of
her arms she smacked Hermione firmly across the cheek. Hermione jumped, head snapping up as she
made accidental eye contract with the woman, Bellatrix Lestrange. The witch was livid, and a nasty,
malicious rage was flashing in her eyes.

"Are you not going to apologize?" Bellatrix demanded, each word slow and cruel. Hermione gaped.
All of the power, the self assurance that Hermione had witnessed earlier had been replaced with pure
madness.
"Apologize?" She asked in shock, her cheek still smarting.

"You walked into my hand, you blithering idiot!" She shrieked, even as her husband watched without emotion. Hermione looked around, expecting someone, anyone to overhear and defend her, this was ridiculous.

"I'm sorry." She spat out, struggling to even pretend to sound sincere. There were rings on that hand, she was pretty sure she was bleeding. She was rewarded for her efforts with another sharp slap, this one deliberate.

"You will address me properly, you…" Bellatrix struggled for the right word but her eyes lit up as she was the markers on Hermione's wrist, both of them. "Well, not much is lower than an omega slave." Hermione flinched back at the hate in her tone. "But a disgusting, moronic, worthless omega slave who can't be bothered to learn her place certainly earns the title." Bellatrix took out her wand and Hermione scurried back, wanting to run but finding herself frozen in fear.

"Kneel." Bellatrix snapped, and Hermione dropped to her knees, slamming them of the hard stone. The wand was directed right between her eyes as she trembled in fear. She was certain of it, in that moment, she would die. She would die at seventeen, never having loved, never having even lived really, and there was nothing she could do about it. "If the Crown wasn't monitoring it I'd crucio you right now, for hours until your throat bled and you lost your mind from screaming." Hermione shook, never having even considered that her death would be anything other than a simple killing curse ending her in an instant. "Unfortunately, Cissy's expecting me, so I'll have to keep this short and sweet." Bellatrix flicked her wand and a terrible pain spread across Hermione's neck, the skin tightened and flared, the pain spreading like a burn. A second movement caused the pain to lash against her cheek. Another flick preceded a similar sensation on her arm; this time she could see the painful welt.

"Get up!" Bellatrix snapped and Hermione struggled to ignore the pain long enough to get to her feet. The older woman grabbed her chin, sharp nails and harsh fingers digging down into the back. "If I ever see your putrid face again it will be far worse than the marks you're sporting now." Hermione nodded as well as she could, too scared to open her mouth. Bellatrix finally released her, turning away with a swish of the black gown that Hermione had admired, her husband in tow. She felt sick.

Chapter End Notes

Hermione accidentally bumps into Bellatrix. Bellatrix hits her and hexes her, shouting insults before she moves on.
Ambushes and Aftermath

**Draco**

Nothing happened in their lives without planning it, without careful, deliberate action. Their opportunity came during the welcoming ball. The ball that Bellatrix and Rudolphus were very helpfully late for.

Blaise had suggested castration or even calling off the engagement but Draco was not quite there yet. Sure he wasn't happy that someone had dared to step where his claim was or that that someone was a Weasley, the Shooting Star to the Malfoy's Firebolt in terms of prestige, but, and this was difficult to explain to Blaise, he couldn't really care less about the offense itself. Maybe he was still coming down from Omega hormones, maybe Hermione was simply making him nicer by her proximity, maybe it was just the fact that Astoria was the most annoying witch he had ever had the displeasure of interacting with, but he actually didn't care about someone making moves. He wasn't actually possessive of her, just his image. If people thought they could stomp all over Draco's claims, if his word didn't mean anything anymore, well it was too disastrous to contemplate.

The point being, Draco thought as he sipped from his glass, just water as he needed to focus tonight, Weasley had to be scared, and publicly so, not destroyed. The principle was what was important here.

Draco could remember that, the issue was if Blaise could. He had better if he wanted Draco to forget about his habit for interrupting.

Draco glanced at his counterpart, his dark skin a rich counterpart to the emerald green robes he donned. Beside him, Draco knew they contrasted obviously. Draco's coloring was fair, bordering on pasty, which was never clearer than when he stood beside the other lord. Draco knew little of envy, having had most everything he wanted since his birth, but he was very envious of Blaise's superior height and build. Draco was for lack of a better word, scrawny by comparison, the far less intimidating one of the pair. It was good they had the balance that they had. They'd need it.

With a slight nod, Blaise set out across the room, meandering towards where the poor, unsuspecting ginger stood, serving drinks to some of the ladies Draco was no longer allowed to charm. Draco took the opposite route, hugging the walls to stay in the shadows before Astoria spotted him. Astoria was in a green satin ensemble, carefully schmoozing the people around her. She was a noblewoman, that was for sure. His mother's approving gaze seemed to agree.

This had to be done at just the right moment, calm enough that the inevitable gossip would spread the word that Draco Malfoy was not slipping, but busy enough that it wouldn't make a scene. It would require the kind of precision strike that only years of friendship could facilitate. Blaise arrived first, standing quietly in the background while Weasley wandered in his direction. The ladies moved off, Blaise stepped closer to Weasley from behind, moving with ease just as Draco arrived.

"You're watching her." Blaise announced, and indeed the other man was staring in Astoria's direction. The waiter jumped about three feet, narrowly avoiding spilling his tray all over the three of them.

"What?" He blurted, turning red to the tip of his ears at being discovered. "I mean, I'm sorry, sir?"

"You're watching Astoria, have been for a while now." Blaise accused as Draco watched silently.
"I assure you, I would never…” The waiter stuttered, stumbling over his words and glancing anxiously in between the two lords. It kind of felt like being a pair of sharks circling a seal, in other words, a lot fun.

"I know you wouldn't do anything, you're just not subtle. Wouldn't want her fiancé to notice or anything, that could be awkward, hear the guys a dick." Blaise offered, his tone dripping with false camaraderie before he slinked away into the crowd of mingling dinner goers, his job was done.

"I'm not going to kill you." Draco offered generously, even though it only made the ginger blush brighter, ungrateful little tosser.

"Thank you, I promise I won't even look at her anymore." The waiter vowed, fear obvious in his expression.

"Course not, wouldn't want your filthy Weasley eyes contaminating my wife, now would we?” He snarled, and there was the briefest hint of defiance in the waiters expression. Draco tilted his head, appraising the other man, and slowly and pointedly drew his wand.

"No sir." Weasley answered, his hands clenched on the tray of champagne but he flicked his eyes down, staying deliberately remorseful. Draco appreciated it and tucked away his wand. It was unseemly to start a duel at a party after all.

"Then we have an understanding." He announced, smiling with deliberate falseness as he drained his glass before placing it on the tray. A hush fell over the crowd as all eyes turned to the main doors of the ballroom, ornate dramatic things that were much larger than strictly necessary. "Now you'll have to excuse me, I do believe my aunt has arrived."

**Hermione**

Harsh breaths burned her lungs as tears dripped down her cheeks. Her hands were shaking as her body trembled, flaring with adrenaline. Inside, she was numb, blank, unfeeling, uncomprehending of anything but the pain and her body’s call of panic. It was a struggle to stand, her legs felt weak beneath her, but she knew she had to move, to get out of here because they could come back. It felt simultaneously like there was no way that could have actually just happened and like it was doomed to repeat and she would never escape it. Her body felt raw, over sensitized and terrified. Her cheek stung as the salt from her tears irritated them, not that she could help it. Her neck seared each time she adjust her head even the slightest bit, and her arm throbbed. She needed help.

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It felt like she had completed a herculean task as she arrived at the Malfoy stable, but it was only when she reached the first row of stalls that she realized that she had no idea how to navigate this stable. This wasn't home. She hadn't grown up here, and she had no idea how to find what she needed.

She was curled into a ball before she realized that it was happening, her breathing was sharp, labored and a tiny bit of her remaining intellectual side realized that she was probably having a panic attack, which shouldn't come entirely unexpected. She felt like she was dying, like she'd fall to the floor and never get up.

"Help" She whimpered, low in the back of her throat, incapable of more speech. "Help." She begged, tears pouring down her face now. She couldn't breathe. She needed to breathe. She needed to...
"Mione! I'm here okay? Look at me, c'mon open your eyes. Shit, Hermione, I'm sorry okay, I'm so sorry. Wake up." The final command yanked her out of the welcoming darkness, and her panic hit just as strong her whole body resumed shaking. She stared up at a familiar face but found herself incapable of recognizing it. "Breathe, okay, take deep breaths, in through your nose out through your mouth." The face ordered, and her body responded mechanically, even though she couldn't stop shaking. It was as if a current was flowing through her and it was starting to hurt, she needed the pain to stop. "You're okay, just keep breathing, I'm going to try to calm you down, I'm so sorry." The boy murmured, his hand pushing her hair out of her face, careful to avoid the burning spot. His hand moved to her neck and traced along the top of her spine. Her body relaxed fully, each muscle slumping into a pliant state. Her mind cleared quickly, and for a brief moment she could focus, then she slipped into an exhausted, overwhelming peace. Everything felt syrupy, slower compared to the panicky speed from before. She was on the other side of the spectrum now. The hand moved off of her neck and her next breath smelled strongly of apples. Someone important smelled like apples.

"I'm going to try to heal these, okay? They'll stop hurting really soon." A nice voice said, but they were worried. Why were they worried? She didn't feel any pain, she was too relaxed. Suddenly, it felt like an ice cube was being dragged against her cheek, it was cold, but she felt so warm. She wondered why she didn't feel it drip. Her face just felt sticky with residue. Had she been crying? The ice cube moved to her neck and that didn't feel good. The syrupy feeling was leaving. Her eyes were starting to focus; she didn't like it.

"Shh, you're okay, I promise." The nice voice reminded her. She relaxed a little as the cold moved to her arm; and was there a bright red spot on her inner forearm? that wasn't right. Her sluggish brain struggled to process what was happening, and then she came up. It was like surfacing from the pond, retreating from the quiet peace of below to the tumultuous surface. Harry's concerned face greeted her and she sat up quickly before the jolt of dizziness forced her to lean back against the stall door behind her.

"Please tell me you washed this floor recently." She joked halfheartedly. Harry was not amused.

"What happened to you?" He demanded, the fear apparent in his eyes.

"Bellatrix Lestrange." She answered, Harry responded with a quirked eyebrow. "She's not who we thought she was."

"She did this to you?" Harry demanded. Hermione stiffened, she knew that he wasn't mad at her, but the anger on his face didn't feel good. He noticed, softening his tone. "Why?" She shrugged, not knowing the answer herself. "We have to tell someone!" Harry announced jumping to his feet. She didn't follow.

"Why?" She asked. She was just so tired.

"Because she can't get away with this!" Harry snapped. Hermione shook her head sadly.

"She already has Harry. She did it so casually, I'm not the first." Hermione corrected, a fresh wave of despair hitting her as she realized just how true her own words were. Harry was still in denial.

"She'll pay for this, Hermione!" He fumed, shouting into the stable. A few horses whinnied in distress, not liking such emotions for their primary caretaker.

"That will never happen," She shook her banded wrist at him, "I'm not even human to them. They're not the Greengrasses, and she's his aunt. Of course she's getting away with it." Harry shook his head,
but sat back down on the ground in defeat. He knew she was right, even if he wouldn't admit it. This was her fate, their fate. They were just playthings, mild entertainments to bring out when their betters were bored, and that would never change.
Draco loved power. He always had and he doubted that that would ever change, whatever his recent decisions about morality were, the chess game of politics was the greatest rush, and balls were the perfect place to practice.

Dancing with Astoria was like cards, a healthy blend of bluffing and a poker face. The dance was all the rage and France at the moment and it involved a complicated series of steps and hand gestures. Astoria knew every moment, being the perfect little pure blood that she was. Draco could wing it with confidence. Blaise didn't give a shit and did whatever he felt like doing anyways. Daphne was exacting in each of her movements, as well as the curt words and sweeping glances she exchanged with most of the room. Daphne was plotting, that much Draco could tell from a mile away, even if Blaise was choosing to ignore it.

The music ended and the room paused to applaud the band. Astoria smiled at him, taking his arm. Her mouth was moving, she was probably speaking. It was a pretty mouth he could admit, even he didn't exactly care for her. She had painted it a dark red to compliment her green, lace gown. A sharp throat clearing from behind him caught theirs attention and they spun as a pair to face his uncle.

"Young Lord Malfoy, how wonderful to see you again." Rodolphus simpered. He was afraid of Draco's father, many people were. Half of the people here were only here to curry Lucius's favor, because no one wanted his ire.

"Hello Uncle," Draco answered curtly, forcing a false smile.

"What a lovely young lady you have here Draco, you clearly have great taste." He leered and Draco had to put an extreme amount of effort into not hexing him right then and there.

"Thank you, I do but I'm also quite lucky." That was generous, that was a good, nice guy thing to say right? He always felt like he had to prove that he wasn't his uncle whenever Rodolphus showed up.

"Oh yes I'm sure," His uncle responded with zero sincerity, his gaze lingering on Astoria's décolletage, the girl stiffened. "Though you should learn to control your staff. " He finished.

"I'm so sorry my hospitality hasn't been up to your standards." Draco let the venom slip into his tone. That was just rude, the Malfoy household was rigidly disciplined, they had to be. "Not your hospitality, just your omegas, I met this spirited little slave today, you really need to take care of that." Astoria's nails drove into his arm for a moment before she relaxed again. Her face didn't move even though he could sense her panic. He felt some of it himself.

"What exactly would you suggest, this isn't exactly the dark ages any more Uncle." Draco snapped. The Malfoys didn't abuse their slaves. Well, at least Draco and Narcissa didn't. His mother wasn't the type and his governess would've killed him. Lucius was an equal opportunity abuser. Sometimes Draco's back still ached from the curses.

"Well Nott has been developing some wonderful spells, permanent trances, it's quite wonderful to behold." Rodolphus suggested. Draco's blood ran cold, remembering Granger crumpling to the ground in front of him. Lord Nott was a sick, caustic alpha who should never have been allowed anywhere near any omegas. The thought of him trapping them in O Space made his dinner rise to the
"I'd imagine." He forced out, resisting the urge to storm away.

"So sorry, if you'll excuse me, I must speak to the count before he leaves, he only stays at social functions for so long." Rodolphus announced slipping away into the crowd. Draco turned down to Astoria who was staring at the beta as he slipped away.

"Your uncle is torturing omegas." Astoria breathed her voice cold with fear.

"My uncle is watching and condoning omegas be tortured, he's not capable of the magic behind those kinds of spells." Draco corrected, though that didn't really make it better.

"You know those kinds of spells." Astoria asked, finally looking up at him. There was fear on her face.

"I know many things. I don't condone most of them." Draco explained. It was true, his father made sure he was learned in the dark arts, every part of them, even if he never planned to practice any of them.

"That's my handmaiden he mentioned." Astoria announced, voicing Draco's suspicion. He had hoped there were others; he had hoped that his family hadn't caused her more pain.

"How do you know?" He asked, hoping he could prove her wrong.

"How many spirited omega slaves do you have in your household?" She snapped as a new song began.

"You know this is the most personality you have ever shown in my presence." He pointed out, revealing more than he should, but he needed a bluff or two to keep her here.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend." Astoria gasped, dropping right back to demure and bland in a heartbeat.

"You didn't." He corrected. Maybe if Astoria didn't act like a wet bathmat all the time his life wouldn't suck so bad.

A servant arrived and bowed low. It wasn't one he recognized.

"Yes?" Draco snapped letting his irritation drip into his tone.

"A private message for the lady." He announced, nodding towards Astoria.

"Very well then, I'll join you again later." Draco offered, leaving with ease. He felt no compulsion to be hyper aware of what Astoria did on her own time.

Testing the room with Blaise was like throwing dice. You had to play a lot to succeed and it always helped when you cheated.

"Your fiancée plots more than you do." He announced, sidling over to the other man and grabbing a scotch on the way. "I wouldn't have thought it was possible."

"And your fiancée is dumber than you." Blaise countered. "Miracles do happen."

"She's speaking with lots of solicitors, what do you think she's up to?" Draco asked, and it was true, Daphne had spent almost a third of her time with the extremely wealthy attorneys who were present.
"Probably trying to get out of her contract." Blaise guessed nonchalantly.

"What are you going to do? You need that contract." Draco reminded his friend. As much as they hated each other, it was a mutually beneficial arrangement and with the inevitability of Blaise's mother coming under fire, Blaise needed the protection the Greengrasses were offering.

"I do, but it's iron clad, no loop holes, I checked myself." Blaise assured him with more confidence than he should probably have.

"You better hope so." Draco shot his friend a pointed look and grabbed a scotch from a passing waiter.

"And you better hope your fiancée doesn't learn that your screwing around again." Blaise snapped, clearly at the end of his patience.

"I haven't signed anything yet." Draco reminded him, as if that made it better. Blaise wasn't the only one in denial. If Astoria found out he and Hermione were doing whatever they were doing she wouldn't be happy and she would make his life incredibly painful.

"You need that contract too, fidelity clause or not, your father's scandal would make your life hell if you had to start over with a less traditional family." Blaise stated the obvious.

"I know." Draco snapped, needing more scotch for this conversation.

"The servants are gossiping about that omega that makes your room smell like literal candy, it won't be long before she hears about it." Blaise announced, providing some new information finally. The cherry scent had been such a constant lately he had almost stopped noticing.

"It's not your problem, fuck off." Draco finally barked, not appreciating the reminder.

"Fine, but don't say I didn't warn you." His friend shrugged, dropping the matter.

"I won't, now can't we do something pleasant for once?"

"Well, Longbottom is attempting to court Lady Brown." Blaise suggested.

"Too easy." Draco shrugged. They had made Lord Longbottom's life hell in their youth, but it had lost its appeal recently.

"Lady Parkinson is trying to convince that visiting duke that her virtue is intact." Draco snorted.

"Too cruel, didn't you take her virtue?" Draco asked.

"I thought you did?" Blaise rounded on his friend.

"Huh, guess we'll never know." Draco shrugged. Pansy had been his first, an impulsive decision for the both of them. It didn't really matter to him who had her first. He shared fine when no would know about it.

"Old Flitwick is trying to remarry again." The other lord offered.

"Too easy. God Blaise, when did we get so old?" Draco huffed, feeling inexplicably tired.

"Speak for yourself. You'll have to excuse me, I have a trade deal to negotiate with that Indian Merchant, my mother needs a new silk supplier." Blaise nodded as he left, making his way across the room. Draco's weariness didn't leave.
As much as he enjoyed the power plays, there always came a moment when the music was too loud, the colors were too bright and trying so hard got too exhausting. He knew when to walk away.

**Hermione**

Waking up in a stable loft wasn't exactly new, it was almost as common as waking up in her own room when she was little, but her and Harry's sleepovers had cut off sharply when they presented. The last time she had woken up surrounded in so many alpha hormones Draco Malfoy had been beside her. That morning, taking a deep breath as she sat up on the couch, she realized the difference. Even though she was still being hit with alpha hormones, even though she still felt comforted and secure, she wasn't excited by it, Harry's scent didn't make her feel alive. When they were younger she could admit to a bit of a crush on him, but now… yeah, Harry was just a brother. It was only after she blinked a few more times and rubbed her bleary eyes that she realized that she was alone in the loft.

"Harry?" She called anxiously, gripping the blanket in her lap tightly. Only silence greeted her. The red plaid covers bunched at the bottom of Harry's bed didn't move and no one appeared. She slowly stood, relieved when the stable floor stayed silent below her. It was too early for the stable hands to be at work just yet. That saved her from another embarrassment. As distasteful as she found the prospect of marriage, even she didn't relish the prospect of being accused of being a whore.

She had to get up, as much as she wanted to hide in bed she knew that she had to drag herself out of bed. Because that was her place, that was her reality. It was waking up at horrifyingly early hours of the morning, running around all day being tormented and mocked and broken down by nobles, and then crawling back into bed at a horribly late hour. It sucked and she got to live it.

She heard heavy feet clattering up the stairs, as well as a thick wave of an apple breeze. She flopped back onto the bed.

"I told Astoria you were sick and you were staying in bed today." Harry announced, flopping down beside her. She sighed. "She reacted like she already knew something had happened last night, told me that you should take as much time as you needed and you should 'owl her if you require anything at all.'"

"You shouldn't have done that." She had work today goddamn it. Astoria would need to decompress from the party, they had to plan for her luncheon tomorrow. She was supposed to chaperone Daphne and Blaise's brunch.

"Do you want me to take it back?" Harry asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"No." She said honestly. She was exhausted.

"Do you want to talk about it?" He offered, a little hesitantly. Harry wasn't good at words.

"No." She said; there was no use dwelling on things that she couldn't change.

"Do you want me to leave you alone?" He suggested. She knew herself well enough to know that she couldn't afford to dwell.

"No." She shook her head.

"Okay." He said quietly. She rested her head on his shoulder.

"Can I kill him?" He asked, she stiffened, knowing he wasn't bluffing.
"I thought we weren't talking about it."

"Not him, whatever alpha you've been with lately." Which really didn't clarify anything.

"Excuse me?" She asked.

"You're less tense and you nose is currently burrowing into my sheets like an addict." He accused. She stiffened, not realizing she was clinging to the alpha pheromones until he said something.

"I'm not addicted." She huffed. She was in control. She knew she was.

"No you're just comfortable… Is he treating you right?" Harry asked tensely.

"It's not like that. He's just helping me be less… affected I guess." Their original arrangement doesn't seem to cover the situation anymore.

"I could've helped you!" Harry pointed out indignantly.

"You've never really affected me like that, even when you first presented." She shrugged, squirming a little at the thought of Harry's hands on her in that way. Even the false, simulated way it was with Draco in the beginning.

"Really? Huh." Harry muttered contemplatively.

"Yeah you were the only one worried." It was true. He panicked when he presented.

"But you've reacted to my commands before?" He pointed out, which was true but kind of beside the point. She had never dropped into O Space with him.

"Yeah, this isn't like that. " She almost felt like she should be laughing, though she couldn't imagine making that sound right now.

"Do I know him?" He asked nervously.

"You've definitely met, but I don't think you've really interacted significantly." She answered carefully. There was no way Harry could ever find out that she was spending so much time with Draco Malfoy.

"Hmmmm, so do I need to kill him?" Harry asked again.

"Not at the moment and I can take care of myself." He brushed his fingers over the chafe marks on her wrist pointedly.

"Has it started to wear off yet?" He murmured quietly. He pitied her; she knew.

"It's better, I managed to transfigure a tea cup the other day." She offered, not even believing her own hope.

"That's good." He answered neutral. It wasn't it was pathetic.

"It's frustrating," She snapped. Twelve year olds could transfigure tea cups.

"You're still a great witch Mione, it's obvious, lots of people are effectively squibs when they get a new cuff." Harry reminded her.

"Yeah it's really comforting, everything that I could be if I wasn't property." She sighed, tears
stinging the corners of her eyes.

"I'm sorry." He muttered. There was a few moments of peaceful silence before thunderous steps echoed up the stairs to Harry's loft.

"Oh, Hermione! Ron told me you were sick." Ginny burst in a blur of red hair and gray fabric before perching on the bed at Hermione's side.

"Ron seems to talk a lot about me." Hermione grumbled.

"Huh?" Ginny asked, peering down at the older girl.

"Nothing." Hermione said hurriedly. Ginny froze, and then peered at the boy on Hermione's other side.

"Harry." Ginny said curtly.

"Hey, Ginny. How are you? I feel like we haven't spoken in ages." Harry gushed, happiness in his face.

"Fine." Ginny muttered, lying down quickly and tucking herself into Hermione's side. When Ginny was little, she was small for most girls her age and when she and Hermione, as the two servant girls closest in age, would play, Ginny would tire faster and frequently end up asleep on Hermione's shoulder or with her head in her lap.

The room lapsed into a tense awkward silence as Ginny and Harry both stiffened in each other's presence. She knew it couldn't be easy for Ginny to be this close to an alpha this soon after presenting. It made her support all the more significant, if not a little ridiculous.

"I have my own room guys." She reminded them, though the last thing she wanted to do was wander the hallways by herself; she couldn't stay here and the both of them couldn't skip work.

"Not another word, you know my mom thinks of you as a daughter, she told me to come here and take care of you." Ginny announced. Harry shrugged.

"You can stay here as long as you like, I have some work to do but we both know your room is more comfortable than mine." Harry reminded her with a knowing loo before getting out of the bed and trudging down the stairs.

"So, spending nights with Harry now?" Ginny asked, shooting Hermione a mischievous look.

"He slept on the ground. He's like a brother Gin, you know that." Hermione reminded the younger girl who looked a little relieved.

"Speaking of, I have to tell you something." Ginny announced, sitting up because apparently it was serious enough that it required Ginny to be fully awake. Hermione was nervous.

"I wasn't planning on telling anyone but it's sort of becoming a thing now." Ginny hedged nervously. Hermione set up suddenly able to focus.

"Spit it out." She ordered; Ginny's ears were pink.

"I hooked up with Blaise Zabini."
"Gin, that's not, that's not good." Hermione sounded like an idiot, and she felt like one. But clearly Ginny was too if she thought hooking up with Blaise Zabini was something to do just casually, as if it was a good idea.

"Actually it was pretty good." Ginny shrugged even though her ears were still red.

"Gin!" Hermione rebuked, Ginny's ears turned redder as she got a little more bashful.

"It was! At least until Malfoy showed up, they really are pigs when they're together." Ginny rolled her eyes.

"Yes, I've heard that." She hadn't exactly forgotten the volume of girls Draco plowed through, literally, in the first few days at the manor.

"It was just something fun, I wanted to explore my omega side and he seemed more than willing." Ginny shrugged, though she couldn't fully meet Hermione's eyes.

"Okay, no judgement." Hermione lied, holding up her hands in truce.

"You're judging." Ginny accused.

"A little bit yeah." Hermione admitted honestly.

"My virtue stayed intact Mione, nothing to worry about." Ginny offered. Which, that wasn't even something that Hermione had started worrying about.

"If it got out you'd be untouchable. Your reputation would be in doubt." Hermione reminded the other girl. Ginny was titled, though it wasn't a large title, and her parents had land, but they didn't have money for a dowry. Ginny's only chance at marriage was wooing a lord who was rich enough that he wouldn't care, and she couldn't do that without her virtue.

"Well it's not going to get out so we're fine." Ginny shrugged.

"If everything's fine, then why are we having this conversation?" The other girl wouldn't have brought it up if she wasn't worried.

"He just doesn't notice me. He doesn't even look at me I'm a person, just a prop." Ginny admitted, she tried to shrug her shoulders but she was so tense that they stopped up close to her ears.

"Oh Gin, did you, do you have feelings for him?" Hermione implored, resting her hand on Ginny's. It wasn't easy, caring for a man who didn't feel the same way.

"No, at least I didn't think I did. I just… why do they get to do this to us? Mione, why do men get to run around treating girls like food scraps while we just have to take it? Why is being female such a terrible thing?" Her eyes watered, and she shook her head in disgust. The misfortune of their births wasn't a secret and their presentations didn't help much.

"I don't know. I don't get it either Gin." Hermione sighed, knowing that there weren't good answers, no matter how much she wanted to give them.
Draco stumbled into breakfast the next morning. His mother had already eaten and was sitting with her hands folded at the right of the table when he entered. She flicked her eyes to him briefly, just enough to send her disdain for his tardiness before she returned to the conversation with her sister. One would think that Bellatrix would look less insane first thing in the morning, that one would be wrong. Bellatrix played with her wand with one hand while eating from the tip of her knife with the other. His mother looked like she was going to have an aneurism with every bite her sister took, but she wouldn't dare say something about the poor manners.

"Draco! Come sit beside me, I was just discussing with your mother how much I enjoyed that welcome party you threw me last night." The woman gestured with her wand. It seemed very likely to him that there was a large chance she was going to set something on fire with that.

"All the best for my lovely aunt." Draco answered with a smile taking the seat next to her.

"I'm surprised to see you up so early, I'd expect you to be recovering this morning." She mused, sipping from a glass that was probably champagne. Merlin, she was nuts.

"Haven't you heard? I'm a reformed man now, pending engagement and all." Draco joked, his mother cleared her throat, leaving the table quietly. Of course she'd leave him alone with this psycho.

"People like us don't reform Draco. We merely do our dastardly acts as a team now." His aunt teased conspiratorially.

"Is that how it is?" He asked. His impression was that the Bellatrix he knew was tamed in comparison to her youth, as terrifying as that thought was.

"Of course, just last night Rodolphus and I had quite a lot of fun together." She laughed, biting into the sausage on the tip of her knife.

"About that, I'm sorry our staff wasn't up to your standards." he started carefully, everything with Bellatrix was about testing the waters and being ready to jump out at the first sign of a shark.

"Yes those omegas really need to learn their place." Bellatrix informed him, he bit the inside of his cheek to keep from screaming.

"May I ask what she looked like, so I can resolve this issue?" He lied through his teeth.

"Bushy brown hair, slave band, sickly." Bellatrix mused. "She should have a lovely red welt across her face this morning." Draco felt a muscle in his jaw twitch. Fuck. He never would've thought that she had actually hurt…

"I suspected as much. I understand your feeling Bellatrix, but in the future I'd ask that you report any such issue to me before partaking in any disciplinary action." He answered calmly, trying to sound stern but courteous. The last thing anyone needed was a pissed off Bellatrix.

"Why?" She laughed incredulously.

"This particular omega is under my protection." He answered a little more sternly. Hermione would be so livid with him right now, but he didn't give a shit. No matter what she said about handling herself; they had... something. He wouldn't let his aunt get away with this anymore.
"How on earth was I supposed to know the bitch meant anything, she's just a slave Draco." Bellatrix chuckled, and her expression was painfully patronizing.

"All the same." His stomach twisted. The night before he hadn't realized how targeted their interaction was. He had to check on her.

"You should mark her if you're going to be so protective." Bellatrix suggested with a twisted smirk. She wasn't wrong. He liked the idea of marking Hermione. There was a spell that Alpha Omega pairs often used; it inked the alphas seal onto a spot on the omegas body, most often then neck or collar bone, but it was serious, indicative of an engagement or long term affair. Others used it as an ownership brand. He wasn't allowed to want that from Hermione. Not that she would ever want it after this.

"Thank you for your advice; I will take it under consideration." He muttered, pushing aside his untouched plate and leaving the room. He needed to find her.

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Draco was exhausted. He had sent his most trusted servants to try and find Granger, but she was missing. She hadn't reported to work that day, some stable boy had told Astoria that she was sick. He had a feeling it was much worse than that. He was anxiously pacing in the garden, his favorite place, where he calmed down, but it wasn't helping. He was going insane. He stormed into the garden, ignore the paths, and succeed in catching his foot and face planting into the grass. His day was just great.

…

Hermione

She had left Harry's shortly after Ginny had fallen asleep after lunch, totally unable to stay there any longer. It was suffocating. She just needed to feel normal again, to find normal again.

And that started with going back to work. She had already missed the luncheon with Narcissa, but that could be remedied with a good debrief. Astoria was in tears when Hermione opened the door to her room. Makeup smeared down her face in heavy, dark tracks. Hermione stopped dead in the doorway.

"Astoria, what's wrong?" She asked, flying to the other girls side. Astoria was in bed, tightly bundled in her thick blankets.

"Draco is having an affair." She whimpered, burying her face in the blankets.

"What?" Hermione could barely breath as her heart rate thundered in her ears. She sat down beside the other girl nervously.

"There's someone else, a servant told me at the ball." Astoria explained.

"Tori, your engagements not official just yet." Hermione reminded her. Technically no one had done anything wrong. A half second kiss didn't count for anything and if there was someone else, well that was his business.

"It might as well be! That's why I asked mother to insert the fidelity clause." Astoria snapped.

"The what?" Hermione demanded. This was news; this was definitely news.
"It's actually very progressive you'd be proud, he faces the same penalty that I would if he commits adultery." A brief flash of happiness flickered in Astoria's eyes.

"What? That's crazy!" Hermione blurted.

"Mione what's wrong with you? Aren't you always telling me to stand up for myself?" Astoria demanded, sitting up.

"Yes, yes of course." She amended. Bad Hermione, she should totally be supportive of this, but… "But why would they agree to that? It's unheard of for lords to not take mistresses."

"We raised the dowry, plus the Malfoy's really want to marry into the sacred twenty eight and I'm the last available maiden." Astoria shrugged.

"Then there's nothing to worry about, whatever's going on, if there is something going on, it'll be over soon." Hermione assured her.

"It's humiliating; I better not find out who she is, I swear Mione, I could destroy her." Astoria hissed her hands clenching into fists. That was new, slightly insane, and new.

"That's not, that's not like you Tori." Hermione murmured.

"I've always been in my sister's shadow, I've always been the dumb one, I'm sick of it. I'm sick of feeling so dumb all the time. I won't be made to look foolish." She resolved, slipping out of bed and heading to her vanity. "I am smart you know that right? Not smart the way you and Daphne are but I'm smart. People think I'm smart." Astoria declared, inspecting her face in the mirror. She rubbed away an imaginary speck of dirt and examined her features at different angles.

"Of course you're smart, everyone with eyes can see that, but you're a lot of other things too. You're mad right now, but you're still a good person." Hermione implored, coming to stand beside the other girl. Astoria didn't take her eyes away from her reflection.

"Maybe I don't want to be good anymore." She mused, shaking her head. Hermione had no idea what to say, but it was for the better, because Astoria continued. "I'd like to be alone. I'll send someone if I need you." Hermione nodded, the dismissal stinging a little as she slipped out of the room, grabbing a book on the way.

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The breeze was cool as the sun slipped below the tree line, and Hermione was acutely aware of the world around her as she read. She felt the damp grass moistening the fabric of her dress, she smelled the hints of gardenia and jasmine in the air. She heard tinkling laughter from one of the balconies in the distance. It was beautiful and soft and almost like something out of a poem. It was meant for someone dainty and elegant. It was so utterly at odds with how she felt. She didn't want to do anything, she just wanted to sleep and stay asleep and not move and stop feeling so unsafe all of the time. That was the real problem, yes Bellatrix took Hermione's pride, she took her dignity, but more importantly, she took her security, her sense of safety, her ability to walk down a hallway and feel okay about her life. She just wanted to go home, wherever that may be. She just felt wrong, at her core, it felt wrong. Soft rustles of leaves alerted her to the newcomer's arrival, and when she glanced up she was unsurprised to see him. His aristocratic features were carefully arranged to be neutral, but the look in his eyes made it clear long before he spoke. She sighed, adjusting the book in her lap as she pulled up her knees into her chest. He sat down beside her, his body warmth a gentle presence beside her. She didn't want gentle. She didn't want anything.
"I'm sorry." He told her, his voice just above a whisper.

"We'll be seen. You should leave." She snapped. He didn't shift even an inch away.

"It's too late, no self-respecting noble sweats outside when they can do otherwise." He argued. She huffed in annoyance, she didn't want to talk about it. "I'm so sorry." He murmured.

"You didn't do anything." She snapped. Her whole body felt too big, too long, too present. She wanted to curl into a ball and disappear.

"Not this time." He answered with more guilt than she was willing to deal with it.

"We were children Draco." She sighed. It all seemed so ridiculous. He was just a boy. A stupid boy. He didn't hurt her. He humiliated her but she knew that it could've been much worse.

"I was a monster." He whispered. That was the last straw.

"It doesn't matter, okay!" She shouted, bounding to her feet in anger.

"What do you mean of course it matters! It matters that it was my aunt and it matters that my uncle let it happen and it matters that it happened on my watch, in my house and I couldn't keep you safe!" He answered, rising immediately and stepping into her space.

"It's not your job to keep me safe! It's not anyone's job! I'm a slave Draco! I'm no more important than a vase or a useful tool. I'm dispensable, your job is to use me and cast me aside when you get bored." She hissed, venting the toxic frustration that was shooting through her veins.

"I wouldn't do that." He snapped in his own defense.

"Yes you would," She rolled her eyes, sure of it, "because you're a noble and an alpha and everything has been yours to destroy at will since you were in nappies."

"I'm not the person you're describing." He argued, but she didn't believe it. She couldn't. It would hurt too much.

"Really, prove it, Draco!" She snapped, turning away from him. His snatched her arm, pulling him back to her.

"The hands cupping her face were unexpected, as was the overwhelming emotions swirling in Draco's silver eyes. He held her with more care than she had ever experienced from anyone else. She breathed in sharply, just before his mouth lowered to hers. It was desperate and clashing and angry and loaded with tension and everything that a first kiss shouldn't be. She kissed him back without control, without restraint, their lips moving in tandem in an addicting push pull. Every sense cheered, alight with sensation. He smelled like heaven and his strong hands moved to her hips, holding her firmly against his body. She was lost the moment it began, completely subject to him. Warmth flooded into her, and the cool breeze didn't seem to touch her skin anymore. She trembled, overwhelmed as every fiber of her being seemed to sing with joy. When they finally broke apart, gasping for breath, it felt like she had run a mile. Her whole being hummed with joy, it was as if her very soul was trilling with glee. Then her mind returned.

"This can never happen again." She hissed, batting his hands away when he reached for, until one hand settled on her wrist, pulling her back to him.

"No one will ever know." He promised, lifting her chin with care. She looked at his face and she wanted it, she wanted it so badly. She could imagine it, the bliss she'd feel, but it felt so wrong, like
something she wasn't entitled to, like something she didn't deserve. It wasn't hers. "Do you want this? Do you want me?" He asked, tenderness in his eyes. She felt everything from the last twenty four hours hit her like a tank. She blinked away the tears stinging in her eyes and froze. The moment stretched, too long, too far, and then it snapped. He shook his head.

"Well then, I guess that's an answer in itself." He shook his head, releasing her and turning away to leave.

"Wait!" He paused, his whole form taut as he turned to face her, his face a mask. "Oh, fuck it," She breathed, mostly to her self and then she bounded forward, colliding into him. Her caught her, his hands on her hips as he lifted her into the air, spinning the pair as they both laughed. He put her down slowly, a genuine smile lighting up his face as her watched her expression.

"I want you. I want to give this a try." She answered, and her stomach swooped with nerves, no matter how certain she felt, she knew it was all going to hell from here.
"Stay with me." He pleaded. She laughed, and it felt surreal as he pulled her down beside him. There was a brief moment when she felt that tense bubble of space between them, but then he wrapped an arm around her, pulling her closer.

"This is going to be a shit show, you know that right?" She asked him. He chuckled and kissed the top of her head.

"Of course."

Hermione woke up with a smile on her face. It was ridiculous. She was ridiculous, but she couldn't help it. There were butterflies in her stomach and her body hummed with energy. The other slaves regarded her with the same blank eyed stare as always but she was grinning. The night before had ended with slow kisses in the darkness outside her room as he had walked her back. It had all been surreal and sweet and perfect. She was dizzy with it.

She donned a simple dress from her trunk, and even the rough fabric felt better on her skin than usual. She made her way to Astoria's room before dawn, stubbornly ignoring the chill arching down the back of her neck. She wasn't going to worry about things that she couldn't change and that included Bellatrix.

Her knock was greeted with a sleepy order from inside. She pushed open the door to the sight of a very tired Astoria spread eagle on her bed with her face buried in the pillows.

"Morning…" Hermione chuckled. Astoria groaned, the sound muffled by the mounds of fabric she was buried in.

"I don't know what's wrong with me." Astoria huffed without lifting her face.

"Nothing is wrong with you." Hermione assured her, removing a few gowns and draping them over a chair for Astoria's perusal.

"I must have seemed crazy last night." Astoria announced sitting up slowly as she buried her head in her hands. "I was just so jealous." Hermione's blood ran cooler as she turned away, careful to hide her face.

"That's normal." She reminded the other girl. There were plenty of ladies who would've banished any woman who had spoken to Draco in the last three months upon hearing such a rumor. No one liked competition.

"Is it so wrong that I want someone to love me?" Astoria sighed, slipping out of bed and heading to her pile of dresses.

"No, of course not." Hermione assured her, quickly whipping together the potion Astoria needed for her hair.

"You have to help me Mione, help keep him focused." Astoria announced, lifting a cobalt blue gown in the process.
"Of course." Hermione promised. This was going to suck really really hard. She hurried to the other girl's side, putting the gown aside as she tightened her corset and adjusted her stockings. Astoria moved pliantly, allowing the other girl to arrange her limbs as she pulled the gown down over her head. There was a mess of laces in the back that Hermione had to separate individually before finally tightening them properly. Astoria's waist looked microscopic, and the deep v neckline accented her décolletage to a point of prominence. "Are you sure about this one Astoria? Aren't you just having tea?"

"Yes and that has gone so well in the past, hasn't it?" Astoria rolled her eyes and chuckled caustically. "Maybe if he's focused on my breasts he won't be listening when I inevitably put my foot in my mouth."

"I'm sure you'll do fine."

"It's just that mother and Narcissa make me so nervous. Daphne has it so easy with you chaperoning her dates." Hermione couldn't help but laugh a little. Poor Daphne, there was nothing to even chaperone; they didn't speak. "That's it!" Astoria squealed. Hermione jumped, unsure what was going on. Astoria rushed to her makeup vanity, applying lip rouge with renewed vigor. "You have to be my new chaperone. It will all be so much more comfortable with just you, me and Draco, don't you think?"

"So comfortable." Hermione answered, biting the inside of her cheek to avoid bursting into laughter or tears. Astoria beamed.

Draco

Draco was pissed. He considered himself to be a very levelheaded, flexible guy. Okay, he didn't actually mean that, but that's what made this so much worse. It's not like Hermione was under any delusion that he would take this well. Astoria had materialized outside to meet him for tea, and trailing behind her like a good little chaperone was Hermione, his well, his something that should never be in the same room as his soon to be fiancée. It was sufficient to say that he lost his poker face in that moment.

"Darling what's wrong?" Astoria simpered, resting her gloved hand on his arm.

"I'm just astounded by your beauty of course. As always, you take my breath away." Draco lied deftly, tucking away his surprise quickly. He carefully avoided looking at Granger as she sat down, a little away from their table. Draco pulled out Astoria's seat and she lowered herself gracefully onto the metal.

He hated this table, the moment he could he was melting this table with a violent incendio and enjoying every moment of it.

Hermione took out a book, a fucking book, and started reading, relaxed as anything, as if there was nothing weird or uncomfortable going on right now, at all.

"How are you?" Astoria asked sipping her tea. The moment she even looked like she might sneeze he was slapping it out of her hand.

"Fine." He answered curtly, shoving a biscuit into his mouth. Hermione's eyes peered up at him over the pages over what must be a truly fascinating volume and narrowed pointedly. "Better now that I have such lovely company." Why she really got him whipped quickly, didn't she? Astoria leaned...
forward, and wow that was a lot of boobs. Way more boobs than he thought she had yesterday, but who's to complain. He had probably been staring for too long when Hermione sneezed violently. Astoria flinched, sitting up and when he snuck a peek at Hermione she was smirking behind that book. Well then.

"I hate to be so direct Draco but I must ask, I know so little about your family's business, you must understand my curiosity in the face of all this splendor." She gestured airily to her surroundings. He smiled tightly.

"I would never want to bore you with such dull matters my dear." He answered tightly. The Malfoy business was intentionally discrete. He frankly didn't know enough about it. His father managed most of their affairs. He only knew enough to study heavily redacted reports and cut very vague costs.

"I highly doubt anything about you is boring." She murmured, she peered at him from beneath her thick lashes, showing very dramatic blue eyes. He swallowed tightly.

"It's just simple business. My family owns a variety of land holdings that we rent to peasants who farm the lands and pay us a portion of their harvest. That and some very dull investments." He explained, letting his boredom with her drip into his tone. Astoria nodded simply.

"I would like to help you in any way I can once we're wed Draco, I hope you understand that." She smiled, sipping from her cup again.

"Of course." He answered, faking a smile. He could feel the tension radiating off of Hermione's body, and the slight hint of anxiety, punctuated by the shift in her scent, making her normal black cherry smell sharp and stinging, rather than it's normal sweet aroma.

Every instinct in his body screamed for him to reach out to her, to comfort her in some way. But he couldn't do that. Astoria continued talking and he responded with the appropriate agreement and interest. When she shivered he stood up and draped his jacket around her shoulders even though it was perfectly warm out and she would've been fine if her arms hadn't been entirely exposed by her top. When their tea was cold and their plates were empty he walked her back to her room all gentleman like as Hermione trailed behind them. The moment Astoria's door clicked shut, he rounded on the omega.

"A little head's up would be nice next time!" He hissed. Hermione looked nervously at the closed door before grabbing his wrist and dragging him down the hallway. She glanced around again before shoving him into an unused room and pulling the door shut behind her.

"What was I supposed to do? She begged me to chaperone!" Hermione huffed, crossing her arms across her chest. She was wearing a practical, pink garment.

"Why on earth would she do that?" He asked in disbelief, the chaperone was certainly not what was wrong with his and Astoria's courtship. "She thought it would be more comfortable." Hermione laughed, though it was clear she didn't find it very funny.

"That's rich." He groaned, leaning against the back of a dusty couch in the long abandoned sitting room.

"Very." Hermione sighed in agreement, resting against the door behind her.

"We're just going to have deal with this, aren't we?" He realized, studying her carefully. He thought about the joy he had felt last night, the rush of pure happiness, and he discovered he would sit
through many many more of those awkward dates as long as that was the pay off at the end.

"I guess so." Hermione sighed, rubbing her eyes.

"I don't like it." He reminded her.

"Trust me, it's not a walk in the park for me either." She snapped.

"I don't just mean that," He waved vaguely towards the garden. "I mean all of it. I don't want Astoria. I don't want to be engaged to her. I don't want to court her, any of it. I just want you." Hermione blushed, the color racing up her cheeks. He wondered how low that blush went.

"Why Draco Malfoy, you're just a regular sap, aren't you?" She teased, walking towards him with a confidence he could appreciate.

"Don't tell anyone, it would ruin my reputation." He quipped, wrapping his arms around her waist as she got close. She chuckled, a breathy little noise.

"Far be it from me to destroy the dastardly reputation of the great Draco Malfoy. Just picture the number of birds who'd be devastated to lose their resident bad boy." She mocked, his hold tightened on her a little involuntarily and he turned serious.

"There aren't any birds, just you." She looked away nervously.

"Of course there are, everyone in the castle has been witness to at least one illicit rendezvous. I myself saw at least three the first week you arrived." She played it off airily, but he could tell that the memory made her uncomfortable.

"That's what this is about." He announced, ignore the small twinge of distaste at the thought of Hermione watching him with one of the birds he had shagged his first week here. That had just been… stress relief, and nothing like what he'd do to Hermione if given the chance. Those had been quick fucks. He had every intention of making love to Hermione Granger, and taking his time.

"What?" She asked, crossing her arms again, but not stepping out of his embrace.

"You're jealous." He announced, smiling a little at the thought.

"I'm not jealous." She huffed, looking put out. Though he could tell she wasn't really angry with him.

"You are, and if it will help, you have my word, from this point forward, there will be no other birds. There haven't been any for a while anyways." He promised. She smiled. "I do have one condition though."

"And what would that be?" She asked, pretending to be affronted.

"There will be no other blokes." He commanded, she quirked an eyebrow, the tight line of her mouth expressing her distaste for the order. "Please?" He added reluctantly.

"Of course." She responded simply, her smile letting him know there was no possibility of another answer. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I do have work to do today." She teased as she moved to the door.

"I work too you know." He argued. She rolled her eyes.

"Working on your physique does not count." She mocked.
"You've never had complaints before." He teased. She grinned.

"Never had the opportunity to voice them." She answered cheekily, laughing as she slipped out the door.

He rolled his eyes, and left heading for his own room. And if he did a few extra sit ups with his daily workout that was no one's business but his own.

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Hermione

She knocked on Draco's door with a strange mixture of excitement and nerves. They had planned this session over a week ago, and she had hopes that the lesson plan had changed since then. She his door was yanked open and he pulled her inside she had a feeling that her hopes were about to be met. He kicked the door shut and kissed her immediately, there was a heat and a frustration in his movements that hadn't been their earlier. His tongue traced the seam of her lips, inviting her to open them. She did, her lips parting easily as she tentatively met his tongue with her own. He tasted heavenly, and smelled even better, the amber in his scent stronger than usual. His hands wrapped themselves in her hair, his fingers dug into the back of her neck along the way, relaxing knots. She started to feel hazy for a moment, but then his hands settled in her hair, the tendrils wrapped around his fingers as he pulled. She moaned. The sound was dirty and sudden in the quiet room. Draco backed her against the wall and she leaned into him. His body pressed against hers was invigorating and erotic and absolutely perfect. No complaints. Draco groaned, dropping his head to her neck.

"I had such a shitty meeting," He admitted, pressing a kiss to her collarbone.

"What happened?" She asked, carding her fingers through his hair. She could do this, she could be comforting. She's a great confidant.

"My father." He answered, as if that summarized everything that could go wrong in a day, which, honestly it probably could.

"Anything I could do?" She asked, enjoying the way the blond locks felt running between her fingers.

"No. I'm just warning you that I might not be in the best mood tonight." He responded, kissing her shoulder apologetically before straightening.

"What do you usually do?" She asked. He smirked. "Other than that." She amended, rolling her eyes. One track mind, that boy.

"I have a retreat or two." He shrugged, though a tiny bit of color perched at the top of his cheekbones.

"Show me?" She asked quietly, it was still afternoon, there was plenty of sun. Just the right time for a stroll.

"Sure." He smiled, offering his hand, which she took, as he nudge open the back door to his suite.

She laughed as he led her outside, winding through paths and then slipping through tiny gaps in bushes as they walked farther and farther away from the manor. It was a warm day, with the perfect breeze. The kind of day that made you happy to be alive for it. The sun bathed her face, which so rarely got to just relax outside, and for the first time in a long time, she felt human. She felt in charge of the moment, utterly in control even as she followed Draco through innumerable tight turns for
what must've been twenty minutes. She caught brief glances of perfectly sculpted hedges and gorgeous arrays of flowers and fountains. Draco led her farther away, to a denser, less well kept area that must've been right on the edge of the woods, near the gate. Eventually, they stopped, and Hermione finally had a moment to fully appreciate her surroundings from the tiny gap in the hedge.

"We're here. My absolute favorite spot in the manor." He announced, gesturing around the small area with pride. A massive oak stretched up into the skyline, just on the edge of a picturesque pond with small fish swimming about. The grass was lush, with tiny patches of wildflowers. Lined with hedges, it seemed as if the small area had just been forgotten about, left to grow naturally. She understood suddenly why Draco was so excited when he talked about it. The tiny little private garden where a young Draco could slip away, hiding from cold parents and heavy expectations.

"It's beautiful." She told him, looking up at him earnestly, trying to tell him that she understood, even if he wouldn't say the words himself. He just nodded simply before settling down in a small patch of sun. She hesitated for a moment before he gestured for her to join him. She planted herself across from him, content to simply back in the sun and talk about nothing of importance for an afternoon. Draco launched into a story about the time he had been so determined to catch a frog that he had leapt into the tiny pond, sinking face first into the muck underneath. They laughed for a moment before falling into quiet again.

She smiled at him. He smiled back. The grass was tickling her legs and she could feel the sun warming her skin but that all faded into the periphery. Draco presented himself to the world as unflappable and reserved but when he got excited he waved his hands as he spoke, gesturing wildly as if to communicate everything or maybe nothing at all. She loved watching him speak, even if sometimes she was too tired to process his words fully and get as excited, she loved seeing him like this. When he was happy and hopeful and looked at her as if the stars shined out of her eyes, nothing else mattered.

As the sun started to sink below the tree line, Hermione felt herself go colder. She hid it briefly, snuggling into Draco's side as the leaned against the huge oak, but eventually she couldn't disguise her shivering. Draco chuckled, pressing a kiss to her forehead as he stood up.

"Let's go." He murmured quietly, she followed him back, the walk seemed shorter this time as they tried to slip through quietly, hearing snatches of other conversations in the garden. It was a popular spot for lovers on warm summer nights. They slipped back into his room undetected and she desperately wanted to stay longer but she had a meeting with Minerva in the morning, so they parted with a quick kiss and her slipping out. It was too early to risk being seen together in the hallways. They had to be careful, no matter how reckless she wanted to be. For the first time in her life Hermione was willing to take some stupid risks, she just had to hope they'd pay off.
Hermione

Hermione spent the next morning curled up in an armchair in the library. Blaise was few chairs away and Daphne was chattering with the librarian. She was an excellent chaperone. She was reading history, specifically a recent publication about the most recent rebellion which occurred just after she was born. A group of wizards, still unnamed to this day, had destroyed many families, accusing them of being disloyal to the crown. Why Minerva wanted her up to date on this subject, she didn't know. She was chilly in the drafty room and she really wished that these two would pick to meet anywhere else.

She wasn't sure what Blaise was reading, but Daphne had not moved from the law section. She was about as subtle as a stupify and at this point, everyone in the castle knew that Daphne was trying to escape her contract. Blaise didn't seem very concerned. She wondered idly if Zabini was trying to find his own way out. She found her eyes drifting away from the paper more and more often as she took in the lord. What did Ginny see in him?

He was pompous, utterly ignoring Daphne and Hermione, and he had a reputation for going through girls faster than Draco. Not that Draco was doing very much of that anymore, she thought with a smile. She planned on seeing the alpha later that afternoon, though she wasn't sure when that would happen. A stomach bug had hit the kitchen, so after this she was going to have to spend her time learning how to waitress to fill the gaps. Fun, that's exactly how she wanted to spend her time. When the required two hours had passed, Blaise stood stiffly and left with a brief bow towards Daphne.

Hermione glanced towards the other girl, but Daphne waved her off.

"I'm not finished quite yet, I'll head back later." The older girl announced, Hermione shrugged before heading off to the kitchen. She just caught the briefest moment of excitement from the librarian.

"Yes, I suppose it could be interpreted that way!" He announced happily as they both returned to their scrolls.

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Draco

Severus Snape was not an easy man to please. In fact, many would say that he was impossible to please. Draco saw him twice a week, and had seen him every day for the first fifteen years of his life. Draco would estimate that he had pleased Snape approximately two times. And that was the generous estimate.

"The Sacred Twenty Eight?" Severus asked, his voice low and slow as he quizzed his godson. Severus had the vocal quality of a snake with sand paper scales. Most of his words were hissed, each sound deliberately control with iron hardness.

"Would you like the definition or the Families?" Draco asked, idly crossing his legs and leaning back in his chair. Severus insisted in meeting in the same room Draco studied in when he was a child. It was a power play, but one Draco was willing to acquiesce to. Severus was brilliant and it was always better to surround yourself with brilliant people rather than subservient ones.

"Families." Severus answered, pacing behind Draco. A heavy oak table separated Draco from the chair Severus was supposed to be sitting in, though Draco never saw him sit there.
"Abbot, Avery, Black, Bulstrode, Carrow, Crouch, Fawley, Flint, Gaunt, Lestrange, Greengrass…"
Draco paused, stuck.

"Idiot." The book whacking into the back of his head was expected but no less painful. "Learn them by our next meeting." Severus ordered.

"Yes, sir." Draco answered, though it was very likely that he would not know them three days from now. It's twenty eight names after all.

"Should you have a daughter, who should she ideally be wed to?" Severus asked routinely.

"An Abbot." Draco answered robotically, his mind wandering briefly to his last encounter with Hannah Abbot. She had thrown a drink at him. All he had done was offer to bring her back to his room. There was no need to be so offended, he would have taken a simple no.

"Why?" Severus continued, snapping Draco out of his thoughts.

"High government position and prestige as well as distance from the Malfoy line. Wouldn't want to turn into Habsburgs." Draco answered, thinking of Phillip's truly terrible jaw.

"And your first born son? Where should you try to find a bride from?" Severus asked. Draco was really getting bored with these questions.

"Maybe an Italian bride, save the poor child some grief." Draco mocked, knowing that was definitely not the correct answer. Severus smacked the back of his head. "Fine, ideally it should be a Bulstrode, though the in-laws are frightening." He faked a shudder.

"Additional children?" Severus asked, his tone bored.

"Foreign families of good standing, preferably French and Italian, to ensure escape routes if the Crown turns unfavorable towards the Malfoy agenda." Draco rattled off.

"Good." His teacher responding, and then paused, probably about to change the subject. Draco took the opportunity.

"Severus, what exactly is the Malfoy agenda?" He asked, keeping his tone curious and carefully uncaring.

"You're insufferable Draco. I've taught you that." Snape snapped.

"I don't mean the cute publicized version. I mean the reality of it, what exactly are we doing in most of our dealings? What is father trying to accomplish with all of these meetings?" Draco snapped, getting to his feet so he can look at his godfather's face. He wasn't a child, he deserved to be informed of the dealings of his family, the dealings he was supposed to take over.

"That is not your concern. Do you doubt your father's integrity?" Snape hissed, glaring at the younger man.

"No, of course not!" Draco flinched. He was not suicidal.

"Then you doubt his competency?" Severus hissed coolly.

"That's not the issue here Severus." Draco scoffed, now his teacher was just being ridiculous.

"It does not matter. Do not ask questions that you aren't ready to hear the answer to." Snape warned tightly. Draco nodded, returning to his seat. Every intelligent noble knew when they reached the time
to stop pushing. Draco nodded.

"Which acts would we like the crown to force through Wizengamot?" Severus tested.

And so it went.

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Hermione

Hermione arrived at the kitchen already flushed. Katie had caught her on her way. Daphne hadn't shown up for her brunch with her mother and she wasn't in the library and the servant was terrified. Hermione suggested she might be in the garden, and Katie rushed off. As a result, Hermione was running late as she burst through the door. There was a significantly fewer number of cooks running about.

"Where were you?" Ron snapped, a tray already in his hands.

"Doing my actual job, this is a favor remember?" Hermione snapped. Ron just grunted in response. She picked up a tray clumsily. She had done this a few times before but she wasn't exactly the steadiest person in the world. Molly appeared out of nowhere and put her hand on Hermione's shoulder.

"Thank you so much for the help dear." Molly murmured, her hand squeezing momentarily as Hermione blushed.

"My pleasure." She assured the other woman, feeling the warmth of motherly love she always felt around the beta.

"The Malfoy's are dining here today as well so make sure to be extra respectful, the both of you. They're stricter about etiquette than our household. " Molly reminded the pair and Hermione nodded. Molly placed plates on each of their trays and Hermione buckled slightly under the weight. Ron smirked. She made a point of straightening as his mother placed the plates on his tray. "Ron start on the right side, Hermione start on the left, begin farthest away from the door and move in, serving the men first."

"Yes, Ma'am." Hermione answered, knowing the instructions were for her specifically. Ron nudged open door first, holding the door for her as Hermione led the way out. She smiled but kept her head down, careful not to make eye contact with any of the family members at the table even as she peaked out of the corner of her eye. Narcissa was chattering angrily about something as Draco leaned back in his chair, boredom clear in his features. That is until he caught her, and she carefully made eye contact. His face didn't move, but his eyes developed a mischievous spark, and oh yeah, she was in trouble. She placed the dish in front of Lord Greengrass first as Ron served Draco. The waiter shot her a dirty look that she pointedly ignored even as color rushed up her cheeks. It was none of his business. She served Lady Greengrass and Astoria next while Ron served Narcissa and Lucius. Hermione had only caught that one brief glimpse of Lucius and nothing about his current appearance changed her original opinion. He sat stiffly in his seat, looking cold and irritated in a way his son never did. Lucius looked like he was above it all, even his own family. As Hermione grabbed the pitcher of wine from the side table to fill the empty glasses, nobles definitely drank a lot before two, the conversation started back off.

"Of course I had to fire her, how dare she use subpar materials to represent my family?" Narcissa snapped, and Hermione cringed at the thought of being whichever poor maid Narcissa had fired.
"Ah yes mother, what a travesty it would be to have anything but refined window cleaning solution." Draco dead panned, his face the perfect mask. Hermione snorted, and as Narcissa's head slowly turned to her, she sneezed violently to cover. Draco helpfully did not acknowledge her. Narcissa slowly turned back to their conversation, but when she dipped her head to look at her plate, Draco winked at the omega. A blush spread across her face as she dropped her head and scurried into the kitchen, ignoring the looks Ron gave her. It wasn't any of his business.

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Hermione successfully made it through the rest of that lunch without any traumatic incidents, thought it was a close thing, and was able to slide away with the bare minimum number of over appreciative comments from Molly, concerned looks from Ginny, and judgmental expressions from Ron.

She scurried down the hallway, keeping her head down as she thought of everything that she had to do that day, the list was extensive. She didn't notice the door behind her open until firm hands grabbed at her waist dragging her inside. She opened her mouth to scream as the door thumped shut behind her but a soft voice shushed her. She had a brief moment to register her surprise before Draco's mouth slotted down over hers. She groaned as his careful hand undid the clip keeping her hair in place. He chuckled, leaned back as he pressed her up against the wall.

"Shh, you're going to get us caught." He teased, mirth in his eyes. She grinned, thrumming with adrenaline at the rush of sneaking around. Hermione wasn't the type to break rules. This was exhilarating. She was going after what she wanted and even though it was a little wrong, a devious part of her could acknowledge that that was part of the fun.

"I'm going to get us caught! You grabbed me!" She hissed, though she couldn't be too mad, not as he pressed kisses to that sensitive spot below he ear. She sighed, stretching to give him better access. He smelled good, even better than usual as she let herself examine the different layers. She always loved the scent of sandalwood, and she always noticed the amber and mint notes but now she could smell lilies and rain and a tiny hint of vanilla and musk. She felt a little hazy and blurry but sooo good.

"Are you mad?" He asked, nipping gently at her ear. The tiny hint of pain made it so much better. That was new. She didn't exactly mind.

"God no." She huffed and as he pulled firmly at the hair on the bottom of her neck. She realized that she had to get with this, or she was going to end up in a puddle on the floor again. She unbuttoned his shirt, he paused for a moment before kissing her again. His lips were soft as hers parted with a moan. His tongue greeted her, and it felt filthy and erotic as he fucked in and out of her mouth, mimicking the dirty act that she suddenly needed more than breathing. She was wet and aching to be touched. Draco pulled back and hovered by her ear as she ran her hands along the ridges of his abs and chest.

"I can smell it, how your scent changes when you get turned on." He whispered, his voice low and dark.

"Bullshit." She hissed. Sure, she and Draco were... whatever they were, but she wasn't gullible, there was no way. Draco couldn't read her that easily. She thought about sex a lot, frequently with him in the room. What could she say she was a teenager with raging hormones and Daphne had a secret collection of smut that she borrowed often. There was no way he knew every time.

"Apricot. You always smell like cherries but when you're horny you also smell like apricot. When you're nervous you smell like lilac and when you're angry you smell like frangipani, but when you're horny you smell like apricot." He told her seriously. He held her eyes for a long time.
"Fuck you." She snapped since she didn't have a good response. He laughed.

"With pleasure," he chuckled, his hands tangling in her hair. She laughed as he went back to kissing neck. She closed her eyes, happily enjoying the moment. That is until the woosh of the door and the harsh slam surprised them both. Draco immediately stepped in between Hermione and the intruder, reaching for his wand. Then they recognized who it was.

"Whoops, I guess this one's taken huh?" The girl joked. She was in a kitchen girl's uniform which wasn't necessarily surprising. Her companion was more annoying. Blaise Zabini was standing in the door warily, watching everyone with crossed arms and an irritated expression. Hermione thought he looked cold.

"Get the fuck out." Draco hissed, stepping farther in front of her. Blaise's eyes never left his friend's face and something dark passed over his features. "And keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you." He threatened.

A humiliated blush rose up Hermione's face as she looked away, letting her hair cover her features. It was easy for Hermione to forget that she was something to be embarrassed of. But this, this made it so obvious. Blaise pulled the girl out with him and shut the door. It was quiet for a beat before Draco laughed.

"He really has shitty timing doesn't he?" Draco joked. Hermione wasn't in a laughing mood. She shrugged before slipping out of the room without a word. Draco didn't come after her as she walked back to Astoria's, blinking back tears. She knew this was the way it had to be if they wanted this to stay a secret, but that didn't mean that it felt good.

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Draco  

Draco left the abandoned suit what felt like hours later. He wasn't sure what had just happened, but he knew it wasn't good. His governess had taught him that it was always better to leave a bird alone when she was angry though he wasn't sure that was the best move this time.

When Draco went back to his rooms feeling sick and tired and irritated he wasn't in the mood for a chat. His best friend wasn't willing to conform to that desire. Blaise was sitting on his sofa, drinking from a glass of what was probably Draco's best scotch. It was barely two for god's sakes.

"Do you remember the name of yours?" Blaise asked ominously without looking away from his drink.

"Excuse me?" Draco snapped. He wasn't in the mood for this.

"They were very on trend when we were growing up, you can't tell me you didn't have one." Blaise continued without hesitation.

"One what?" Draco demanded, losing the little patience he had very quickly.

"A whipping boy." Blaise answered, his tone cool. Draco froze. He could hear the snap of the belt as if it was happening right then. He could hear the whimper, see the terrified eyes, and smell the blood.

"Why?" Draco asked, refusing to display any emotions.

"Mine was named Cadmus, after the royal nephew." Blaise admitted, a deep sadness in his eyes.
"Why are we having this conversation?" Draco asked, resisting the temptation to pour himself a glass.

"My step father at the time was one of the ones who lasted longer. He didn't give me any warning. One day he just started whipping this slave and he said it was my fault. I had broken a lamp roughhousing with my brother. It had fallen out of fashion to hit his son, but he could make me watch him hit someone else. Everytime I'd see Cadmus he'd look at me with such fear, pleading for me to not make trouble. Most of the time I wouldn't, but sometimes I couldn't help it." Blaise confessed, his expression dark as his eyes glazed, reliving something Draco couldn't.

"Mine was a house elf, Dobby." Draco admitted, his throat suddenly dry.

"It felt like shit when our fathers hit them didn't?" Blaise prodded, picking at a scab Draco hadn't thought of in years.

"Of course it did! What are you getting at?" Draco snapped.

"It's going to be so much worse when you're found out." Blaise announced dramatically, his voice cool.

"What do you mean?" Draco demanded, his head spinning with the circling conversation.

"That omega is your new whipping boy." Blaise explained, and Draco flinched, the words as shocking as a slap.

"Excuse me" He hissed refusing to think to hard about the implication, cringing at the images it provoked.

"When you two get caught no one will punish you, but they will destroy her, and it will be your fault." Blaise continued.

"We won't get caught." Draco argued. They'd be careful, more careful. They were both smart and they could get away with it.

"You will." Blaise asserted with forced certainty.

"Why do you even care Blaise, weren't you the one who suggested we use her as a spy?" Draco snapped, deliberately shifting the argument.

"Things have changed. I had no idea she was a slave and I had no idea that you had feelings for her Drake." Blaise explained softly, as if Draco needed to be coddled. He didn't.

"So it's fine to set a bird up to be punished as long as you only want a shag?" Draco mocked, his tone sour.

"No, but it's over quicker, there's less risk." Blaise shook his head.

"Who has got you being so straight laced?" Draco pushed, eager to change the topic of conversation.

"None of your business." Blaise answered tightly. He was sure that if he could he'd be blushing.

"Since when do you have boundaries?" Draco taunted.

"That's not what we're talking about." Blaise reminded him. Draco nodded before heading his bar and grabbing the bottle.
"You're right we're not talking; we're drinking and tonight we're drinking a lot." Draco suggested, taking a heavy swig straight from the bottle. He cringed as the liquid hit his throat but the pain felt deserved, like penance.

"Works for me." Blaise agreed, grabbing the bottle for himself and drinking a mouthful. It was going to be a long night.
Hangovers, Pants, and Problems

Draco

Draco was well onto his way of passing out and he was going to enjoy every moment of it. Blaise had higher alcohol tolerance but he also started earlier. Their livers were going to be shot by their thirtieth birthday but hey, there were worse ways to die. They were draped over couches, not even really talking any more as they drank in silence. He wasn't sure what Blaise was drinking about, but he was certainly drinking hard, maybe even hard enough to forget, though Draco wasn't quite there yet. He blinked blearily at the door as light suddenly poured into the dark room. Draco hadn't realized that it wasn't evening yet, or maybe it was morning already?

There was a silhouette in his door way, and it was only when she came closer, too quickly, that he recognized Hermione. Blaise seemed to notice at the same time.

"Draco, you've gotta talk to her." Blaise slurred sloppily, sitting up despite his wobbling.

"Blaise?" Hermione squeaked, and wow was her voice usually squeaky? He didn't think she was squeaky. Usually, she moaned very nicely, not too loud or overdone, but with feeling. He was pretty sure he'd be hard if he hadn't drank almost the whole bottle at this point. But the trigger hair reaction wasn't exactly new around her. He'd woken up hard every day for the past week after dreams about her. Did she know? Shit she probably shouldn't know. She definitely shouldn't know. Why shouldn't she know? He didn't remember.

"I'm gonna go so you can talk to her." Blaise slurred, stumbling out of his room with, wait wasn't that his bottle of scotch? He wanted that. He loved scotch. He also hated scotch sometimes but he was wrong those times. Scotch was great. It was a great thing. He should drink scotch all the time.

"You two are dangerous." Granger muttered and then she was closer, when did he miss her getting closer? "You should get to bed, you'll regret it in the morning." She took his hand and he sort of got to his feet, using the couch for support. Her hand was cold. Or maybe he was just really warm. Wow he was tired. Bed sounded good. So good. He was falling asleep now, but he shouldn't do that. Why shouldn't he do that again?

"I want you." He said, suddenly needing to say it. "I should mark you, why aren't you marked?" God that would be hot. His seal would look fucking awesome on her. He'd have to put it somewhere fun, maybe her neck. He liked her neck. He watched her go into O space after toughing her neck. He wondered if she'd let her draw it on her neck. He liked drawing. He wished he could draw more often. Why did everyone hate him for drawing?

"Oh wow, it's a good thing you're not going to remember this tomorrow." She sighed, and he was offended by that. He held his liquor just fine. He would totally remember this in the morning.

"I'm sorry you're my whipping boy." He thought to himself, except Hermione gave him a weird look as she nudged open his bed room. Maybe he said it after all.

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"Yeah, you can tell me more about it tomorrow, go to bed." Hermione said, pushing him towards his mattress. He fell onto it and he felt her tugging off his shoes. That was nice of her. She was so nice. He liked her. Hermione was nice.

"Stay with me?" He asked as she pulled the blanket from underneath him. She was strong for such a little thing. Especially for an omega. His sheets were going to smell like omega. He liked that. She
smelled like cherries. But not like apricot. He couldn't remember why that was significant but it was.

"I don't think so." Hermione scoffed. "Go to sleep." She ordered, blowing out the last remaining candle as she slipped out of the room.

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Hermione

Hermione wasn't in the mood for any of this shit. She had just put an absolutely smashed Draco Malfoy to bed and all she wanted to do was collapse face first into her cot and not move until the end of time. But somebody was crying, and not just softly weeping into her pillow, because all of her roommates had done that at one point or another, this girl was sobbing, deep wracking, never ending sobs. She didn't have the energy to deal with this.

They were the only two in the room, as it was still a little early by usual standards. It took a moment for Hermione to recall the girl's name, which was a little embarrassing. She had this mass of curly blond hair covering her face, and she was in a ball on her pallet in the corner. Hermione has been lucky enough to make a tiny bit of money, meager gifts Astoria has given her for Christmas and the date they approximated to be her birthday, so she sleeps on a thin cot but at least it's not the bare wooden platform that new slaves get.

"Penny?" Hermione guessed, the girls looked up, displaying bright red eyes and numerous tear tracks. Joy. "You okay sweetie?" Something told her that the answer was not going to be a resounding "yes!"

Hermione cared about people, she was compassionate. She had empathy for the suffering of others. The problem was that she was tired. Every new slave did this. They cried and bitched and whined and made everyone around them pick up the slack because they had to accept the reality that Hermione had been dealing with for all of her life.

Their lives could've been so much worse. The Greengrasses were decent people, they offered the opportunity to be educated, if a slave wanted it. The girls weren't used to as bed warmers. They weren't free, but they were as close as a slave could get to it.

"No." She sniffled. " I can't do this. I can't handle it. People look at me like I'm dirt. I'm not even human." Penelope whimpered. Her parents had been caught in some sort of wrong doing, she was too young to be married off that quickly, so they had sold her off to cover the gaps between their assets and the fine they had to pay. It wasn't a common story, but not a particularly rare one either. It sucked but so did everyone else's terrible tale.

"You'll get used it." Hermione assured her and it was true. They all got used to it. None of the girls talked about their stories, everyone leaves with the occasional pleasantry to do their jobs and no one has to comfort you when they hear you weeping into your pillow. Hermione hadn't felt anything weeks until she had started this thing with Draco. That was a problematic thought.

"This isn't how you treat a beta, they act like I'm O trash." Hermione flinched and watched as casual hatred dripped into her tone. "Like I'm worthless." Penelope was the common, casual kind of prejudiced. It scared her more than the Bellatrix of the world because you could avoid the lunatics, you couldn't predict the Penelope's because their hatred was all in their heads until an omega got what they wanted. Hermione was careful to keep her wrist flat in her lap, not willing to risk exposing her brand.

"Yeah well we all have our marks to bear, you'll get used to being lower than a free omega. Karma's
funny that way." Hermione snapped as she stormed over to her cot. Maybe she shouldn't be so vindictive, maybe she should blame the societal rules and not the individual falling under their influence, but that didn't change the fact that it was incredibly satisfying to snuggle into her cot and ignore the sound of the other girl weeping on her pallet.

... When she woke up Penelope was gone and the other slaves were asleep. They were maids and laundresses mostly, working the harder jobs that free women wouldn't take. Hermione was reminded everyday of how lucky she was that Astoria chose her. That Astoria saved her.

When she entered Astoria's room it was like time had been reversed. Astoria and Daphne were laying in Astoria's bed in a fit of giggles. Katie was sitting at Astoria's vanity, dabbing her eyes with a tissue as she laughed. Hermione smiled. Things must be really good to be laughing this hard.

"What's so funny?" Hermione asked. Astoria and Daphne only started laughing harder but Katie was recovered enough to speak.

"Blaise Zabini pants are currently dangling on the outcropping outside of the north tower."

"What?" Hermione laughed, the image so ridiculous she couldn't help it.

"We're the only nobles that have noticed so far so Blaise isn't even aware." Astoria explained.

"How do you know they're his?" Hermione asked since she was a hundred percent sure that Daphne had not gotten Blaise naked. She was a good chaperone like that.

"They're green silk and have a massive "Z" embroidered on the leg. We're pretty sure." Daphne smirked and there was a dangerous vindictiveness in her eyes. Hermione was very glad she was not Blaise Zabini this morning, and not because of the hangover he was surely experiencing.

"It's amazing how much arrogance that man has." Katie remarked, shaking her head in distaste.

"Okay, I see the humor but isn't it a little juvenile to be laughing this hard about underwear of all things?" Hermione pointed out.

"It would be if the culprit hadn't left a note on the banner flying beneath the wonderful drawers. 'For every pair of knickers you get into, I take some clothes. Hope you brought enough.'" Katie relayed.

"So it's a scorned lover getting revenge, I think we all can applaud her." Astoria continued, a happy gleam in her eyes that Hermione hadn't seen in weeks.

"And since there isn't a chance in hell that my fiance will be keeping it in his pants for any length of time, we were laughing at the possibility of a half dressed and confused Blaise Zabini trying to borrow clothes." Daphne finished, rolling her eyes and taking the adultery with admirable stoicism. Hermione wasn't gonna call more attention to that though if Daphne was taking it so well.

"He's over two meters tall, what are the odds that he will fit into anyone's clothes?" Hermione asked, and that was a little comical, the thought of Blaise trying to squeeze into anything Draco's size was ridiculous. Blaise wasn't fat, but he was tall and solid. Draco was lithe and noticeably smaller.

"Highly improbable. I hope the thief succeeds, this could be fun." Daphne answered, her smirk returning with joyous vindictiveness.

"Nothing like a little public humiliation to entertain us, huh?" Hermione joked, dropping down on
the bed and lifting a hair brush. She pulled Astoria's hair back and began brushing it out. The act was as natural as breathing. Something that she had done since she had been born.

"Only to those who deserve it." Astoria specified. Hermione thought for a moment about Blaise's interruption the day before, and the time before that, and that fact that he messed with her best friend.

"Yeah, I'd say Blaise deserves it."

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Draco

Vomit was a lovely thing to wake up to. That wonderful, delicate scent was perfection to wake up to first thing in the morning. As was the horrifying feeling of vomit chunks on his face and shirt. There wasn't a scourgify in the world strong enough to make this better. Everything had to be burned. Including maybe his skin.

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It took a solid two hours before Draco felt human enough to leave his room, and even then he cancelled all of his appointments, including his date with Astoria on account of the pounding headache that would only be cured with an aggressive breakfast and a full day's rest. He stumbled into his sitting room, not even sure that he matched. He debated for a moment the 'hair of the dog that bit you' theory but he was pretty sure that Blaise took the last of his good scotch. The glance to the bar revealed an interesting surprise. There was a dark green bottle of hangover potion waiting for him. He blinked, wondering for a moment if it wasn't some surreal mirage. He trudged over to it, his footsteps painfully loud, and grabbed at the note that was beside it. Maybe he was still drunk?

"Hope this helps, and no worries about that stuff you said." The note read in perfect curly script. He stared blankly for a moment, wondering who could have written that. He remembered talking with Blaise and then opening the second bottle of scotch and then nothing. He held the note closer as if that could reveal some sort of magical clue. Amazingly, it did, the sweet scent of cherries.

"Shit." Draco announced to the empty room. Oh no, he was definitely stone cold sober, he just had no memory of talking to his omega while drunk out of his mind. That's not fucking problematic at all.

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Granger was not an easy person to find, apparently in the course of a single day she traversed the whole goddamn manor and never stayed in one spot that wasn't Astoria's room for more than a few seconds. He asked around under the guise of needing to deliver an extra confidential message to Astoria that couldn't be left unattended for any length of time, even though that was a laughable premise, and seemed to get sent on a wild goose chase, except every time he arrived at the supposed location he had apparently "just missed her." In about ten minutes he was going to start screaming or throwing up. That was until a quickly moving woman crashed into him.

"Are you kidding me?" Draco snapped, and then he looked at the girl in question. Hermione was flustered but as she stepped back and recognized him, there was definitely murder in her eyes.
"Oops," he chuckled nervously, and then pulled Hermione into the nearest broom cupboard. She allowed herself to be pulled, even if it was a bit reluctantly.

"What are we doing here?" Hermione asked, looking bored as she looked up at him. Normally he'd be offended but bored wasn't too bad. Bored was better than horrified right. His thought could get weird and if that whole "drunk words are sober thoughts thing" was true he could be in trouble. Not
that he thought terrible things about Granger, but it was probably too early for some of his more lewd thoughts.

"So yeah, about last night." He started. Hermione rolled her eyes. That didn't make him feel better.

"You were smashed Draco, I know better than to take any of that stuff seriously. You're not the first drunk noble that I've put to bed." She explained. That also didn't make him any better.

"No it's not just that, wait a minute, who have you been putting to bed?" He tried to stay focus and yeah, he didn't succeed.

"I keep the Greengrasses' secrets and I'm good at it." Hermione explained, a tiny little smirk on her lips. Okay that was concerning.

"But Blaise and I were talking…" He tried to start.

"Hey, you and Blaise can keep your secrets too." She shrugged and chuckled a little bit. He didn't appreciate the implication but it wasn't the time. Blaise had been drunk last night but also right in the beginning, the part he remembered.

"I don't want you to get hurt." He announced. She rolled her eyes and that was rude. He was being decent and chivalrous.

"I'm not gonna get hurt. I know what this is, we're just having fun and exploring each other's company. No worries." Hermione answered dryly.

"That's not what I mean, at all." Draco was confused. That was not the plan. That was not what they discussed in the garden. For once in his life he was pursuing something real and Granger just wanted to fool around now. That was new.

"This is what it is. No worries, I'm not your whipping boy, whatever that means. I hope I don't know what that means." Hermione's eyebrow scrunched towards each other with confusion. He ignored her.

"You could get hurt for being with me." He reminded her. She didn't seem to get the severity of what he was saying.

"Yeah well, I could get hurt all the time. I've spent my whole life not going after what I want and it's only ever ended with me getting hurt. Gotta break the pattern somehow right?" She snapped and there was an anger in her eyes that he wasn't prepared to deal with.

"You're sure?" He checked, not sure what he should be saying right now. A large part of him was wondering why he was even arguing with her about this and not trying to get into her knickers. It was only that tiny sliver that had magically become decent and emotional as of late that had a problem with this.

"Yeah I'm sure." She answered not meeting his eyes. "Wait five minutes." She snapped and then slid out of the cupboard.

Draco was left standing alone and very confused.
Chapter 20: Jealousy, Jealousy, and more Jealousy

Draco

The arrival of the traveling merchants was unexpected, though not entirely unpleasant surprise. But maybe Draco was just in a good mood. Their cart was substantial, though the inside had clearly been altered with an undetectable extension charm, and goods lined the oak siding. One merchant hung over Draco's shoulder, hovering even as he assured the lord that each item he picked up was the highest quality that could be found. Everything was "the best." The other, a burly Bulgarian stood in the corner with his arms crossed, watching Draco with open distaste. Draco greatly preferred the latter of the two blokes.

He was inspecting a delicate necklace, idly wondering if Hermione might not like something shiny (Astoria always seemed to like the random baubles his mother had chosen), when the bird flew into the small space at a dead sprint. She was smiling brightly, so large that it had to hurt. He smiled back, though he was surprised at this outward and frankly dangerous expression of affection and then she blew by him, skidding to a stop in front of the burlier merchant.

"Viktor!" She squealed as he caught her up in his arms with ease. Draco watched aghast as the Romanian lifted the small omega.

"Hermyninnie!" He gasped with equal glee, final setting her down after way too long in Draco's opinion. "Why arrre you herre?" He demanded, an unnatural smile on his pointed, angry face.

"What am I doing here? What are you doing here?" She laughed, pushing his shoulder lightly. Draco did not like how comfortable these two were with touching each other.

"Ivan vas going to London and I have trrryout zerrre so I kame along." The older man explained. Way older, frankly way too old for her. What was Hermione thinking, he couldn't even pronounce her name properly.

"Astoria's here getting engaged," Hermione explained in a rush, Viktor nodded as if this explained everything. Hermione smiled up at him, positively giddy. She still hadn't noticed Draco. He let the necklace in his hand clatter down onto the counter as he left, suddenly not in the mood to be around other people.

Hermione

When Hermione reluctantly left Krum's side to go finish the never ending list of chores she had to do. Unfortunately before she could get ten yards, Draco materialized from behind a bush. This was getting a little creepy. Fuck buddies weren't supposed to stalk you, right? Because that's what they had to be, for her sake.

Draco was looking decidedly pissed even though she had no idea why he would be.

"Did you notice me at all or we're you too caught up with you Bulgarian playmate in there?" Draco snapped. His tone cold and wow that was harsh. She hadn't seen Viktor in years, excuse her if she had missed him lurking in the corner, she was a little excited.
"Excuse me? Krum is just a friend." She snapped, irritated with him already.

"You expect me to believe that?" He hissed and then laugh harshly. She really didn't like that.

"Draco you don't have the right to be acting this way." She snapped. They hadn't agreed to be exclusive, they hadn't agreed to anything at all.

"Excuse me?" His eyes bugged out of his head, as if she was the ridiculous one.

"Did you forget our deal, did you forget about your fiancee?" She reminded him. They had just discussed it the day before, what the hell, did he have the memory of a goldfish?

"That wasn't a deal, that was you barking out orders." He argued.

"We're not together Draco. I can do whatever I please." She snapped angrily. His eyes flicked down and he paused, his body language changing instantly. That wasn't okay. Shy, timid Draco was not a Draco who she wanted to fight with. She wanted to fight with asshole, domineering Draco. That was a Draco she was ready for.

"What if I want that?" He murmured, almost too quietly for her to hear. He shuffled, scuffing his feet.

"What do you mean?" She demanded.

"I want to be together. I want that." She felt herself deflate but there was was no way he meant that. Whatever he said while drunk, there was no way... he couldn't even be willing to... she wasn't worth that.

"We can't." She reminded him.

"I think you're scared. You're scared of exploring what is between us and you're scared of how amazing all of this feels." He looked up, catching her eyes with a piercing silver gaze. 

"I won't be your whore Draco." She looked away, feeling like she was burning.

"How dare you! Do you really think so little of me? You're a coward Hermione Granger." He accused. That hurt more than it probably should've.

"So what if I am? That's how I've made it this far, right?" She defended herself. She was cautious or she died. That's been her whole life. She was already risking so much, her job, her life, did she really have to risk her heart too?

"You don't have to do that with me, I'm not asking for anything, just try being with me, whatever that means, I won't be able to live the rest of my life wondering." He pledged. She didn't want pledges; she didn't want anything.

"Then forget about me." She suggested, crossing her arms over her chest. She should walk away. She should be done. But she couldn't. She just couldn't.

"I can't and I won't." He argued. His tone firm. Why was he so goddamn stubborn? Why were they both so stubborn?

"Then I guess we're at a standstill." She snapped, it was his turn to budge.

"You don't have to think so hard, no one ever has to know, it's our business. Whatever we do won't change that." He was wrong; he was so very wrong.
"That's not how Astoria will see it." She reminded him. She remember Astoria standing at her mirror, desperate to matter. She couldn't do that to her. Or could she?

"When was the last time you went for what you wanted? When was the last time you stopped thinking of Astoria for five seconds and thought of yourself? Don't you think you deserve to be happy?" He pleaded, cradling her the sides of her face in his hands. She felt vulnerable and small and cherished. All of the things that she wasn't allowed to feel.

"Yes I deserve to be happy." She agreed without thinking, unable to ignore the way that he was looking at her.

"Then let me make you happy, come to my room tonight, seven thirty, just like we planned. No pressure, I just want to spend time with you." He suggested, gently tracing her cheekbone with his thumb.

"I don't think that's a good idea." She said slowly.

"Stop being so goddamn rational all the time." He snapped, his tone softer than his words, almost fond. "This is not rational. We do not have to be rational. Just let yourself stop thinking and stop distancing yourself from this. You feel something for me, I know it." He stated with confidence. He didn't know shit. She was mysterious, a closed book, totally secretive.

"What if I don't want to have feelings for your Draco? What if I know better?" She challenged.

"It doesn't change what you're feeling. I can see it. I can smell it. You care about me." He insisted. He wasn't wrong but that didn't matter. She couldn't have it. Something flickered in his eyes as he saw something he didn't like on her face.

He kisses her suddenly, his lips meeting hers in a gentle push pull. She met him half way, leaning into his frame. He was warm and her nerves sung as he ran his fingers through her hair, soft and gentle and cherishing. Fuck that felt good. She wanted this, she wanted it so goddamn badly that it hurt deep in the pit of her stomach. She wanted to cry or never leave this spot or run away because it was too much. She couldn't process it. She couldn't compartmentalize. She was already in too deep..

"Tell me you only felt that on a physical level and I'll believe you're don't want more." He whispered against her lips, not even opening his eyes.

"Of course I fucking want more!" She shouted, pushing him away with zero concern for witnesses or getting caught. He made it impossible to think.

"Then let yourself have it." He suggested, as if it was just that simply. And maybe it was. Maybe it had to be.

"Fine." She answered, the word slower and more careful than it had a right to be.

"What?" Draco asked, freezing. He clearly couldn't believe that that strategy had worked. She couldn't quite believe it herself. She was an idiot, but at least she got to try being selfish out for once.

"Yes, fine, you're ridiculous cheesiness wore me down." She snapped, refusing to give him the satisfaction. He won but that didn't mean that he got to know that he won. He clearly disagreed with him.

He whooped, cheering and throwing his hands into the air.

"You're a child." She hissed.
He whooped again.

"And you're drawing way too much attention." She pointed out.

He whooped again.

"Shut the fuck up Draco."

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Convincing Draco to wait until this evening had been like talking a child out of eating their slice of birthday cake. Luckily, she had the excuse of her extra shifts in the kitchen to focus him. The flu was still flying through the palace and help was still needed. Today was just food prep, thankfully. It was probably a bad idea to try to be anywhere near Draco in a professional capacity. She'd just end up smiling too much, or blushing or god forbid giggling. Ginny was waiting a little ways down from the kitchen with a huge smirk on her face. Ginny made the same face every time she had a secret since she was seven years old.

She met the other girl, who merged smoothly, walking with her down the hallway. There was mild traffic, but now where as bad as it usually was. There were some good things about the flu after all. Ginny's telltale smirk faded and Hermione guessed that she'd have to wait to be let in on the secret, but how juicy could it be, really? Ginny sniffed, maybe she had the flu, she probably shouldn't be working. They had reached the kitchen and just as Hermione reached for the handle, Ginny yanked her back, tugging her into a side hallway.

"Mione." Ginny snapped, glaring at her. Hermione leaned back, feeling a little confronted.

"What?" Hermione demanded. Ginny rolled her eyes.

"You can't go in there." She ordered. Her expression a little bit patronizing, even though that wasn't fair. Hermione was older, more knowledgeable.

"Why not?" She demanded.

"You reek of alpha and while Astoria may not have been able to smell it, someone in there definitely will be, and that will not end well for you." Ginny hissed. Shit, she sniffed her blouse on reflex but she didn't smell anything. Was she already adjusted to Draco's scent. That probably wasn't good, even if the omega side of her was preening at the thought of smelling like her alpha.

"Really?" She asked, not sure that she believed it.

"Yes really, I came very close to panting from the scent on your clothes." Ginny snapped, looking a little disgusted at herself. Hermione wasn't thrilled with the imagery either.

"Fine, okay, I'll freshen up." She responded neutrally, holding up her hand in surrender. She hurried to the nearest lavatory, ignoring Ginny's shouted demand.

"And don't think you're getting out of this without an explanation Mione. You owe me!" She called. A few lower servants turned to look at her but she merely raised an eyebrow and gave them her best scornful look. Draco's strategy worked well. They scampered away before they could see her gold band. Maybe she should try cool dislike more often, especially since she knew that it was totally possible to be a marshmallow underneath at the same time.

Draco
Draco had developed a new hobby. When he was bored, which he figured must be symptom of being in a relationship He had to find some way to occupy his time that wasn't trying to get into multiple witches knickers. Now it was just one! Who also happened to spend most of her time working. Which he didn't approve of. She should be with him, as often as possible. Hermione disagreed, saying something about responsibility and reputation. Eh.

As a result, he had too much free time on his hands and found himself wandering far too often. After too many near misses with Astoria, he started using the hidden corridors throughout the castle. Their official purpose was escape routes in the event of an invasion. Their less official purpose has been spying hide outs. He was certainly helping them live up to both. He was avoiding the invasion of the Greengrasses and spying all the while.

People watching nobility was boring. He already knew most of their secrets, and the ones he discovered were just gross. He really didn't need to know that Lady Greengrass bit her finger nails in private. Surprisingly, Draco found himself watching the servants. They were people who had no connection to him, whose lives didn't affect him, and that's what made it all the more interesting to watch.

One of the Weasley boys had been slipping off to escape with his fiancée approximately every thirty minutes, though he couldn't really blame him. She lived in a nearby village and was the daughter of a highly sought after jeweler, and she was the most in your face beautiful person that he had ever seen. Blaise's red head was still hiding the O on her wrist, but eventually her mother was going to figure it out and who knew how that would turn out. Omegas didn't tend to take well to leadership positions well and it was no secret that the Weasley women were supposed to run the Greengrasses' kitchen. His own cook was an asshole who kicked the house elves and drank too much. The moment he could he was firing him, unfortunately, he was his mother's cousin, so that man wasn't going anywhere any time soon.

A blonde maid was positively in love with the youngest Weasley, but the man was too much of a dunce to notice. He was going to start screaming if something didn't happen soon.

Hermione's dark haired friend, whose name he should probably learn, spent a suspicious amount of time outside of the stables. He should probably look into that. He doubted Hermione would be friends with a spy though. At the moment the stable boy was walking steadily towards that infuriating Bulgarian. The merchant was chatting up Astoria's assistant, a delicate pretty beta that, according to Blaise, spit fire well enough to keep up with Hermione. He wasn't convinced that it was possible. The stable boy arrived and immediately turned red, his whole body stiffening. Somebody didn't like what he was seeing. The stable boy waited impatiently, literally a meter from the other two, just glaring. This was more entertaining than he imagined. After a while, the stable boy huffed audibly and slipped away, just in time for the bird to notice and watch him leave with a strange blend of confusion and shock on her face. Maybe he should watch these two more often?

That didn't exactly matter now though, because it was near supper, and then he had a date with his omega, which felt fucking great to say. He grinned, emerging farther down the corridor when the coast was clear and hurrying to his dining room. Things were good. Things were very good.

Hermione

"Hermione, you're almost done with the herbology texts I assigned I trust? I need your analysis tomorrow." Minerva asked as she walked by whilst Hermione headed back to the kitchen.

"Of course I'm only adding some finishing touches tonight." She called back. Minerva nodded and rounded the corner as the blood drained from Hermione's face. She had not started, with everything going on with Astoria and Draco it just felt like things were slipping through the cracks. It was
frustrating. Everything was frustrating. God she had to relax.
Studying, Discoveries, and Books

**Draco**

He had not expected Hermione to arrive at his room with a book in her arms that weighed more than her and he couldn't exactly say that he was thrilled. She collapsed onto his couch, tied up her hair with some twine and set to work.

"Hello, nice to see you too. Go ahead, make yourself at home." He announced sarcastically, shrugging sarcastically.

"I have work due tomorrow." She announced as if that made it make sense.

"Okay… So why didn't you cancel. I would've understood." He assured her. Maybe she was afraid to break plans. That wouldn't be a good thing. He didn't want the bird to be afraid of her.

"Maybe.. Maybe I wanted to spend some time with you. Did you think of that?" Hermione replied without looking up. A blush crept up her cheeks and okay, that was cute.

"Oh." He responded dumbly.

"Oh." She parroted.

"Make yourself at home then, I'll keep myself occupied." He promised.

**Hermione**

That lasted for about fifteen minutes.

"I have work to do." Hermione muttered, not looking up from the text. Why was this so dense? Why did herbology suck so much?

"This is more important." Draco argued, skimming his mouth over her neck, the stupid hound dog.

"This is optional. I will die if I don't finish this." She corrected and it was true, Minerva would kill her. As in totally, absolutely dead.

"You will not die." Draco scoffed, clearly not understanding the severity of the issue.

"I will die." She repeated.

"I will die if I don't get my hands on you right this second." He countered, still wrong. Boners were not medical conditions. It would go down and then maybe she'd fool around with Draco, if she finished this.

"You will not die." She reminded him.

"I will die." Dang it, she had lost her place.

"I disagree." She stated curtly. "Draco!" She squealed, laughing as he kneeled in front of her and began pressing kisses to her inner ankle "what are you doing?"

"Multitasking." He continued up her leg, tucking up her skirt as he went, lingering at the side of her knee.
"That is not helping me focus." She laughed, he smirked and oh, that was a dangerous expression to have whilst in between her legs.

"Good. I'm not good at sharing attention. Only child you know." He teased, kissing right above the side of her knee. He was looking up at her but she was very aware of how close he was to her knickers.

"I can tell." Her breath caught as he slid his hand up the lower part of her legs, massaging her calf. He stood slowly, his movement predatory. "Draco." She said darkly. He smirked. She glared. He traced the side of her face gently. She continued to glare.

"How much would you wager that I'd be more engaging than that book?" He asked, his eyes were dilated, signaling his apparent arousal.

"I'm sure you would be. It's still not going to happen." He kissed down her neck as if that would change her answer.

"Will you let me mark you?" He asked suddenly. She jumped.

"Excuse me?" She sat up suddenly. It was one thing to talk about it while drunk out of his mind; it was entirely different to suggest it now.

"Not somewhere anyone would see." He scoffed as if it was the obviously solution to the problem she was having with it, as if that was the problem she was having with it.

"Are you nuts?" She demanded, pulling back to look at him seriously. He shrugged and then gently kissed along her jaw. That didn't make it difficult to talk or anything.

"It's a time honored tradition for OA pairs." He reminded her, as if she didn't know exactly what she was talking about. When she was really, really little, she had dreamed of having a pretty mark on her neck, had painted it on her skin. Since then, she had learned better. Now she woke up with nightmares about a stranger's label on her body, never being able to get it off. She had woken up frantically scratching at her neck more than once.

"It's a brand, like for cattle. I've already got one of those remember?" She shook her wrist at him. He caught it and carefully pressed a gentle kiss to some of the more recent cuts that it had inflicted.

"This will be different. It's from me and something you agreed to." He argued, kissing up her arm and lingering on her inner elbow. She had no idea that that area was so sensitive.

"I'm not agreeing to it. That's not, that's not something we can have." She struggled to explain, her words failing her.

"I get that we have a time limit, but that just means that we don't have time to waste. Why shouldn't we have exactly what we want while we can get it?" He countered and she saw in his face that he believed it, every word.

"Because not everybody gets what they want all the time Draco." She sighed, it was like arguing with the most pesky, brilliant, child ever.

"Yes, but I am lucky enough to be amongst the fortunate few." He laughed, his eyes lighting up.

He lifted her. Easily, like she was a little doll. She squeaked as he slid beneath her and settled her into his lap. Her foot clipped the stack of books on the coffee table. Her notes fell to the ground. He ran his fingers through her hair. She laughed.
"So much for keeping yourself occupied, huh?" She teased.

"You prefer it this way." He insisted and gently nipped her ear. "Do you want jewelry?" He asked, and okay, that was random.

"Why would I want jewelry?" She asked. When would she wear it? She had never been one for flashy bling, no matter what Astoria said about diamonds being her best friend.

"Aren't you supposed to?" Draco looked surprised, and wasn't this a strange conversation to be having in his lap. She was going to start taking offense real soon.

"Let's not worry about what either of us are supposed to do from now on." She suggested, smirking. It wasn't as if she was following any rules anymore.

"Works for me." He laughed, but she cut him off, pressing her mouth to his. He tasted sweet and it only took a half a beat before his tongue was tracing the seam of her lips. She opened up for him and he caught her lower lip between his teeth, tugging gently. She sighed. His hands went to her hips and his thumbs skimmed her back just beneath her blouse. She shivered. It was all too surreal. She had snogged Viktor on more than one occasion while he worked for the Greengrasses but that had always felt awkward and fumbling and she had always just kind of gone with his lead. That's not what she wanted not anymore. She scooted closer, letting her hips get nearer to his groin, and reached her hands back to wrap her fingers through the hair on the back of his neck. She pulled, slowly but firmly and Draco groaned, his hips twitched. He brought his hands back in between them and started frantically undoing her corset.

"Wait." She gasped. His hands stilled. She looked at him for a beat, unsure how to phrase her concerns even as her stomach flipped with worry.

"I won't compromise your virtue, unless you want me to of course." He assured her, his eyes had that arrogant gleam, even though it didn't minimize his sincerity. He was such an ass.

"Okay." She said, nodding slowly. He went back to what he was doing, even as he sucked a mark high on her neck. The loosened corset felt freaking amazing as it dropped off, but she barely had time to think about it as he sucked a little harder. "What the fuck, you can't leave a hickey!" She hissed, she felt him smirk against her skin.

"Wear your hair down more often and it won't be a problem." She rolled her eyes.

"I thought you hated my hair. Didn't you call it a bush?" She reminded him.

"Well I couldn't exactly say that I wanted to pull it on while you sat on my cock now could I?" He smirked. She felt the color rise on her cheeks at his positively filthy words. His smirk got larger.

"We're you actually thinking that?" She asked. It seemed ridiculous. They were literally fighting at the time.

"I'm generally thinking that." He answered.

"Well then." She responded, not quite sure what to say. At least she didn't have to worry about being desirable.

"And you know what else I think about?" He asked, something dangerous flickered in his gaze.

"This." He continued, kissing her again. His tongue immediately met hers, twining together. It was so easy to imagine that tongue going to work elsewhere on her body. After what could've been minutes or moments he pulled back and slipped his hands underneath her blouse. "And this." He added
before catching her mouth again. His hands slowly skimmed up her back and over her ribs. She was incredibly aware of how close his fingertips were to her loose breasts. Slowly his fingers skimmed just below her breasts. She whimpered. She had no idea that was so sensitive. She didn't have time to explore her own body, most of the time she wasn't even sure what was going on. Draco seemed to know what he was doing with a woman's body. That was kind of a scary thought. He must've felt her stiffen because he froze.

"You okay?" He asked quietly.

"Yeah." She murmured but she wasn't quite sure that that was true.

"Nothing has to happen today you know." He reminded her. She blushed.

"Of course. I'm not some damsel. I know how to say no." She defended herself.

"Do you?" He asked skeptically.

"Of course." She answered stubbornly.

"Okay then." He concluding before kissing her again. As caught up as she was in his mouth and as breathless as he made her feel, she was still very aware that his hands didn't leave her lower back. It pissed her off, the part of her that was a strong, take no prisoners, kind of woman, but it also made her feel incredibly safe, even from herself. She could call his bullshit and apparently he could call hers. She let it go on for a little while longer before finally pulling back and standing up.

"I do have to study this you know." She sighed, grabbing for her textbook from the ground. It had fallen face down and she hurried to gather up the notes.

"That's mine." Draco corrected. She blinked, staring at the cover. She was pretty sure that was hers.

"No, it's mine." She responded, displaying the cover.

"Couldn't be, that's crazy high level stuff Granger." Draco scoffed, and okay, now she was mad.

"Excuse me?" She snapped, and looked around the room, and there, on one of the bookshelves was the same neon orange herbology textbook that she was currently reading. "There's your copy, that one is mine." He turned to look where she pointed and a weird flicker of almost realization crossed his face.

"You're reading that?" He asked, astonished.

"Yes, I'm reading that." She answered slowly so he didn't get lost.

"I just put my foot in my mouth, huh?" He cringed as full recognition dawned.

"Big time." She answered, dropping into the arm chair with her very large book.

"How the hell are you reading that?" He asked, and she had to look up again because sometimes stupidity astounds even the people most used to it.

"You should totally just keep digging that hole." She suggested, what else could he possibly say to piss her off.

"I barely made it through that book." Draco stressed with that same confused tone.

"Are you suggesting that you're smarter than me?" Not that she assumed she was smarter than him,
but he had no idea how smart she was.

"I… I'm just saying that I had tutors, crazy good ones." He back pedaled, finally finding the line and struggling to get to the right side of it.

"I was educated, had many of the same tutors as Astoria." She informed him, cracking open the ridiculously heavy book. Thankfully she only had to read the first half of the textbook for tomorrow, and she was halfway done. Only two hundred and fifty pages to go.

"It's just… why?" He asked as if the idea of her being educated was to absurd to believe.

"Excuse me?" She snapped, looking up again. His eyes bulged out as he realized his mistake, again.

"I'm not saying that you don't deserve it or aren't worthy or whatever but why does a Astoria's personal attendant need to be an expert in herbology?" He asked, a little more carefully.

"I'm not always going to be Astoria's personal attendant." She explained idly. Wouldn't that be hell.

"What are you going to do instead?" He asked, genuine curiosity in his voice. It was hard for her to remember that he didn't have any options in life or opportunities, he always knew what his future was going to be like, and all of his friends knew theirs. She was the only one who had ever been uncertain.

"The plan is to work under Minerva officially when we go back home. Then eventually I'll take over once she retires." She shrugged.

"Minerva? As in McGonagle?" He asked in disbelief. Minerva arraigned most of the accommodations, it wasn't surprising that Draco knew her name.

"Yes." She answered simply.

"You're going to manage the whole household?" He asked.

"That's the plan, yes." She clarified. Though if she had to do it one more time she was going to scream.

"Wow." He leaned back as if he had to work to take it all in.

"Thank you for that tone of surprise, it's really flattering." She snarked, not as mad as she wanted to be.

"It's just, that means, you're brilliant. Like crazy brilliant. I knew you were smart. We've spoken. But I had no idea you were brilliant." He rambled; she blushed and the heat kind of hurt.

"I'm not brilliant. I'm hardworking. There's a difference." She corrected. She was proud of her accomplishments, but that's what they were accomplishments. Brilliance implied talent, it implied ease and neither of those things were true for her.

"Is both not a possibility?" He asked.

"I'm just not brilliant." She shrugged, feeling embarrassed now. She curled up in the chair, tucking her knees in. God not wearing a corset is fabulous, she glanced at the dark brown garment on the ground and wondered if she could get away with leaving it there for good.

'I disagree.' Draco answered simply before rising to grab himself a glass. She watched him pour amber liquid into a glass and wondered briefly if he was ever totally sober. He grabbed a book off of
his shelf and dropped onto his couch. She raised an eyebrow. He smirked. "I have studying to do too you know. Have to have the Sacred Twenty eight memorized by tomorrow."

"Just the surnames?" She asked, Minerva had her memorize that three years ago, was he really so far behind?

"Nah, I messed that up last time. Now I need to know all of the individual members." He shrugged and that made more sense.

"There's a tapestry in the Northwest wing." She informed him helpfully. Or at least that's how she saw it. He laughed.

"That thing? The charms been broken for as long as I can remember, it creates false branches on the family tree." He explained. Hermione shrugged before returning to her book. They lapsed into silence as Hermione slogged through over a hundred pages. Eventually she yawned and stretched like a cat. She liked cats, she had wanted one as a child but Astoria was allergic.

"I should go, Astoria should be getting to bed soon." Hermione explained and rolled her stiff neck as she picked up her annoying corset.

"Does she really need help?" Draco asked in disbelief. Hermione cocked an eyebrow with equal skepticism as she did up the laces on the binding piece.

"You can't expect me to believe you run your own baths." She pointed out.

"Yeah I don't." He shook his head. She rolled her eyes.

"That hair doesn't wash itself." She announced, standing up and walking towards the door.

"Wait." He called, she turned expecting the worse, but he had stood up and was walking towards her. She blushed as he pressed a chaste kiss to her forehead. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

"And you'll think about me tonight?" He asked headily when he pulled away. She was dizzy, totally out of breath, but even so she was sure she spoke the truth as she agreed.

"Absolutely."

"Good, I like my attention. Only child you know." He repeated. She rolled her eyes.

"Good night." She said simply.

"Good night." He called as she slipped out the door. It was only as he cheeks started to hurt while she knock on Astoria's door did she realize she had a dopey smile stuck on her face.
Hermione

Hermione's morning was not going as expected. First thing she was supposed to chaperone a date between Daphne and Blaise, but Blaise had sent a messenger, who passed on the official message that he was sick and the less official message that he had been cursed and his arse was glowing pink every time he lied. Daphne thought it was hilarious; Hermione thought that she should probably find her best friend now.

She pushed open the kitchen doors with confidence, very at home there, and for the first time, ever, smacked right into someone. They had double doors for a reason, Molly literally filleted anyone who messed up her perfect entryway system. Hermione jumped, only to be faced with the burly ginger who she definitely didn't want to see.

"What the hell, Ron?" She snapped.

"Not today." He grunted, which was incredibly strange. She thought he would've gotten over his ridiculous suspicion that she and Draco were sleeping together it's not like had any prove, even though he was right, and besides, how was it any of his business if she was.

"Who crawled up your arse?" She grumbled, before finally making her way into the kitchen. Unfortunately, there was a disappointing lack of flaming red hair and she quickly found out that Ginny had the day off. Luckily, it only took a few turns through the garden before she found her friend. She was lying on a bench; her arm rested across her face, covering her eyes. When Hermione cleared her throat, Ginny jumped up in a panic.

"Oh, okay, it's just you." Ginny sighed, dropping back onto the bench. Hermione sat beside her carefully.

"That's so nice of you to say." She said sarcastically. Ginny rolled her eyes.

"Sorry, it's been stressful lately." She sighed.

"Tell me about it." Hermione agreed.

"Yeah, but it's not the same." Ginny argued and okay, now Hermione had to fight.

"Trust me it's the same, I can't take anymore right now either." Ginny scoffed.

"You're Hermione Granger." Ginny announced as if it explained everything.

"What the hell does that mean?" Hermione asked, so what? She was Hermione Granger, that doesn't mean shit.

"You're like a superhero." Ginny said with awe.

"I'm literally just a normal witch." Hermione shrugged. She wasn't significant. In fact, if anything she was less than normal. She was subpar, barely even a witch.

"But you just handle everything." Ginny said, as if it was an extraordinary feat. Hermione was just trying to survive. She just didn't sleep.

"If anyone's extraordinary, it's you Gin. I mean you're single handedly taking down Blaise Zabini."
She pivoted, studying the other girl closely.

"That's not at all the same thing!" Ginny scoffed and then realized the misstep. She went pale, or paler. "I mean what are you talking about?" She tried weakly.

"Subtle Gin." She scoffed.

"Fuck you." Ginny flopped back onto the grass dramatically. "But really how'd you know?"

"The hex this morning?" Hermione admitted.

"Yeah?" Ginny prodded.

"You used a modified version on Ron a bunch of years ago for whenever he said something stupid." Hermione reminded her. Ginny groaned.

"Dang it, and here I was thinking I was so clever." She laughed.

"I won't tell, but why are you doing it Gin?" Hermione asked, shaking her head at it all.

"I matter Mione and he treated me like I didn't. No one's ever stood up to him and it's about time that someone did." Ginny said firmly, looking forward at nothing but with the same grim determination that she's always had. Ginny was a tank, with daring up to her ears.

"Just be careful Gin, he's a snake." Hermione reminded her, well aware that Blaise's type didn't take insults to their pride easily.

"Yeah, but I'm in control." Ginny said with more bluster than certainty.

"Okay then." Hermione backed off.

"Mostly." Ginny corrected, a little bit of panic creeping into her voice.

"Sure." Hermione agreed.

"Partially at least." Ginny adjusted.

"Of course." Hermione placated.

"Listen, I know what I'm doing." Ginny snapped, jumping to her feet.

"I'm sure you do." Hermione responded calmly.

"He deserves it." Ginny reminded her, her eyes watering a little bit.

"He does." Hermione had no argument.

"He won't catch me." Ginny vowed.

"Hopefully." Hermione qualified. The wind immediately left Ginny's sails.

"Hopefully. " She repeated before dropping to the ground. Silence stretched between them.

"It's a good thing we're very hopeful people, huh?" Hermione joked, Ginny choked out a shocked laugh.

"Good thing." Ginny agreed. "Are you okay?" She asked quietly, pivoting.
"Yeah, I'm…" She thought of the night before, and felt herself smile without trying to for the first time in a long time. "I'm really good."

Draco

Draco liked quiet mornings, not quite as much as he liked his scotch, but he enjoyed an early morning cuppa and lazily playing with a snitch just like everyone else. The only problem was that people kept interrupting him.

"I made a horrible, terrible mistake." Blaise announced as he walked into Draco's room.

"You know I have a meeting, and you have a date." Draco said, from his position lying on his couch. He released the snitch in his and let it almost get away before catching it again.

"Have you been keeping tabs on me, or do you just follow your omega's schedule so closely that you know when she's chaperoning?" Blaise snarled caustically. Well then, okay, that's a lot of aggression.

"What terrible, horrible mistake did you make?" Draco asked, willing to play along to change the subject.

"My whole life. Some bird is trying to punish me." Blaise announced with incredible malice.

"Why do you think that?" Draco asked idly, focusing back on his snitch.

"You know Draco, gin is my favorite." Blaise confided randomly.

"Scotch is your favorite." Draco corrected, because they didn't joke around about liquor.

"I'm aware." Blaise said tightly. Draco gave him a pointed look, but when Blaise didn't explain, he realized he was missing something. He looked Blaise over, wondering if this was a boggart or something, and that's when he caught the neon pink halo right at eye level, or at least eye level when he's on the sofa.

"Is your arse glowing?" He asked in disbelief.

"Yes, bright pink I'm told." Blaise said tersely; Draco laughed.

"Did you try finite?" He suggested.

"Of course I tried finite, there's a magical signature keeping it in place apparently." Blaise hissed.

"Clever. Do you know which bird?" He asked. He'd like to shake her hand.

"Do you really think I'd be here if I knew which bird?" Blaise said tightly.

"How much damage did it do before you found out?" Draco asked.

"I was in the middle of chatting up the maid, in the middle of the hallway. I told her I first noticed her eyes." Blaise said slowly, cringing the whole way.

"Nice, what exactly would you like me to do about it then?" Draco asked. "Other than obliviate everyone in the manor because I'm not sure I'm up to that."

"Hide me until it wears off. I can't not lie. It's like taking away my wand." Blaise hissed and collapse into an armchair.
"Which one?" Draco asked, unable to resist such an easy opening.

"Prat." Blaise grumbled. "So can I stay here?" He asked finally.

"Could I kick you out if I wanted you to?" Draco asked, resigned to spending way more time with Blaise than he strictly wanted to.

"No probably not." Blaise shook his head.

After leaving Blaise, who totally passed out for no apparent reason at all, Draco trudged to his meeting. He had arrived early, and just before he was about to knock, his father's voice thundered out into the hallway.

"There was a child!" He roared, his rage evident. Draco froze, his blood pounding, and then scurried, in a very manly manner, back around the corner. As if on cue, a terrified looking messenger crashed out of the room, looking scared shitless. Well then, he should probably give his father time to cool off. Draco waited for a few minutes, waited for the crashing and shattering noises to teeter off and then very cautiously made his way to the threshold. It would only make things worse if he didn't show up, or merlin forbid, was late. He'd be dead.

He knocked on the door timidly, and only barely opened it when his father called for him to come in. He really would rather his father dismissed him and they both pretended this all never happened.

"Sit." His father ordered, and that was not the result he was hoping for. He tentatively sat down on the chair, but his father didn't look up from his reports. That was better at least. At least he didn't have to see the abject disappointment on his father's face if he never bothered to look at him. Everything appeared to be in one piece, but Draco knew a simple spell could hide the damage quickly. His father seemed cool and collective. If he hadn't overheard he never would've known that something was wrong. Either way, he definitely wasn't going to ask.

Suddenly, his father broke the silence with a clipped statement.

"I've been hearing reports that your fiancée is feeling neglected Draco." He announced coolly without looking up.

"What?" Draco floundered. This was not the conversation that Draco had been expecting. He hadn't known what to expect but it certainly had not been this.

"Your fiancée believes your interest is waning. That it is shifting. It is strange but they seem to value their daughter's happiness. Additionally, it is not in the Greengrasses' interest to have their blood competing with bastards." His father continued and then turned the page. It was ludicrous, that he could see to control his son's life but would never make eye contact.

"I know the spells. I don't understand the purpose of that clause." Draco wouldn't have bastards, fidelity clause or no. It was unreasonable and emasculating to deny him mistresses. He knew the charms to keep a woman from getting pregnant, had known them since he was old enough to manage the spell.

"It is not your job to question. It is your job to be a good little stud and produce heirs with your perfect little pure blood wife for the good of the family. You will adjust and if you don't, so be it. Worse things have happened." His father hissed, finally, slowly looking at Draco. The absolute malice in his eyes was terrifying, and Draco knew that if he didn't do exactly as his father said, without complaint, that the consequences would be horrifying.
"Yes sir." He nodded reluctantly.

"If you screw up this engagement I will disown you." He stressed icily, his tone implying that being disowned would be the least of the punishment. Draco felt a chill race down his spine. He nodded again. "You are dismissed." He finished coolly, returning to the tax records in front of him.

"Thank you sir." He murmured quietly before slipping out of the study. God, it all sucked so badly.

_Hermione_

Chaperoning Draco and Astoria's dates was like yanking out her fingernails. She spent the entire process vaguely nauseous and in pain. It sucked ass to see her Alpha on a date with someone else and she so wanted it to be so painful and awkward as possible but she also definitely didn't want Astoria to crash and burn. The engagement was so important to the other girl and these dates going well would be the only way to make Astoria happy. She really honestly wanted the other girl to be happy. She had decided she was going to bring a book and she was going to sit away from the table and just hope her presence made both of them more comfortable. She kind of doubted it.

Draco was waiting when she arrived. She grabbed the chair and pulled it back, careful to keep her distance.

"I had a talk with my father this morning." Draco announced quietly, careful not to look at her in case Astoria arrived sooner than expected.

"How'd that go?" She asked, keeping her tone cool in case they were overheard.

"Terrible. If Astoria doesn't start feeling my interest I get cut off." He snapped, disgusted.

"Then you need to start showing interest in her." He scoffed. "You do just fine when it's me." She reminded him.

"That's because you're more interesting than dry toast." He offered nicely.

"That's harsh. She's very sweet." She defended. Astoria was incredibly nice and genuine, and very likable, definitely not toast like.

"So far she has either talked incessantly, not said a word, or snorted tea on me." He listed.

"You're still not over the tea?" She asked in exasperation. It was time to move on.

"Okay I'm not over the tea." He admitted.

"Get over the tea." She ordered. He sighed.

"You realize how ridiculous this is, don't you?" He asked with a sarcastic chuckled.

"What?" She demanded. They didn't have time for that.

"You, my omega, are encouraging me to flirt more successfully with another girl who is also your boss." He said fondly.

"Okay, we're ridiculous. That doesn't change the fact that you need to do it." She reminded him, shrugging off the urge to laugh, or cry.

"How bad is that gonna hurt?" He asked, finally looking at her. She didn't know what he meant. "Watching me charm your best friend, because I will do it and I can do it, but I want to make sure
"You're ready to watch it." He was looking at her inflexibly, all she could do was look away. "It's gonna suck I know that, it still needs to happen." She answered, avoiding the question. She didn't like that he knew she'd feel jealous, but they both knew it was the reality. "Come here." He said gently. "We can't." She shook her head. She wanted to curl up in his lap badly, but they couldn't risk it. "I mean it in the most literal terms, come sit at the table." He patted the table top gently. "I shouldn't." Hermione shook her head. "You should, because I want you to remember that I would much rather it was just the two of us and the only reason I'm going to be able to do this with a straight face is because I'm going to be picturing you." He said sweetly. He was such a sap, fuck him. Okay maybe she liked it. "Oh… okay. What will we tell Astoria?" She asked uncertainly as she pulled her chair up to the table, carefully sitting exactly in between "Trust me. Just jump in once or twice when she stalls or talks too much. She won't question a thing." He suggested, smirking. "How do you know that she'll make a mistake?" She asked, offended on Astoria's behalf. "She'll make a mistake." He assured smugly. Astoria arrived in a flutter of skirts and the click of her heels on cobblestone. Exactly four minutes late. She was good at that. "Mione!" She chimed as if she was surprised. Hermione stood and hugged the other girl just the same as she greeted her with a kiss on each cheek. "Draco." She greeted with equal excitement. Draco smiled, having stood already and bowed low. Astoria curtsied. "You look stunning, truly." He told her. Astoria turned bright pink. "Thank you." She murmured before slowly taking her seat. Draco pushed in her chair before sitting himself. Hermione cracked open her book, very careful not to look at either of them as the waiters arrived to serve lunch. She wasn't getting food, not that she'd really expect to, but she was just hoping that her stomach wouldn't start grumbling. As the plates clicked down, Astoria and Draco lapsed into silence until Draco suddenly snorted violently. She looked up in surprise. He was chuckling to himself as he leaned back into his chair. "Are you alright?" Astoria asked and her eyes flicked to Hermione. Hermione shrugged. She had no idea what was going on either. "Sorry, I just have recently developed a fondness for apricots." He explained to the very tense girl. Hermione felt all of the blood rush to her face, as she stared at the plates on the table. Their starter was a lovely apricot and couscous salad, very light, very delicious. "And that's funny to you?" Astoria asked, a little confused, a little horrified.
"Ironic's always funny to me." Draco announced with a smirk.

"What's ironic about it?" Astoria asked.

"Just the timing that's all." Draco laughed again. Astoria's eyebrows crinkled together and her lips pursed.

"Are you alright Hermione? You look a little flushed." Astoria asked, turning to the other girl to avoid dealing with what was definitely a confusing interaction from her end.

"I think the heat may just be getting to me." She lied, fanning her face with her hand to make her point.

"Mmm, you should be careful. Not all of us can take the heat." Draco advised, mischief in his eyes clear as day, that snake.

"I'll take that into consideration Lord Malfoy." She answered dryly.

"That's my father, if you're to be my new chaperone you should just call me Draco, simplify it all." He offered, that asshole.

"If you insist." She answered and she was pretty sure that she felt her eye twitch.

"Mione's very firm about her formalities." Astoria teased, and good, that was actually good, they were bonding. I mean sure, they were bonding over making fun of her, but they were bonding.

"What a disappointment, and here I was hoping that things could finally become less formal between us?" He flicked his eyes down, pointedly taking in the younger girl's body. Hermione felt a little sick and went back to her book.

"Why Draco, you're making me blush. You're so forward today." Astoria tittered. Hermione gagged a little bit.

"Well, I couldn't exactly be as open as I wanted to be in front of your mother now could I?" Draco smirked. He sounded sincere. He sounded as if he was trying to get into Astoria's knickers, but he sounded like he wanted to get into them. It wasn't exactly comforting that her alpha was such a good liar.

"Wow." Astoria sat back, blinking. She had been successfully shocked out of all of her training. It pissed Hermione off on a whole different level to know that Draco could've salvaged these dates way earlier, he just hadn't bothered to try.

"I'm sorry if I'm too forward." Draco backpedaled slightly, only for show.

"No, it's refreshing. Someone's finally being upfront with me." Astoria admitted, leaning forward.

"I'm afraid that's all of that kind of candor that I'm okay with you sharing, or I'll have to cut this meeting short." Hermione cut off Draco's coming answer. He smirked.

"Then I'll have to try another." Draco offered, carefully not taking his eyes off of Astoria's, she blushed. "It was quite entertaining watching you at the party a few nights ago. You had all of those lords around your delicate little finger you know."

"I wouldn't attribute that to my charm, but to your reputation. It precedes you." Astoria redirected, and then took a bite of a piece of apricot. She was careful to only take one bite for every two that
Draco took, it wouldn't do to look like she did such lowly things as get hungry

"I hope that's a good thing." Draco teased, and that, that sounded genuine. Fuck him.

"It's a very good thing." Astoria agreed, very, very carefully sipping her tea and looking up at him from under her eyelashes. Hermione really wanted that tea to come out of her nose right about now. As if on cue, sensing her anger, a hand found its way onto Hermione's thigh. She was very careful not to look underneath the table but from the way the rather large hand was tracing what felt like an M over the fabric of her skirt she was pretty sure of whose hand it was. She felt herself blush, and okay maybe he wasn't that much of an asshole. She wasn't quite confident that he was only picturing her as he used this charm, but at least she had the knowledge that'd she'd be the bird he was snogging pretty shortly, and really was it so bad that that was all she could hope for? At least, at least she got to be happy this summer, even if it only was one summer. She'd worry about it all later she decided as Draco and Astoria continued chatting. She'd worry about it all after, when she had to. But right now, the sun was warm and the flowers smelled lovely and Draco's hand was warm on her thigh. For now, it was okay.

... "Oh Mione, that was amazing!" Astoria gushed the moment Draco left. She was smiling so genuinely and so happily that it almost eased the ache in the pit of Hermione's stomach.

"Yeah, it seems like you guys are really getting on." Hermione offered. Astoria blushed.

"That was the first time he's been like that. Mione, do you think he's really, actually interested in me?" Astoria asked, so much hope on her face.

"I can't imagine anyone who wouldn't be." Hermione answered honestly. Astoria giggled, before taking the slave's hand in her own and pulling her to her feet.

"C'mon, we have to tell Daph, she'll be so happy for me!" Astoria predicted eagerly. Hermione sort of doubted it, but she couldn't bring herself to crush that hope. It was amazing how delicate and fragile hope was, how precious and rare of a commodity, and as with most things, those who had it just kept amassing it, and those without just had to make do with what they had.
The Other Other Woman and Other Secrets

Draco

The woosh of the floo disturbed Draco's brief peace and quiet. He looked up quickly, straighten for his relaxed position on the couch. It was a good thing he did too, because it was highly important that he saw the slim brunette step out of his fireplace.

"Excuse me?" Draco choked out as Pansy brushed dust off of her navy blue dress. Pansy had brown hair so dark it was nearly black that hung pin straight around her face whenever she wore it loose, which was whenever she could get away with it.

"How are you, Draco?" She asked, totally unfazed as she settled onto his couch as if she had been invited.

"Fine. Why are you here?" He spit out. She rolled her eyes.

"What? Can't visit a friend?" She smirked, and they were both aware that friend wasn't the most accurate descriptor they could use.

"I'm getting engaged Pansy." He reminded her. He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. He was getting a headache.

"So?" She rolled her eyes, her smirk still intact as she leaned forward, very deliberately showing off cleavage.

"I'm not interested." He clarified, carefully focusing on keeping his eyes on her face. What could he say, he was human.

"When have you ever not been interested?" She scoffed, resting her hands on his knees. He brushed them off.

"I'm not now." He insisted, shaking his head.

"I don't believe you." She laughed and bit her lower lip, creeping her hands up his thighs. Normally he'd be thinking about how quickly he could get her out of her dress at this point. Now he was thinking about how pissed Hermione would be if she wandered in right about now.

"Go somewhere else if you're looking for that. I'm not interested." He repeated, grabbing her hands and deliberately putting them on her lap. She huffed.

"It's a girl isn't it?" She smirked, carefully studying him. He rolled his eyes.

"Yes, my fiancée." He lied.

"I love Daph like a sister Draco, but even I know that Astoria doesn't hold anyone's attention for long, let only someone as interesting as you." That seductive glint was creeping back into her eyes.

"What can I say? There's more to her than it seems." Like her handmaiden.

"You're really clinging to this. That means at least some of it is the truth, but it's not Astoria." She studied him like a snake and it made him deeply uncomfortable at the scrutiny. "It's someone else." She grinned, like a shark circling. "Who is it?"
"No comment." He snapped, knowing she wouldn't give it up unless he gave her something.

"Even for little old me?" She teased, her voice light and flirtatious.

"No comment." He repeated.

"Who would've thought it, Draco Malfoy, loyal." She leaned back in surprised, laughing to herself.

"Is that such a crime?" He asked lightly.

"No. I only wish it had been for me." She teased, smiling what might've been Pansy's genuine smile. He wasn't sure if he had ever seen it before.

"Yeah… never would've happened." He shook his head, cringing.

"Ouch." Pansy flinched, faking the hurt, he was pretty sure.

"No it's just…” He shook his head, trying to explain in a gentle way.

"Loyalties gotta go two ways, I know." She laughed, taking the words out of his mouth.

"Are you saying you would've settled down for me?" He teased.

"Never!" She laughed, recoiling at the thought. "And you would've made a terrible cuckold." She teased.

He rolled his eyes, "that's true, yes."

"Must be some girl." Pansy sighed, leaning back.

"She is." He smiled. A brief flicked of something passed through Pansy's eyes, something like jealousy.

"Will I ever get to meet her?" She asked.

"Probably not." Draco answered, and yeah, Pans could be a spiteful bitch, even if they were only friends, there was no telling what she'd do to Hermione, just on principle.

"My loss." She smiled ruefully. She stretched, and he caught a whiff of the false omega pheromone perfume she favored. Lots of lords resented female betas, so she masked it, but more importantly, now his room would smell like sweetened banana.

His door crashing open made them both jump, but neither was that surprised when Blaise stood in the doorway.

"Pans!" He greeted pleasantly with excitement. "Sorry if I'm interrupting but I'm not leaving. You're welcome to continue with an audience, I know you like that Pans." He mocked, settling in at the bar and pouring him a drink. Draco gave him a dry look. "Oh yeah, I forgot Draco's a prude." Pans scoffed, Blaise turned to her in surprise.

"Please, just because his tastes aren't quite as ostentatious as yours doesn't mean that he's exactly vanilla. You'd be surprised." She winked at Draco and he rolled his eyes. Blaise gave him an affronted look that clearly meant that he wanted details, not that he'd get them.

He and Pans had experimented a lot after that first time and Draco had learned a lot about women. He wasn't in a place where he'd want to repeat the experience but he could acknowledge it helped
him figure out a lot of shit. He wasn't the bumbling idiot in bed he had been then, and now he
certainly knew his way around some of the less vanilla things you could do in bed, if his partner
wanted that is. He wondered for a moment if Hermione wanted and then realize he probably
shouldn't be thinking about Hermione tied up in his bed with polite company, if Blaise and Pansy
could be considered that.

"I don't buy it." Blaise scoffed. Draco smirked, just to rub it in.

"You're not supposed to, gentlemen should be the epitome of discretion, after all." Draco mocked,
winking at Pansy. She laughed.

"Don't get your knickers in a twist Blaise. You were a fabulous lover." Pansy placated the pouting
Italian. Draco rolled his eyes. He had heard too many recounts to still be squeamish but he still didn't
really like hearing about his oldest friends sleeping together. "Beside Draco's found a bird and I'm
lonely." She simpered, making eyes at him. Draco rolled his eyes again. Blaise cleared his throat
uncomfortably.

"Probably not the best plan at the moment." Blaise cringed. Pansy huffed.

"You too?" She snapped.

"What?" Blaise stuttered, and wow Draco had never seen him stutter before.

"You found yourself a pretty little omega to settle down with?" She demanded, staring Blaise down.

"Woah, I never said anything about her presentation." Draco pointed out.

"Of course she's an omega, you've got a domination streak a mile wide" Pansy accused waving him
out, he was about to stutter out some sort of brilliant reply when she rounded back on Blaise, "and so
do you, so fess up, who is it?"

Blaise looked at Draco, terror in his eyes. Draco shook his head quickly.

"No comment." Blaise answered firmly, crossing his arms. Pansy huffed and rose quickly.

"Fine, you two are no fun, guess I have to settle for Theo again." She rolled her eyes with vague
disgust, and that was a little harsh. Theo was a part of their friend group too, even if he could be a
little skeevy.

"Do what you want Pans, we know you will anyways." Draco suggested. She rolled her eyes.

"True, but hey, a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do. We have needs you know." She winked as she
slid back into the floo and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"She could rule the world if she wanted to." Blaise announced.

"Well, you're not wrong." Draco agreed. "But I think she prefers the cloak and dagger act."

"Why take the heat when you can just pull the strings?" Blaise ruminated, taking a swig from his
forgotten scotch glass.

"Dude, it's two o'clock in the afternoon." Draco reminded him.

"My arse was pink this morning. I need it." Blaise insisted, and okay, Draco didn't have a rebuttal for
that.
Hermione was bringing Astoria's shopping list to Lavender, who did the trips to the market when she caught sight of Draco in the hallway. There were too many witnesses around so she carefully kept her eyes down as she passed, just in time to see the tiny slip of paper in his palm. He carefully slipped it into her hand, so quickly the casual passerby would just see an unintentional hand brush. She found herself smiling as she ducked into the girl's lavatory. There was a smile on her face as she uncurled the tiny slip of paper and she grinned even more when she read the neat, loopy letters. *Our spot in the garden, four?* Astoria would be at tea with her parents for at least three hours, which was undoubtedly why Draco had chosen it.

When she emerged from the ladies room she wasn't entirely surprised to see Draco loitering a little ways down the hallway, peering out the window as if something was utterly fascinated. He glanced towards her and she nodded, almost imperceptibly. She blushed as she turned away, feeling that happily little flutter in her stomach that she had worried had gone away entirely. She hurried away to catch Lavender, anxiously waiting for the next hour to tick away.

When she finally found the tiny pond Draco had shown her Draco was already there. He bounded to her, cupping her face and sweeping her into a sweet kiss. She felt a little giddy as she looped her arms around his neck. He pulled back slowly and she grinned up at him.

"How are you?" He asked, something like concern on his features.

"I'm... I'm really really good." She answered honestly. He just grinned back. That's when she caught sight of a weird flash of iridescent blue. "Wait, is that a..." She picked up the tiny feather, and peered at it closely, surprised when she caught sight of the iconic eye symbol.

"Is this what I think it is?" She asked him, raising it up for his inspection. He was entirely unfazed.

"Yeah, one of the peacocks most've dropped it, normally the gardeners pick them up but I guess they missed that one." he shrugged.

"You have peacocks." She said slowly, not fully comprehending the fact that Draco was keeping gorgeous, exotic, fascinating birds wandering around his gardens and she hadn't seen them or known about it.

"I have peacocks." He confirmed, a tiny smile peeking at the corners of his mouth. Oh good, he found her amusing.

"Why wasn't I aware of the peacocks?" She demanded testily.

"Lord Greengrass doesn't like them, calls them blue rats." He explained with a shrug.

"Can I see them?" She asked slowly because clearly he wasn't getting the importance of this. She had never seen a peacock. She had never seen any exotic anything outside of a book and she sure as hell wanted to see one now.

"You really want to see the peacocks?" He asked skeptically, and wasn't that just like him.

"I want to see the peacocks. Why wouldn't I want to see the peacocks?" She demanded.

"Who cares about peacocks?" He shrugged, as if massive, royal blue birds with some of the most impressive coloring in nature were utterly unremarkable.
"Me!" She snapped.

"Do you not have peacocks?" He asked, bewildered. She was going to start screaming soon.

"Why would I have peacocks?" She asked, exasperated.

"I have peacocks." He answered as if that was explanation enough.

"Why do you have peacocks?" She asked for the first time, wondering what their purpose could be if the occupants of the manor seemed totally uninterested in it.

"Why wouldn't I have peacocks?" He asked as if it was perfectly normal. She closed her eyes, pinched her nose and gave up.

"Draco, show me the goddamn peacocks." She demanded. He shrugged.

…

They were standing in a tiny shed, facing two covered cages when Draco finally stopped. He gestured at the heavy black cover as if it explained everything.

"Why are they in the dark?" She asked.

"They make a terrible racket, unless they think it's night time, then they sleep." Draco explained easily, and Hermione wondered just how much time he spent around the keepers.

"Well then, maybe we shouldn't disturb them." She suggested.

"You're probably right." He admitted. She turned to walk away, and cringed. Yeah no, it wasn't called an insatiable curiosity for nothing.

"Wait just a peek, that won't hurt, right?" She asked. He shrugged.

"Go for it." He smiled and she felt a little bit like a naughty child whose parent was letting her break the rules, just this once. She yanked off the tarp, and immediately the blue bird poked his head up. He was sitting down, it's legs folded into himself. His long, show feathers were down, but they stretched out behind him, more gorgeous and delicate than any of Astoria's gowns. Her breath caught as she stared at him and she desperately wanted to touch, even though she knew better and the bars on the cage wouldn't allow even her tiny hand to slip through.

"He's beautiful." She whispered as she knelt to get a better look at him. He stood up, shaking his feathers slightly, clearly expecting to be let out.

"Yes, yes you are." Draco chimed in, kneeling beside her. She blushed violently and pushed him. He fell right into the pile of sawdust and feathers.

"Don't be such a sap." She chastised.

"Excuse me, that line has worked numerous times." He argued, getting to his feet and brushing off the dust.

"Unless It was followed with a stupify, I kind of doubt it." She teased.

"Now that's just rude." He scoffed, affronted.

"I don't want lines Draco, I'm a sure thing." She teased, he took her hand, pulling her too her feet. He
"Somehow I don't think you're using that expression quite right." He teased.

"Okay, you're right." She shrugged, and that blush just wouldn't leave her cheeks.

"About that" He started and trailed off, unsure.

"About what, Draco Malfoy?" She cut him off, adopting her most proper expression. He laughed and ran his hands along her upper arms in a soothing motion.

"An old friend dropped by, and I figured I should probably warn you." He shrugged, and now he was blushing a little bit.

"it wasn't just a friend, was it?" She asked, noticing the guilty set of his mouth. He was like a kid with his hand in a cookie jar, or in this case, up a skirt.

"Not in the most traditional of definitions, no." He admitted, cringing a little.

"Parkinson or Davis?" She asked dryly. She knew one of them would be stopping by eventually, had even warned Astoria about the exes.

"Excuse me?" He demanded.

"It's kind of my job to know everything about your love life, former and current." She reminded him. He cringed again, and that was kind of fun.

"Well then." He said, as if he wasn't quite sure what could come next.

"Listen, did anything happen?" She asked coolly, crossing her arms and stepping back so she could see his face better in the dim light of the shed.

"No, and I told her nothing was going to anytime soon." He assured her, a firm look on his face.

"Then there's nothing to worry about." She shrugged. If she got in a jealous tizzy about every girl who ever made a pass at Draco, she'd be exhausted within a week.

"Yeah?" He asked in surprise. He was still looking at her as if he expected her to have a freak out any moment.

"Yeah." She agreed.

"While we're on the subject, is there anything that I should know about your Bulgarian friend?" He asked sternly. She jumped a little with surprise.

"Of course not, Victor's just a friend." She scoffed, even the idea of going back down that road… ridiculous.

"Is that all he ever was?" Draco asked, his expression serious.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" She teased, making her way out of the shed with one last reluctant glance at the peacocks before covering them.

"C'mon, you know all about my past, it's only fair." He pleaded as he followed.

"You really want to have this conversation?" She asked, rounding on him.
"Yes, I really want to have this conversation." He answered, crossing his arms and looking down at her with a stern expression.

"You sure?" She asked him. She really didn't want to do this.

"I think you're trying to dodge this, you're embarrassed. Though I can't for the life of me say why, if you really know all my dirty laundry." He pushed, the last part slightly joking. He really didn't think she knew. Maybe this would be fun after all.

"All joking aside, there's not a lot to tell." She admitted, shrugging even as the blush crept up her face.

"Really? I kind of doubt that." He pushed, his expression eager, and oh that wasn't a good thing.

"I had a fling with Viktor, years ago, and a very, very brief tryst with Ron Weasley, but that's it, that's all there is to it." She offered nonchalantly, her experience wasn't impressive. She was sure he thought her no more womanly than a child, and he wouldn't be far off.

"Are you a virgin?" He pressed, noticing that she left that tiny little detail out. She blushed some more. Most girls took pride in their virtue, at least noble girls, but at this moment Hermione desperately wished she wasn't a bumbling, unattractive idiot.

"How is that any of your business?" She snapped, stubbornly choosing to ignore the question.

"So you are." He concluded, grinning like a pleased cat.

"Well, we both know you're not." She pivoted, going on attack.

"How would you know that, I mean for sure? Rumors lie sometimes you know." He covered quickly. She rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, but I've seen you in action." She teased, cringing a little at the awkward memory.

"WHAT?" Draco nearly shouted, absolutely shocked, and that, that was a little bit of a surprise.

"Please, Draco, you're not sneaky in the least." She laughed at his outrage. You don't shag girls in every corner of the castle and not expect at least a few people to walk in at one time or another.

"I don't believe you." He shook his head stubbornly.

"The blonde against the wall in the north wing, the red head on her back in the library…" She ticked off easily and Draco turned bright red.

"Okay, you can stop now." He asked, cringing. He closed his eyes and turned around, groaning as he pulled at his hair. "Would it help if I said that I'm different now?" He asked timidly as he turned to face her again.

"Don't worry about it. It's your past, I won't judge you on yours if you don't judge me on mine." She offered, shrugging. Fresh starts were what made the most sense.

"Your past is impeccable." He said in exasperation. She scoffed because wasn't that the most ridiculous thing that she had ever heard.

"Do you really think I've never done things I'm not proud of? I panted after Ron Weasley for starters." She offered, and wasn't that a humilitating time in her life.
"Really? That buffoon?" He asked in surprise, scrutinizing her as if he could find evidence of some hex that would cause such a terrible mistake.

"What happened to the no judging thing?" She demanded rubbing her eyes.

"Okay, okay… but really? What was the appeal?" He continued, like a dog with a bone.

"He treated me like a human, and he was the first boy that wasn't like a brother to me who did that." She answered honestly and all of the wind came out of Malfoy's sails.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it. Like I said, it's the past." She shrugged, reassuring him even as she nestled into the comfort of his arms.

"You're human, in fact you're worth twice as much as most of us." He whispered. It all seemed ridiculous to her. She shook her head but didn't argue, and they stayed like that, wrapped in each other even as the air started to grow cold around them. Eventually she pulled back and he lifted her chin. He kissed her forehead gently before taking her hand and walking back towards the castle.

"We should head back, the bugs will be coming out soon."

"Mmmhmm."

"You know what I think?" He said suddenly.

"What?" She said, shaking her head, even though all of his antics still seemed charming, despite it all.

"I think that you should come to my room tonight, it's about time my lovely little student had another lesson, huh?" He suggested, that dangerous look flickering in his silver eyes.

"I suppose so. I must say my only tutors growing up were a woman and a man who was less than four feet tall, so you are by far the most attractive teacher I've ever had." She informed him, grinning.

"I'm glad to hear it." He smirked.

"I should go." She told him reluctantly.

"Then go." He suggested. Neither of them moved. Weren't they a couple of idiots?

"Draco! I know you're in there!" A severe voice shrieked.

"Bellatrix." Hermione found herself saying even as everything screeched to a stop.

"Wait here." Draco ordered, in his panic his voice had a tiny hint of alpha power behind it. It was enough. She froze even as she felt him tap her head and the disillusionment charm cascaded down her body like a cracked egg.

"Bella!" She heard Draco say in the distance. They couldn't have been more than a few hedges away. "What a surprise!"

"Well I was just leaving Draco, and I couldn't do that without saying goodbye to my favorite nephew, now could I?"
"I'm your only nephew." He remind her, and even in her frozen state Hermione had to chuckle at that.

"Yes, yes, that's true." Bellatrix agreed loftily.

"Look after that little omega and train her well dear, they can be flighty things." She advised, and then there was the telltale pop of her apparating away. Hermione could hear the crunching of branches as Draco hurried back to her. The moment he reenter the clearing he seemed to realize what went wrong.

"Shit. I didn't mean to do that, do whatever you want." He took back the original order and she relaxed, suddenly able to breathe fully again. He tapped her head gently once again, and the spell disappeared, leaving her fully visible again.

"You told her about me!" She demanded, ignoring the accidental order because shit happens

"Yeah, just to protect you, so she wouldn't go after you again." He explained urgently, sensing her anger. Bellatrix fucking Lestrange should never know her business.

"When were you going to tell me about this?" She asked tightly, trying not to flip out. It was always better to approach mistakes with understanding she reminded herself, quoting a self-help book about leadership that Minerva had made her read once upon a time. Draco cringed.

"Never isn't the right answer, correct?" He checked.

"Correct." She agreed, gritting out the answer through her teeth.

"Eventually isn't much better, right." He guessed.

"No, not much." She concurred.

"Does sorry work?" He asked carefully.

"Sorry would work." She nodded.

"I'm sorry. Next time I'll ask?" He suggested.

"Asking would be a good start yeah." She offered.

"Sorry, I'm new to the whole relationship thing." He said with a grimace. She sighed with the reminder.

"Me too, it's okay. We'll figure it out together I guess." She shrugged. He nodded and mirrored her shrug.

"So tonight?" He asked carefully.

"Yes, I'll see you tonight." She answered. She looked up at him seriously and it suddenly struck her how ridiculous they both were. She laughed at herself as she started to walk away.

"What's so funny?" He called after her as she left the garden. She just shook her head and laughed as she slipped back into the manor and back into reality.
Hermione had served Astoria her whole life. When she was a toddler, they had been playmates. As she had grown up she had learned to do little things, brush her hair, help her into her dress. They had even shared baths for a short period and then Hermione was old enough and the temporary maid retired and left Hermione in charge at just eleven. Hermione took on larger and more difficult duties. Nowadays, she'd did everything for Astoria and at the moment that included a bath. She sat on a stool behind the other girl as she soaked, the water thick with different scent oils and bubbles, all designed to complement her pineapple scent.

"What do you think Draco will be like?" She asked, her voice dreamy.

"What do you mean?" She asked, scrubbing her long locks thoroughly. Astoria sighed happily, she always did like a long, hot bath. Hermione didn't get that type of privilege. Her baths were cold with harsh soaps that burned in a tiny tub that she couldn't properly stretch her legs out in. She always had to rush because someone else was always in need of the tub after her. There was never enough time, or soap to feel really clean.

"In bed." Astoria clarified. Her tone was carefully cool but her ears were turning pink from the strength of her blush. Hermione sputtered.

"How would I know?" She asked, grabbing the rinse bucket in a hurry to hide her face. Astoria tilted her head back as Hermione ran the cool water over her head, letting the suds slide off.

"You know more about these things than I do!" Astoria protested, still blushing violently.

"I only know theory. I couldn't possibly guess about Draco's tastes." Okay, she probably could, but Astoria definitely didn't need to know that.

"But do you think I'll be good enough?" Astoria asked timidly.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked gently as she chased the rest of the soap out of Astoria's hair.

"I know that he's had other women, sluts of course, like Parkinson, but I'm sure they were good in bed, even if they were whores." Astoria explained harshly, the disgust in her tone evident. Hermione found herself flinching even though she knew the hatred wasn't directed at her, knowingly of course. "Hell, he probably has one in his bed now."

"I doubt that." Hermione blurted before she could stop herself, too irritated with the image to hold back.

"How do you mean?" Astoria asked curiously, starting to turn. Hermione turned her back quickly. Astoria couldn't see her face and it was best if they kept it that way.

"He seems enraptured with you, I doubt he's wasting his time on anyone else with your impending engagement." Hermione explained airily. No, only a fool would be with Draco now. A real idiot. Like her.

"I just want to be good enough." Astoria murmured and Hermione had the feeling that they weren't talking about sex anymore.
"Me too." She whispered under her breath. Astoria didn't answer and they lapsed into silence as she finished rinsing off and got out. Hermione bundled her in towels, drying her off, and then dressed her in her slip. Astoria slid into bed and Hermione was reminded of just how innocent the girl was as she pink out from under the light pink silk sheets.

"Good night, Mione." Astoria murmured as she moved to the door.

"Good night Tori." She whispered, closing the door behind her with a sigh.

Draco

Hermione crashed into Draco's room, a whirl of taupe fabric and brown hair. She had worn it down the last few days, hiding the mark, his mark. It wasn't a proper mark, not the bound seal he yearned to see on her skin, but it was his mark nonetheless, and he liked thinking about it being there. He had every intention of putting more on her soon but today was definitely not the day.

He was lounging on his couch with a good book, she was not quite so relaxed. She looked frantic and harried and desperately in need of relaxing. He could do that. He could definitely do that. The trick was just getting her to agree to it.

Hermione

"How are you?" Draco asked coolly, as if he already knew the answer, and she had a feeling that he did.

"Stressed." She admitted warily. She wasn't used to this bit, the being able to confide in other people thing. She had always had Harry and Gin but they all tried not to complain, as they were all in the same boat. Most of the time they brushed it off with callous jokes and sarcastic remarks. She wasn't used to people inquiring after her health.

"What's bothering you?" He asked gently, leaning forward and studying her as if he could find the answer in bumps and bruises rather than a much less physical scar.

"This." She admitted honestly, gesturing between them. "I just, it just makes me so nervous all of the time and I want, I need to feel wanted, not like your dirty little secret." She admitted, the words falling out of her mouth without her permission, but they rang true all the same.

"That's not what you are to me." He insisted, the tiny hint of outrage present in his eyes.

"With that clause that's all I can be." She reminded him.

"There's no guarantee that this engagement will go through and even if it does, that won't be for months, and remember, we agreed to focus on the here and now, not what may be coming." He pushed, standing to take her hands in his.

"I…" She stuttered.

"You worry too much. Let me take care of it okay." He assured, tucking a loose lock of hair behind her ear. "Will you trust me?" He asked cautiously, his eyes showed his nervous even if the rest of him seemed confident.

"Okay…" She agreed timidly, not sure where this was going.

"I know you hate your biology and we've spent the last few weeks trying to learn how to resist it." He started, and okay, he had definitely been thinking about this since before she came in.
"Yes?" She asked because he sure as hell better get on with it asap. He was drumming his finger tips on his thighs nervously. Hmmm, he had definitely been planning this speech for a while.

"But you can use it to your own advantage." He finished, and there it was, that little glimmer of pride because he knew it was working.

"Uh huh?" She tentatively encouraged him to continue.

"I can send you under, make you feel good. Not have to think for a bit." He finally suggested. The suggestion made her nerves ratchet up another level, and her adrenaline started coursing through her, but she found another part of her willing to do whatever he asked, and wow, wasn't that a little scary.

"And…" She pushed, knowing there had to be a trick; she didn't get offers like this.

"I'll be here the whole time and I won't put you fully under, just skirting the edges. Think of it as meditation." He finished, grinning. Merlin help her she wanted to say yes.

"Okay." She answered nervously.

"No pressure. Only if you want." He checked carefully, and okay, she wasn't used to people caring about what she wanted, let alone double checking to be sure she had made up her mind, but she wasn't a hundred percent sure that she was comfortable yet.

"I said okay." She snapped. He only smiled, seeing through her cornered animal act. God he pissed her off with that stupid arrogant smile and that stupid, effortlessly disheveled blond hair, and his stupid perfect jawline, and he was just stupid.

"Okay." He grinned triumphantly.

"Where do you want me?" She asked, resting her hands on her hips, not that she was using power posturing to convince her body that she wasn't nervous. She had absorbed some of the self help book Minerva made her read, after all it couldn't hurt.

"Sit down." He said first, but when she made a move for the couch, he shook his head and sat down in his chair. "Here." He gestured to the spot by his feet. The part of her that was wary about all of this thought it was ridiculous to have her sitting at his feet, barbaric. The part of her that so desperately wanted to submit was jumping up and down with joy.

"You want me with my head near your crotch, such a surprise." She snapped smarmily, even as she settled down between his legs, facing away from him.

"I swear I will not take your virtue, not unless you ask, no matter how much you smell like apricot." He promised, running his fingers through her hair.

"I still don't buy that." She snapped, even as she felt the fight draining out of her with each of his cherishing touches.

"I'll prove it to you later." He teased gently in a fond voice.

"You will not be proving anything." She corrected primly. He laughed.

"Fine, just sit down and relax." He conceded, keeping up that gentle motion through her hair.

Her head rested against his thigh as her eyes drifted shut.

"This is very compromising." She murmured, no heat to her words.
"You're not even facing the right way." He chuckled.

"Oh would you prefer that I turn around?" She asked, adopting an affronted tone. He laughed again.

"Of course." He cleared his throat. "But that is not what is happening right now. This about you needing to relax."

"Fine." He pushed her hair back again as she leaned further into him.

"Just take some deep breaths for me. Just breathe." She followed his instructions warily, focusing on filling her lungs completely as her eyes slipped closed again.

"Keep breathing for me." He ordered, though he didn't put any power behind it. "Now I want you to do something for me, and it's going to feel a little strange but you'll feel good when you do it." She tensed warily, but his calming voice continued. "I want you to picture a pool of oil right at your navel." She still felt skeptical, but did as instructed. "And I want you to take another deep breath in and when you do that oil will spill out, sliding down your skin. It won't feel sticky or greasy just silky smooth and perfectly warm. Once you've filled your lungs completely I want you to hold your breath as the oil lingers on your skin, picture it traveling from your navel up to your neck and down to your tones, caressing you." Just when it felt she couldn't hold her breath any longer his voice broke the silence again. "Okay now I want you to let it out, slowly, and when you do picture the oil retreating to that warm pool, but it leaves your skin feeling soft and warm and soft. " She did as instructed and felt her body relax pleasantly. "Keep the cycle going, let the warm, silky oil coast over your skin." She imagined it and with each deep breath she felt herself relax a little bit more each time. She could feel her arousal rising but that seemed to be a distant, secondary thing. She just felt relaxed. She didn't have to think; she just had to listen to her alpha. There was something freeing in that reality, in that steadiness. The hand in her hair dipped to her neck, drawing soft circles on the surface. His touch wasn't firm enough to send her under but it felt so good, better than anything had the right to. At least nothing that wasn't overtly sexual. It was fucking perfect.

He started pressing harder, working out the knots on her neck and shoulders and she kept picturing that oil spilling and retreating. Her body felt heavy as she sunk into him and her mind fell quiet. She didn't need to worry about anything, she just had to listen to Alpha. That's all. It was so freeing, submitting to his will, totally and completely. She slipped into silence, everything going quiet and still. Everything was blissfully quiet and she let it all slip away, except for the feeling of the oil and Alpha's touch.

"Good girl." He murmured, and the praise slid through the syrupy fog. She remembered floating in the pond beside him, and this felt kind of like that, except every nerve ending in her body was telling her that she was surrounded in soft, plush warmth. It was bliss.

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_Draco_

Hermione sunk further and further into him, her head using his thigh like a pillow. Since the first time she had gone under he had done some more research, had pulled every book in the library that even referenced O Space in order to study it. He found chapter after chapter about omegas struggling to achieve it, and all the ways an alpha could help overcome this difficulty. He was lucky enough to have the most responsive omega in history sitting at his feet and he certainly wasn't going to take it for granted. He watched her closely. Her breathing was slow and if he didn't know better he would think that she was asleep. Every once in a while she would squirm, totally unaware of it, and burrow farther into him or squeeze her legs together. Okay, maybe there was the possibility of this meditation increasing arousal but he wasn't going to act on it. She made him horny often enough and he never
complained. To be fair, most of the time she had no idea that she was doing it. He could probably get
away with pleading the fifth on this one too.

He waited about an hour, letting her hover just at the top layers of O Space. If he wanted to have her
slip any farther down, he'd probably have to throw in the tiniest hint of pain, the good kind of course,
or a boatload of pleasure, or more simply, an alpha command or two. He'd save that for next time, for
now, she had to come up.

He lifted her chin gently and guided her straight with her shoulders. She was still so relaxed that it
was like move a rather soft doll, no resistance at all. He stood, carefully and awkwardly stepping
around her until he was away from the chair and facing her. He knelt down and lifted her chin
gently. Her eyes slowly opened but they were totally glazed over.

"Time to come up babe." He whispered to her. She shook her head minutely. "I know, I know, but I
need you to come up. You're such a good girl, so good for me. It's time to come up sweetheart. I've
got you." He watched her slowly start to come up nervously. She rolled her neck lazily and squirmed
a little. "I know you can't get up but I want you to be comfortable and warm when you come all the
way up babe, okay?" She made a soft sound in the back of her throat that was probably agreement.
He'd go with it. He lift her quickly, scooping her up behind her knees. She was light, even lighter
than he was expecting, but he could feel that she had ditched the corset around her waist before she
came, smart girl. He carried her towards the couch at first and scowled at it for a moment before
finally leading her to his room. He laid her gently on the bed before lying down beside her. She
snuggled into him immediately. He petted her hair gently.

"Good girl, c'mon, it's time to come back to me, okay? You did so good. I'm so proud of you." He
murmured, her eyes had slipped closed again but they opened slowly. They were clearer than before,
nor clear enough but clearer. "That's a good girl. You're my perfect little omega but you need to
come up, okay?"

She nodded and the first hints of awareness crept into her.

"Al... Draco." She practically breathed, the relief in her voice clear. He pushed her crazy hair out of
her face gently.

"Good girl." He praised. Her eyes fluttered. "No, no none of that. You need to eat something." He
preached, calling crackers in from the other room. He caught them easily and broke them into little
pieces before grabbing the glass from his bedside table. He cast a quick aguamente and then put his
wand away, sitting them both up a little bit. "Here," He said, bring the piece of cracker up to her
mouth, she took it cautiously, chewing slowly. Next, he made her drink a few sips of water, all the
while never stopping praising her. Awareness slowly crept back into her until the dazed bliss
dissolved into a more common relaxed state. She cracked her neck, and then looked up at him with a
telltale smirk and he knew she was back with him.

"You've been studying." She declared, eyeing him as if she expected him to whip out another
unexpected secret.

"Didn't want to get caught unawares again." he teased, grinning. She cringed at the memory of their
first unfortunate mistake.

"Good. I appreciate it." She admitted and he had a feeling that that was as close to a thank you as he
would ever get. She was stubborn, charmingly so, but stubborn nonetheless.

"Speaking of, you should really stay the night, dropping is a terrifying thing." He reminded her,
gently pushing back her hair again.
"Is that really your only concern?" She pressed, eyeing him cautiously. He always sensed that horndog reputation would bite him in the arse at some point.

"Yes, I'd even offer to sleep on the couch but we both know that would defeat the purpose." He promised. He found himself doing that more and more often recently, and the strangest thing was that he meant every single one of them.

"Fine then, but no untoward behavior. I'm a lady you know." She reminded him with a smirk as she pulled the covers up over the two of them. He laughed.

"You my lovely little omega are no lady." He teased as he kick off his shoes and undid his belt, very deliberately leaving the rest on. What could he say, it wasn't the most comfortable way to sleep but he was willing to make a terrifying number of sacrifices to ensure her comfort. He was a fool that way.
Early Starts and Unfortunate Encounters

Hermione

She woke up in his bed, sleepy and perfectly relaxed. He was behind her, one arm around her waist while the other rested behind her head. It all felt hazy and soft in the early morning light. She felt sheltered and warm in his arms. She snuggled into his warmth, sheltering from the abnormally cool morning. Her body felt loose and relaxed and she felt better than she had in years. Draco smelled like a spring rain, like a new beginning, and she felt totally at peace.

A large slam sent them both rocketing out of bed. Hermione tried to tumble of the side, but the intruder was too quick, the door opening as she teetered on the edge. Draco sighed dramatically, the arm that had been reaching for her relaxed, even though the hand on his wand didn't even twitch.

"Blaise, get the fuck out." She groaned, flopping back into bed and tugging the sheet up to her neck. She wasn't exactly decent, no corset and all, and Blaise Zabini sure as hell wasn't going to see her like this.

"What a way to speak to your betters!" Blaise gasped over dramatically. She rolled her eyes.

"Get. Out." She repeated slowly. Blaise just smirked, crossing his arms as he leaned against the open doorway. He was in dark robes, distinctly rumpled but unfazed.

"I liked you better when you were meek." Blaise sneered eyeing her with distrust. She rolled her eyes again and turned over, burying her face in Draco's perfectly soft pillows.

"She was never meek." Draco argued, the voice was muffled by the sheet that he had pulled over his head, the coward.

Blaise scoffed.

"What time is it?" Hermione asked warily, if she had to get up right now she might just have to blow it off and face Minerva's wrath when it came.

"Five… ish?" Blaise shrugged.

"Why are you even awake?" Draco groaned dramatically, even as his arm reached around her waist.

"I never slept." Blaise shrugged, looking whatever the suave and aristocratic version of bored was.

"Why?" Hermione asked blearily. Sleep was good, very good, she wanted more of it herself.

"Don't ask." Draco and Blaise said in unison.

"Then why are you here?" Hermione demanded with a huff.

"I had a question to ask your girl." Blaise explained.

"Blaise, get the fuck out." Draco snapped, pulling her back into his arms. She went, reluctantly though not that reluctantly because he was warm and she liked warm almost as much as she liked sleep.

"No really… I'm pretty sure the bird existing to ruin my life is a servant and I'd bet you know who it is." Blaise guessed, stepping into her line of sight and meeting her eyes. She closed them very
deliberately and rolled over, facing Draco.

"Why would I know?" She asked casually, she pressed her cold nose to the soft cotton of his under shirt. She didn't necessarily remember him stripping off his out layers but she assumed that it happened at some point.

"Astoria's keeper, Minerva's trainee, you seem very tapped in." Blaise announced stubbornly. He was right but that didn't mean that she had to like it.

"Why did everyone but me know about that?" Draco asked, smoothing down her hair. She shrugged and ignored how nice that felt. This was all rather lovely actually, except for Blaise.

"You've been a little distracted." Blaise reminded him. Draco rolled his eyes.

"How do you know it's not Daphne?" She asked curiously, resting her head on Draco's chest.

"Too childish, plus I'm pretty sure that she doesn't give a damn." Blaise theorized.

"Well you're not wrong about the latter." She admitted, smiling.

"So who is it?" He pushed, as if she would or could answer. Ginny would murder her without hesitation.

"C'mon Blaise, she doesn't know who it is." Draco groaned, rubbing his eyes.

"Of course I know who it is." She corrected, a little affronted.

"Huh?" Draco stuttered.

"Like he said, I'm tapped in." She admitted. It was job to know everything that was going on, even if she wasn't succeeding so often lately.

"So who is it?" Blaise demanded firmly.

"I'm not telling." She rebutted firmly.

"What?" Blaise sputtered, absolutely shocked that she was refusing. Good, it was probably a very positive thing if Blaise Zabini heard "no" more often. That much she could agree with Ginny on totally.

"Mione, she's ruining the poor boy." Draco pleaded on his friends behalf and... yeah, not gonna work.

"You have your secrets, I have mine." She reminded him pointedly.

"Really?" Draco asked watching her with calculating eyes.

"Really." She nodded firmly.

"Fine." He shrugged, pressing a fond kiss to her hair.

"I could order you to tell me." Blaise threatened. Draco tensed.

"I'd eviscerate you." He threatened before gently running his fingers through Hermione's hair. Her eyes drifted shut.
"Drake!" Blaise whined like a small child being denied a sweet.

"Get out Blaise." Draco answered dryly, his eyes never leaving her.

"He calls you Drake?" Hermione observed, smirking a little. Draco rolled his eyes.

"You just noticed?" He asked in disbelief.

"I've been distracted." She answered, smiling at him.

"You two are disgusting." Blaise chimed in.

"You were not invited." Draco reminded him.

"No but apparently you'd be into that." Blaise sneered and whoa, it was way too early for that revelation. She wasn't even sure how she felt about that particular issue, and it definitely wouldn't be Blaise, that's for certain.

"Excuse me?" She demanded, leveling a stern glare at the blond. He rolled his eyes.

"Thanks Blaise." Draco groaned, the sarcasm dripped in the air.

"What the hell is he talking about?" Hermione questioned slowly. She wondered if she sounded as dangerous as she wanted to.

"Remember that secrets thing we were talking about?" He asked, grinning, the little shit. She felt her eyebrows shoot up her forehead.

"I have a sneaking suspicion that this secret should involve my input." She suggested.

"Oh definitely." Blaise chimed in very helpfully. He was just a super helpful person.

"Not yet, I'll let you know if it becomes an issue." He warned, kissing the top of her head again.

"I hate when you give directions like that." She complained half heartedly.

"You love it." He teased, laughing, and wow, yeah that was the L word, that word that they definitely shouldn't be talking about this early. Not that he was using it that way, he was just joking around, right?

"I do." She agreed too late with a grimace. Omega tendencies were a blast.

"And that would be my cue to leave." Blaise cringing, edging out.

"Wait! You do know that this isn't what it looks like right?" Hermione demanded, suddenly it was incredibly important that Blaise not think she and Draco slept together, not yet at least. Not that Blaise should be told the moment that they slept together, because that was none of his business. It was just, they hadn't, you know, done that yet. Not that they definitely would, she wasn't sure, she didn't know...

"Of course of course, you two just drifted off reading Bible passages to each other." Blaise suggested, smirking.

"Funny. And you can't tell anyone about this." She warned. Forget Draco, she would eviscerate Blaise himself if this got around.
"Trust me, I'm aware." Blaise assured her, shooting Draco a dark look, and okay, maybe she didn't have to give this speech after all. He finally left, slipping out the door, and Hermione settled in to at least try to get a few more hours of rest, if she couldn't get actual sleep, before she'd inevitably have to set off to accomplish her long list of things to do for that day. Oh, if only she could just stay here.

After a brief pit stop to her room, Hermione was hurrying to Astoria's when she had to skid to a stop in the middle of the hallway, faced with the terrifying duo of Lords Greengrass and Malfoy. She carefully kept her eyes trained to the ground as she dipped into a low curtsy.

"Go on." Lord Greengrass encouraged gently.

"Wait." The order came hard and fast and Hermione froze. Lucius circled her, studying her face with unnerving eyes. She carefully focused her gaze on his feet. Lord Greengrass cleared his throat, carefully drawing the attention back to himself.

"Tell me, Ezra, do you mark your slaves?" Lucius asked, his voice cold and clinical. She felt his wand lift her hair, as if he was expecting a painful brand burned into the back of her neck, as if the shackle on her wrist wasn't enough.

"No, I find that it makes resale more difficult. I prefer to keep it traditional, no tattoos." Ezra answered coolly. Lord Greengrass had always been more reserved, had never really interacted with Hermione for longer than necessary, but he was still a good man, still fair and honest.

"I see…but you really should consider piercings." Lucius pushed. Hermione had to focus very carefully on her breathing to keep from flinching.

"Oh?" Ezra answered coolly.

"A permanent reminder with beading and engravings to brand her as yours which can easily be transfigured if you want to sell her." Lucius explained, a terrifying kind of hunger in his tone.

"I see the appeal. I assume Nott has already implemented this." Ezra answered craftily.

"Of course, the man can't resist trends." Hermione could hear the grin in Lucius's voice. No one like Lord Nott.

"I guess I'll have to wait and see then, if the trend passes." Ezra replied noncommittally. At least Hermione could be mostly sure that she wasn't going to get pierced any time soon.

"The last girl I rented had one, it was very satisfying seeing the emerald green on her skin." Lucius shared lecherously. Hermione cringed against her will. Lucius paused his circle and she froze, very, very carefully staring at the floor and trying to think about nothing. Her very, very treacherous brain wouldn't let her let go of the idea that she might not totally mind wearing green sometime, for his son, for Lucius's almost engaged son. This was definitely not the time for those thoughts. What a trainwreck. "Consider it." Lucius advised. "You may go now." He instructed firmly. Hermione nodded and scurried away as fast as was socially acceptable.

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Draco

Draco rose slowly, stretching as he got the joints in his shoulders and neck to pop. He observed the empty half of his bed with distaste, but understanding. She was busy after all. He had a pleasant day
ahead, a leisurely breakfast, a morning lesson with Severus and the afternoon to himself. It was shaping up to be a good day, as long as he didn't have any surprises. Something told him that he wouldn't be that lucky.

Hermione

Hermione prided herself on knowing everything that went on at the Greengrass Estate, but the Manor, goddamn Malfoy Manor, refused to let her figure out what was going on. Each corner she turned she was faced with a new surprise that she had to deal with. Today, that came in the form of a shapely brunette stretched across Astoria's couch the moment she opened the door.

"Hello?" She asked timidly. Astoria and Daphne were nowhere and sight and the only person left was the very unamused Pansy Parkinson.

"Daph's not back from her tea and Tori's still in bed." Pansy announced easily. "Who are you again?" She demanded. Hermione had to take a deep breath because she had known Pansy for years. The girl was Daphne's best friend and it's not like Hermione was new around here.

"Astoria's handmaiden." She answered easily, heading for the door to Astoria's room.

"Oh yeah, thought I recognized you. Don't tell Tori I'm here just yet, I want to surprise her."

"All right then." Hermione agreed hesitantly, moving into Astoria's room quickly. Astoria was just a puff of bright blonde hair exploding out from beneath pink satin sheets.

"Hey, Tori it's time to get up." She announced. Astoria groaned, even though this was one of the few mornings that she had actually slept in.

"Too early." Astoria grumbled.

"It's almost ten." It's not like Hermione had been awake for five hours and had already had multiple awkward interactions or anything. "And you have a visitor."

"Draco?" Astoria groaned melodramatically, lacking any glimmer of excitement or her previous anxiety. That was probably a bad sign, but also not an Easter egg she willing to miss with right now.

"No, a friend, who still hasn't learned my name again, by the way." Hermione rolled her eyes, setting up Astoria's vanity to start the morning routine.

"Pansy!" Astoria gasped, shooting out of bed. Hermione shrugged noncommittally, that was close enough to honoring their agreement right? "Ugh." Astoria groaned, flopping back onto her bed heavily. "Guess I won't be seeing Daphne for the next few weeks."

"Yeah, probably not." Hermione shook her head. Whenever Pansy showed up, Daphne disappeared, the two really left Daphne's room frequently blowing off appointments and commitments and not letting anyone intrude. It drove Katie up a wall.

"I should probably greet her at some point." Astoria sighed, slowly sliding out of bed. Hermione wrapped her in a silk robe easily as she walked to the dresser.

"Probably." Hermione agreed as the other girl settled, pursing her lips unhappily at the mirror.

"After I get ready." She decided.

"Works for me." Hermione allowed easily, pulling Astoria's hair off her face. Astoria closed her eyes
automatically as she brushed powder over her face. She opened her eyes as Hermione swapped it out with a little rouge, brushing the color along her cheek bones. Astoria's eyes fell shut again as Hermione lightly lined them with kohl. When she opened, her blue eyes look fuller. Hermione smiled as she handed Astoria a light pink lip rouge. They younger girl applied it easily as Hermione brushed out her thick tresses.

"I'm thinking the blue today?" Astoria suggested, Hermione nodded, quickly rising and guessing the light gown Astoria was thinking of. It was soft chiffon that floated easily over Astoria's head when she stood. Hermione made the final adjustments, pulling the hem just right and with a sigh, Astoria announced that it was time to enter the trenches.

She pushed open her door easily and greeted Pansy with a smile that looked like it hurt from Hermione's angle. Pansy rose simply, her maroon gown falling out into a large circle around her.

"Tori!" Pansy gasped, "It's been too long." She announced, and the girls hugged stiffly.

"Clearly" Astoria agreed. "You're so brave, most people would wear such a dark color in August but you've never been one for convention, have you Pans?"

"As if I'm the only one, embarking on such a… unique… blue with your complexion." Pansy tittered. Astoria laughed as if it was a true compliment. The claws were certainly out.

"Tea?" Hermione offered hopefully.

"That sounds lovely, thank you Mione." Astoria answered gratefully.

The two girls settled onto the couches easily as Hermione hurried to pour their tea. Astoria took hers with just a splash of milk and three spoonfuls of sugar. Pansy took hers dark and bitter, like her soul.

"How's the engagement proceedings going Tori?" Pansy pried.

"Just fine, though it was a surprise, we all thought you and Draco would end up together." Astoria answered sharply as Hermione handed her the tea. "Don't you two have a history?" Wow, Hermione didn't think that Astoria knew about that, had worked hard to make sure that Astoria didn't remember that.

"We all spend far too much time together, I don't think there's anyone in our social strata that doesn't have a history." Pansy answered diplomatically, and sure that was kind of true, Pansy had a history with almost everybody. Not that Hermione cared, she wasn't exactly in a place to judge, but it made her kind of notorious among most of the well to do. "It must be so much better to start fresh." Pansy finished with a smile, watching Astoria with crystal sharp eyes. She leaned forward, showing focus, but not jealous. No, there was something else going on here.

"I owe it all to Hermione." Astoria grinned, gesturing for the maid to come over. She hesitantly crossed to Astoria's side as she took her hand. "She's the most amazing, supportive chaperone. She makes it all so much more comfortable. I don't know how she does it." Pansy turned those hawk eyes towards Hermione and smirked.

"Me neither." She agreed; the look in her eyes made Hermione very, very nervous.

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Draco

Draco's mother cornered him at the breakfast table which was just rude frankly, nothing ruined a good
toastie like his mother worrying about his love life. He was mid sip of tea when she sat down beside him.

"You're failing." She told him with a disturbing amount of nonchalance.

"At what?" He asked with the same degree of boredom. It wasn't like this was a new conversation. If she thought his father's message wasn't getting through, Narcissa would often try to mediate. By taking Lucius's side and gently berating Draco, rather than Lucius's much less gentle berating.

"I never should've let you read so much as a child." She announced, an interesting angle he had to admit, even if it's relevancy was up for debate.

"Excuse me?" Draco asked, bewildered as to what her point could possibly be.

"You're father said it was foolish to let you read so many stories, that it would make you soft, but I didn't believe him. I suppose I should've." Narcissa explained sadly and then sipped her tea as if that was a normal thing to say to her son.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Draco responded, resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

"An arranged marriage isn't a death sentence." His mother assured him for the millionth time.

"I'm well aware of that." He snapped, expressing his anger by tearing off a piece of his toast with his teeth. She was ruining a perfectly good breakfast.

"You'll grow comfortable with each other, she'll make you happy." His mother lied, another repeated phrase she liked to use.

"No she won't." Draco answered because there was no possible way for Astoria to make him happy. He thought of Hermione in his bed that morning, how right that had felt and realized there was no way he could even manage fake happiness anymore, not since he had truly experienced it for the first time.

"No, but you'll find other ways to make yourself happy, ways that won't involve the family jewels." His mother answered plainly and drank some more tea.

"Mother!" He choked on a piece of toast. It was one thing for Lucius to know about him having sex, the man was disgusting and frequently flaunted the slaves he'd borrow or rent. It was an entirely different thing to have his mother bring it up. As far as he was concerned he was conceived immaculately.

"What? It's the truth." She shrugged, her voice even. He could feel color rising on his face and had a strong desire to slam his head on the table repeatedly. Maybe it was possible to knock himself out.

"I can't believe that I'm having this conversation." He announced to the world, the galaxy, the cosmos, all of it that was conspiring to destroy him.

"You and Astoria just need to spend more time together, with less pressure." His mother assured, patting his hand gently.

"I really don't think that's" He started to protest but she had already stood and left/ I guess he should just cancel the plans he had for the day or week or lifetime.

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Hermione

That afternoon, it had cooled off and Lady Malfoy had a brilliant idea for tea out in the gardens. Of course, by the time the masses had arrived, the plants had been temporarily relocated via some very complex herbology charms, and a large field had been cleared while a large white tent had been set up to keep most of the sun off of their delicate complexions. She didn't envy the grounds crew today. Because it was intended to be a casual affair, seating arrangements were religiously established, and each couple was forced to maintain a chaperone. Hermione, as per usual, had the amazing luck of watching over Draco and Astoria. Pansy on the other hand was entrusted with ensuring that Blaise and Daphne didn't do anything uncouth. Normally, Pansy would be the last person to be trusted with this sort of thing, but Blaise and Daphne had about as much heat as a block of ice, so it was generally assumed that it would be fine. Plus Hermione was seated right next to their table too.

Suddenly Pansy was talking dramatically over the clang of many people having tea all at the same time and squeezing Hermione's shoulder.

"These glasses are disgusting." She announced, snatching up the obviously pristine cups and making her way to the small bar the Weasley's had set up in the garden. "Hermione and I will get new ones." Hermione rose, shooting Draco a terrified look as she went, he cringed, and then immediately turned back to Astoria and continued charming her, which Hermione had successfully managed to block about by listening to Pansy chatter on up until that point.

They both went to the bar and had a scowling Ron hand them new glasses, but when Ron left to take care of someone else, Pansy rounded on her.

"You're the one." She announced with certainty, leaning forward to whisper to her. Hermione leaned back and frantically glanced around to make sure that no one was listening.

"The one what?" Hermione stopped, dropping the polite façade just as easily as she could adopt it.

"You're the one who tamed Draco." Pansy declared, grinning like a shark. Hermione froze, her blood running cold.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Hermione hissed angrily. This was not good, definitely not good and especially not the right time.

"He's watching you right now." Pansy explained, when Hermione turned, because there was no way he really was, Pansy smacked her arm. "Don't look! Do I have to teach everyone in this manor how to hide a secret."

"What does that mean?" Hermione demanded.

"You'll see eventually." Pansy grinned conspiratorially before taking her tea cups and floating away. Hermione looked up at the white tent and imagined that she could see whatever deity was obviously trying very hard to make her life a living hell. Then she imagined flipping them off and that did make her feel admittedly better.
Hermione

She collapsed heavily on her cot, remembering a thick mattress and silk sheets with something like regret. Last night with Draco had been great but she couldn't risk it again, not with Astoria already suspicious with him.

Despite this lack of frills her eyes slipped closed easily, and she sunk into sleep.

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The dream started in a bed. Emerald sheets rested against her skin as a mouth kissed down her neck. Blonde hair brushed her jaw and she moaned as his hand traced over her breasts. He caressed her skin, played with her nipples and then his mouth was gone. She whimpered, squirming on his sheets. She smelt sandalwood and amber and far more faintly she could make out hints of apricot. Suddenly that mouth was kissing down her stomach, hovering over her mound. His tongue flicked out, stroking her sensitive bud. Fuck that felt good. And…then he was gone and she awake.

Something hit her face, she blinked dizzily, knocking the offensive pillow away as she sat up in her cot.

"For God's sake wake the fuck up!" A shrieking voice squawked. Hermione cringed, awkwardly untangling herself from her blankets and settling back in. It wasn't the first time that somehow had had an inappropriate dream in their room but it was the first time Hermione had had one, at least one that had been loud enough to wake everybody up. Oh lord, she was never living this down.

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Draco

Draco woke to a bird in his bed. That wouldn't have been a terrible thing, accept it was not his bird.

"What the fuck!" He shouted. Pansy sat up easily, grinning like a shark.

"Oh don't be such a twat Draco, I came in to talk to you but you were asleep, so instead of disturbing you I waited. I must have fallen asleep." She shrugged as if that were a perfectly normal thing to say.

"And you needed to wait in my bed, under the sheets?" He questioned. She rolled her eyes.

"Well this bed is so much more comfortable than mine. Astoria and Daph have always have the nicest things." Her eyes went dark, and he suddenly regretting sleeping in just his pants.

"No, Pans. I'm with someone." He said firmly. She rolled her eyes again.

"Oh I know, I met her. Nice girl, if a little plain." She nodded nonchalantly.

"You what?" He demanded because that was bad, that was definitely very bad. Why hadn't Hermione mentioned that to him?

"You're not subtle Draco. I know your bedroom eyes and you were directing them at the girl like no one's business yesterday." Pansy accused airily.

"I was not." He barked. He certainly wasn't that transparent. He couldn't be.
"Don't apologize, it made that awful tea almost bearable. I thought Daph was gonna burst a vein."
Pansy laughed.

"Can't you convince her to be nice to Blaise?" Draco pleaded, knowing that Blaise never would.

"No way!" Pansy scoffed derisively.

"Don't you pity the guy? Even just a little bit?" Draco asked. Even he pitied Blaise a little, even though he'd never, ever tell his best mate that fact.

"Not particularly." Pansy shook her head easily.

"Didn't you lose your virginity to him?" Draco pointed out, and okay, maybe he was fishing just a little bit, and he wouldn't, he was curious.

"Oh no, there was someone before Blaise." Pansy laughed and smiled fondly. That, that was interesting.

"Who?" He asked, studying her. She shifted, standing up and strolling around his bedroom as if she lived there. She looked at her reflection carefully and smoothed down her hair before answering.

"A better lover than both of you put together and that is the only detail that I will give you." She smirked and he brushed off that answer. He was a wonderful lover, thank you very much.

"For someone who loves learning everyone's secrets you sure don't share very many." He pointed out.

"What would be the fun in that?" She smirked.

"Trust. Friendship." He pointed out. He was well aware he sounded like a prat but it was true and he firmly believed that Pansy wasn't as shallow as he appeared.

"That's what Daphne is for, among other things, and you can't tell me that you trust Blaise entirely." She pointed out.

"I'd trust Blaise with my life." He vowed stubbornly.

"But not all your secrets." Pansy asserted.

"Not all of them." He admitted. There were somethings that Blaise could do too much damage with. It was better for everyone if they operated on a need to know basis.

"Exactly! Now stop distracting me, I did have a purpose for coming here you know." She whirled back to him with fire in her eyes. If he knew anything it was that that was a very dangerous expression.

"And what would that purpose be?" He asked carefully.

"I want to help." She gave him a look as if all of his problems were now magically solved.

"Excuse me?" He swallowed nervously. It was never good when Pansy took a personal interest in things. They never turned out the way that you'd expect.

"You want out of your contract with Astoria." Pansy declared.

"Yes but..." He started.
"I can help you get out of it." She announced.

"I'm sure you could but…” He tried again.

"Really, it's simple, I'll…" She started again and turned away from him, inspecting the painting on the wall with an appraising eye. There was no way to stop her. At least, not gently.

"PANS." He snapped.

"What?" She snapped back, glaring at him.

"My father will disown me if I mess this up." He confided. She paled. The "D" word was particularly scary in their circles. They had no discernable skills, no talents, at least, none outside of social climbing and backstabbing, without their family connections they'd flounder in the real world and they both knew. To give that up they'd have to be crazy, or stupid, or have something much better waiting for them on the other side.

"You're crazy, I'm sure he wouldn't…” Pansy protested weakly.

"He's already told me." He explained. She got a little paler on his behalf before sitting down on the side of his bed again.

"You're his only son." She reminded him, as if that made a difference.

"Astoria's the only one left among the sacred twenty eight. That means more to him than anything. It was difficult enough to negotiate this courtship, because of the scandal no one else will touch us." He admitted. She cringed at the reminder of the embarrassment the Malfoy's had endured and how easily it could have been her family instead.

"And that's your fault." She said, exasperated.

"In his eyes it is." He shrugged. It sucked but there was nothing that could be done.

"Your father's an asshole." She stated the obvious. He rolled his eyes.

"I don't disagree but I can't agree. He has ears everywhere." He gave a pointed look at the walls dramatically. He was pretty sure his father didn't have people spying on him. Like eighty percent sure.

"Bullshit, my head would be on a stake if that were true." Pansy scoffed and he studied her carefully.

"Why are you even here Pans?" He asked finally.

"I told you, I…” She huffed but he cut her off.

"I don't mean in my room, I mean at the manor." He clarified.

"Why, Draco, do you not want me here?" She fake gasped pretending to be horrified.

"I do lots of things just because I want to." She pointed out, straightening as if he had insulted her free will.

"Sex maybe, but you're not getting that here, not with me and Blaise both turning you down, so why
"Are you here?" He pressed further.

"There's more to life than just sex, Draco." She said wisely and paired it with another eye roll.

"Maybe, but that's still not an answer." He pointed out.

"Maybe I just wanted to visit Daph, did you think of that?" She shrugged.

"Maybe, but Daph's so busy that you can't be seeing much of her." He reminded her.

"Quality over quantity." She said meaningfully and smirked and he wasn't quite sure what that meant.

"You're a weird one, Pansy Parkinson." He announced. She laughed.

"So are you, Draco Malfoy." She countered.

"By the way, Blaise is constantly accusing me of engaging in kinky sex every five minutes because of you." He groaned.

"Aren't you though?" She teased, winking. "You know as well as I do that I'm mostly vanilla." He shrugged. He wasn't embarrassed of his preferences but her preferred to keep them private.

"Mostly, most nights you were fine with just a good, hard fuck, but other nights you wanted me desperate, begging…" Pansy leaned towards him, her voice going breathy as she looked him up and down.

"No, Pansy." He admonished firmly. She rolled her eyes and flopped backwards very unattractively.

"Fine! It didn't used to be this difficult for a hot woman to get shagged." She grumbled, standing and making her way to his door.

"I thought you didn't come here for sex?" He called as she walked into her sitting room.

"I didn't but it's always a nice diversion." She called back and then he heard the click of the door swinging closed. It was shaping up to be a weird day.

**Hermione**

Hermione woke up in an awful mood with a debilitating migraine to boot. She was tired and cranky and itching for a fight. One of the chamber maids had dropped Astoria's perfume and while a quick reparo saved the bottle, there was no hope for the liquid inside. That perfume had been customized and irreplaceable on short notice. Hermione had shouted at the girl for what felt like hours; only when she had been reduced to tears did she dismiss her. She may have felt bad about it later but right then it just pissed her off more. She was pissed at the world, immensely pissed, and she knew that she was taking it out on all the wrong people but she was exhausted and irritable and couldn't help it. She was doing everything in her power to be perfect, at least in public, why couldn't people just handle their shit.

By the time Astoria was out the door, on her way to meet her tutor, Hermione thought there was a good chance she could even manage a hex the next time someone got in her way. Hands grabbed at her, pulling her out of the hallway. She went easily, letting Draco pull her into the empty guest room. His mouth was on hers immediately but she pushed him off.

"I'm not in the mood." She snapped.
"Okay…” He sighed, stepping back. He perched easily on the back of a couch, watching her carefully. "What's going on in that head of yours?"

"Are you calling me crazy?" She demanded, ready to snap.

"Yes, but you already knew that." He teased, smirking. She wasn't in the freaking mood.

"That's a very nice thing to say." She pointed out, her tone biting.

"Hey, what's wrong? You know that I'm only joking." He reminded her and yeah, she knew that didn't change the fact that she wanted to rip his perfect blond hair out by the roots for no apparent reason. Sleep deprivation sucked, hormones sucked, and whatever the hell this irritation was caused by sucked too.

"I'm just not in a very joking mood this morning I guess. I should, I should go." She sighed, stepping towards the door.

"Okay. Will I see you later?" He asked slowly.

"I don't know." She sighed again, shrugging. She was just so tired, all of yesterday's peace was gone and now, now she was just mad. Mad at herself for being so weak, mad at her subconscious for making a fool out of her, mad at him for making her feel this way, and mad at the world for not letting her have it that way she wants to.

"Wait, does this have anything to do with Pans?" He asked carefully.

"What about her?" She asked warily, watching him carefully. Should she know something about Pansy? If he cheated on her with perfect Pansy Parkinson she might have to fling herself out of a window.

"She won't tell anyone."He promised enigmatically and then, then she remembered. Pansy had revealed that she knew yesterday. Oh lord, she hadn't even thought about Pansy telling the world. There were far too many pieces in play for her liking.

"No it's not about Pansy." She shook her head, feeling exhaustion settling into her bones. Her shoulders felt heavy.

"Then why didn't you tell me that she confronted you?" He asked, and he sounded a little hurt. His perfect blond eyebrows scrunched together in the dim light of the room. This would all be so much easier if he wasn't adorable on top of being gorgeous.

"I'm sorry I just, I got busy. Astoria was really happy about yesterday and..." She sighed, pinching the bridge of her nose. It hurt. Astoria had been giddy about how well her and Draco's dates were going and wanted to analyze every single detail at least ten times before going to sleep last night.

"Oh, okay that's fine. You should go if you need to go." He shrugged and it felt like a dismal. Her head bowed on reflex.

"Oh, okay." She murmured, slipping out the door, feeling like she couldn't possibly fuck up any more.

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As if her day wasn't complicated enough as it was, Harry met her the moment she turned the corner from leaving Draco. She jumped, but he just launched right in to what was no doubt a highly
planned question.

"Why is Ginny avoiding me?" Harry demanded, his tone bordering on alpha persuasion. Hermione shot him a dirty look, and he got enough composure to scale it down to like a seven, rather than a nine. His shoulders dropped, the tension in his torso relaxed, and he collapsed into the window seat beside her. "Did I do something wrong?" He asked, his face vulnerable, like a little kid. It made keeping things from him that much harder. Harry still didn't know that Ginny had presented and if she didn't want to tell him then that was her business.

"Ginny is avoiding you, but I can't tell you why, and no, you didn't do anything wrong." She explained slowly, careful not to give too much away. Harry groaned and gave her a petulant look, and she was reminded of how often she feels like his mother sometimes. "She's dealing with some stuff right now, and you just need to give her some space. She'll come to you when she's ready."

"I don't know what it is Mione, I just…" He closed his eyes, tensing beside her as he struggled to find the right words. "I keep feeling like something is wrong, like I need to see her, to protect her." It was Hermione's turn to stiffen and she turned to him with her eyes wide. Those were alpha urges and even if Harry didn't know what was happening, she did, he was giving into his instincts, trying to claim and protect the newly presented omega. She didn't know if he actually had feelings for Gin or if it was just pheromone confusion but either way Ginny could not deal with that right now, not with everything going on with Blaise.

"You need to shut that down right now, there's nothing wrong and even if there was it's not your job to get involved; you can't get involved." She gave directions, mimicking his alpha tone as she did it. She was hoping to trigger something biological but he just looked at her, stunned.

"Okay, okay, I won't get involved." Her promised, looking down at the ground morosely. Quick footsteps alerted the both of them to the new arrival. They both looked up as Katie stopped in front of them.

"Mione! Lady Greengrass wants to see both of us." Katie panted, distress in her eyes.

"Oh, I'll go get Astoria." Hermione announced, starting to set off, wondering why she would need to talk to her daughter right that moment.

"No, just us." Katie clarified, going pale at her own words. Her fear was mirrored on Harry's face.

"You better go," He instructed, nodding at her uneasily. Both girls took off.

Hermione had been called into Lady Greengrass's study twice in her life. The first time was when she had been promoted from playmate to personal attendant. The second was when Astoria's engagement negotiations had first been announced. Both times she had been greeted with teas and cakes and a warm, smiling mistress. This time was much less pleasant. The older woman studied Hermione and Katie like a hawk as they entered, sinking into deep curtsies immediately.

"Rise." Lavinia Greengrass instructed coolly. They both slowly straightened on shaky legs. "You may sit." Hermione pulled out the chair as carefully as she could, desperately trying to not make a sound, as if that would stop her impending doom. If she just didn't make a sound, maybe Lady Greengrass would forget that she was there. An omega could hope.

"Why aren't Daphne and Astoria succeeding?" Lavinia demanded and Hermione felt her stomach drop. There was nothing that she could say to answer that question that wouldn't get her fired.
"I'm sorry Lady Greengrass, I don't, I don't think that I understand." Katie stuttered nervously.

"You two know more than they do, are capable of hearing more gossip." Lady Greengrass asserted, leaning forward and staring down each girl in turn.

"Draco and Astoria's dates have been drastically…" Hermione offered nervously.

"I threatened his father; he's not charmed, he's desperate, there's a difference. He should be charmed. They should be. I have lovely daughters, at least Astoria is lovely." Lady Greengrass shrugged.

"Yes you do, my Lady." Katie agreed quickly.

"I'm well aware." She sneered dryly. "So why aren't their respective fiances interested? What is going on to stop these engagements?"

"I don't know Ma'am." Katie answered sincerely.

"How about you Hermione. What can you tell me? Has some kitchen girl caught Draco's eye?" Lavinia asked eagerly.

"I don't, I don't think there's a kitchen girl my lady." Hermione stuttered, she was sure her cheeks were coloring but she hoped that it could be passed off as naiveté.

"Stable boy? Is it Harry Potter?" Lady Greengrass asked in a very dramatic transition.

"No! I mean, no ma'am, I don't believe so." Hermione answered too quickly.

"If, when you two find out what or who is disrupting my daughters' engagements, you must tell me immediately. I will do anything to make sure that my girls are taken care of, no matter what." Lavinia ordered firmly. They nodded frantically. "Once they are secured, I will reward you both. I will ensure that Minerva speeds up your training and I will arrange a marriage for you Katie, someone of impeccable standing that you can wed with my approval, pending your consent of course."

"Thank you my lady." Hermione murmured, carefully keeping her eyes down.

"That is an incredibly generous offer." Katie sounded surprised but if she knew what was good for her, she wouldn't question it. This what they both wanted, what they both had always wanted.

"Pay attention and report to me the moment you hear anything. I don't care if it's just gossip, I don't need it confirmed, tell me immediately." She instructed. They both nodded frantically. "You're dismissed." She finished curtly and they both hurried to stand, curtsying once more on the way out. As soon as the door closed behind them, Katie turned to her, her eyes wide.

"This is going to suck isn't it?" Katie announced.

"Yes, yes it is." Hermione sighed.

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**Draco**

Draco had a stressful day. After that weird encounter with Hermione, he hadn't been in the mood to deal with other humans so he had taken to the passageways for some quality people watching. With the impending wedding, the eldest Weasley had been escaping more and more often. That was going to be an intense wedding, he'd guess. The blonde kitchen girl still kept trying, dropping things and bending to pick them up every time that he stood behind her. He was totally oblivious. He actually
looked kind of sad. Oh well, that would teach him not to touch another bloke's girl.

Later on, he had had a lesson with Severus which focused on brewing antidotes for poison. That included repeatedly poisoning him and giving him twenty minutes to identify the potion as well as brew the antidote before painful and or humiliating side effects set in. That was so much fun.

Lunch had included a lecture on how to meditate so that he wouldn't cheat on his future wife from his mother. Another wonderful experience. Afterwards, he had had to deal with Blaise freaking out because he was convinced that he had a lead on the bird destroying his life. He wouldn't tell Draco who he suspected of course, because he was convinced that Draco would tell Hermione and then she'd "tip off the culprit." That was another great use of his time. Then he had to fend off a girl who literally started unbuttoning his pants before he could say "hello" or more appropriately in this case "no thank you." She had left quickly, thankfully.

Now he was just waiting for Hermione, who was supposed to be coming at any given moment. A soft knock on his door cut off his train of thought.

"Come in!" He called lightly. The door creaked open slowly and an embarrassed looking Hermione slipped in through what was surely the smallest crack that she could manage. She slipped into the room, meekly perching on the couch in front of him with her hands folded in her lap. He sighed, sitting up because clearly something was still wrong, not that she'd tell him without some prying.

"Are you mad at me?" She asked quietly, not taking her gaze off her hands.

"I'm not mad at you. Why would I be mad at you?" He asked, genuinely surprised. She hadn't done anything wrong, everyone was entitled to not be in the mood for a snog every now and again.

"Someone's always mad at me." She sighed sadly, and it seemed like her eyes were watering. He could pick up hints of lilac in her scent. "And I snapped at you this morning when you literally didn't do anything wrong." She admitted and then shrugged as if it clearly wasn't difficult to say.

"Hey it's okay." He told her gently, pushing her hair out of her face and lifting her chin. "You don't have to be perfect, you know that right?"

"Of course I have to be perfect, at least when people can see me." She scoffed, turning away and looking at a painting on his wall as if it were fascinating.

"Why do you think that?" He asked seriously, curious how her brain worked, how she operated with so much pressure on her shoulders.

"I'm already so messed up. I have so many disadvantages; I can't afford to get caught making mistakes." She admitted and rubbed her arms despite the very apparent lack of a chill.

"You're not messed up." He assured her. She looked up from her fixed point on the wall and met his eyes stubbornly as she blurted out her answer.

"I don't sleep on a bed; I sleep on a mat on the floor in a room I share with twelve other slaves. I love libraries because I've never been allowed to read unless it was to make me more useful as a slave. I don't like jewelry because it's only ever hurt me, dampened my magic and made me weak. I love Astoria anyways because she didn't make the rules. She's just as trapped by them as I am. Now are you still going to tell me that I'm not messed up?" She demanded and laughed harshly.

"You're no more messed up than I am. I was an abusive, twisted sociopath of a child and then a horndog for the entirety of my post pubescent life. Trust me, where you sleep and your jewelry preferences don't mean shit." He assured her gently.
"And the libraries?" She asked, smiling a little now.

"Well, we met because of that misguided obsession with libraries, who am I to complain?" He teased, hoping they could skip the messed up part of that encounter. She smiled fondly and he took that as a signal that he was in the clear. "So do you want to tell me what was wrong this morning?"

"No, not particularly." She admitted, laughing at herself. He couldn't help but chuckle.

"So what would you like to do?" He had an activity in mind but it wasn't polite to ask for that straight out of the gate. Hermione stood and strode to the bar with a terrifying amount of self assurance. Her smile reminded him of Pansy in the most terrifying way possible as she turned to him with a very large bottle of tequila.

"I would like to drink and tonight I would like to drink a lot. " She announced, that grin not wavering for even a moment.

"I can accept that plan." He acquiesced as she took her first swig. This was going to be an interesting night.
Hermione didn't drink often but when she did, she drank hard. She started with tequila and then Firewhiskey, Ogden's, the good kind, and then progressed to Brandy because Draco's scotch was disgusting. He was watching her with an expression that swung between reproachful and impressed. She wasn't paying him much mind except to prod him into keeping up. He drank his fill too. She had only been drinking for like half an hour or so, maybe forty five minutes when he took the bottle out of her hand, that was rude. She needed that if she was going to stay sane under all this pressure and secrets. She was already breaking if he took her alcohol, she wasn't sure what she'd have to do.

"Hey!" She protested, reaching for it and missing clumsily.

"Nope you're taking a break." He declared firmly before sitting down beside her. "You ready to talk about it yet?" He asked calmly. She shook her head before resting it on his shoulder.

"When can you send me down again?" She asked and she felt the exhaustion deep in her soul. She wanted peace and tranquility. She wanted to feel good again.

"Not after alcohol." He answered solemnly.

"The fuck?" She snapped, rounding on him. "No kinky shit while under the influence. Cardinal rule." He leaned back and her head slipped to his chest. He ran his fingers through her hair as if he wasn't being a huge pain in her ass. This was the only place where she didn't have to be goddamn perfect, how dare he take that aware from her.

"It's not kinky, it's natural and totally normal and expected." She reminded him. Omegas were supposed to go under for their alpha. For a while withholding O Space was almost legally considered a form of abuse but there was too much push back against the government having any control of OA relations. The sicko alphas who wanted their O's always under particularly didn't like the idea of government monitoring. They preferred omegas oblivious and horny and unable to say no. She thought that there had to be a balance. Omegas got testy if denied pheromones, it was a fact, and probably a contributing factor to her irritability and snapping this morning. Even though she knew that's what was going on, she still couldn't control it.

"It's based around control. I don't take control and you don't give it up after even a glass of wine." He instructed firmly. She knew he was right but it didn't stop her from rolling her eyes.

"When did you get all responsible?" She teased, laughing. It felt good to laugh, the weight lifting off her shoulders even for just a moment. "What can I say? Some girl inspired me." He smirked even though the light in his eyes showed that he was entirely sincere. Her stomach flipped and she felt something like happiness.

"Some girl? Well fuck her then." She teased, casting off that feeling . She wasn't going to over analyze this. Any of it. She breathed deeply and sighed, letting herself relax as she imagined the tension flowing out of her finger tips into the arm of the couch beneath her. It was good when she let herself lose a little bit of control.

"Working on it." He smirked for real then and the hand on her waist crept lower and settled on her hip.

"Really? Hadn't noticed." She feigned surprise.
"Har har" He deadpanned, not amused. She knew he was just faking. She was very funny, when she wanted to be.

"Really most of the time getting a girl drunk is just the first step to getting in her pants, not the prohibiting factor." She groused. He laughed and kissed her temple; his hand didn't move from her hip.

"We're not most people. Alpha pheromones" He started to remind her, as if it was new information.

"Work like a drug as it is, I know, I know." She sighed, resisting the urge to roll her eyes.

"You'll thank me in the morning." He told her knowingly, and there went her restraint.

"Doubt it." She grumbled but wasn't able to get too mad about it. Everything was still hazy and out of focus, even though he had taken away her bottle way too early.

"Who would've thought we'd end up here?" He laughed and she couldn't help but smile.

"Sure as hell not me." She snorted. They lapsed into silence for a little bit and she felt her stress melt away. It wasn't O Space, but it was something.

"By the way, why were you in my father's office that day." He asked suddenly and she froze and worked really hard to keep her breathing even.

"I told you, I was just returning something for a friend." She repeated easily, very deliberately not looking at him. Harry would be killed if it came out that he had stolen, and Draco had every right to kill him. Even though Draco didn't like his father it was still stealing and Harry was still living in his manor, if Harry couldn't be trusted he was done.

"Why did they have something from my father's office?" Draco pushed a little harder. She sat up.

"I don't know; I didn't ask." She answered honestly. He studied her.

"You didn't ask?" He questioned, eyeing her with distrust.

"Well I had some stuff going on right around then, now didn't I?" She reminded him. She always had things going on. It sucked ass.

"True. What was it?" He prodded. She sighed.

"Just a book, I didn't even open it, but I could tell it wasn't anything secret, just a regular book. " She assured him fiercely. It was incredibly important to her that he didn't think that she was a thief. That might put a kink in things and not the good kind.

"Would you recognize it if you saw it again?" He asked slowly, studying her face.

"I don't know, maybe, why?" She rounded on him. This was not the line of questioning that she had been anticipating.

"My dad…No reason, just curious." He shook his head but she chose not to push him. She got to keep her secrets and he got to keep his, that was the deal and it worked. For now.

"I think you're curious about the wrong things." She told him and eagerly swung her leg over his lap. He sat back, his hands resting on her hips as she straddled him. She ran her fingers through the hair that curled on the back of his neck and slotted her mouth over his. She ran her tongue over the seam of his lips and he opened his mouth immediately. He kissed her like it was a pleasure to even breathe
the same air. It made her feel drunker than Ogdens, happier than a cheering charm, and freer than floating in the pond. His hands traveled from her hips, gripped her ass with warm hands, and pulled her closer. There was that scotch.

He tasted like scotch but it was better mixed with him. The mint part of his pheromones was strong. Maybe that was his apricot. That would be interesting, Candy Canes would take on a whole new meaning and Molly's peppermint tea. Slowly his mouth slowed on hers, drifting to her throat. She felt herself lean forward as her eyes slipped closed. Draco groaned.

"Come on, let's get you to bed." He suggested and everything got very spiny as she was suddenly in the air. Draco's arms were strong around her as she cradled her. She thought that she should probably protest, probably insist that she wasn't some damsel that needed to be taken care of, but that would be a lie at this very moment. She was far too drunk for things like walking now that all of that alcohol had hit her. She dropped down onto the bed, bouncing slightly on the thick comforter. She felt the warmth of a charm hit her as the queasiness that she hadn't noticed in her stomach stilled. She drifted off easily, quickly slipping into sleep.

**Draco**

Hermione was warm in his bed. She was warm in his arms, but her feet were cold. Freezing cold toes pressed against his calves, even though she was a warm presence beside him. He looked down at her, or at what he could see around the wild bush of curls. Curls he wanted to tug on while she rode his cock but still, first thing in the morning, they were a bush. This was new, the only person who had ever spent the night had been Pansy and that was only after they had done some truly out there shit. He didn't mind though. He liked the simple pleasure of a warm body beside him, of cherry scented sheets (he had paid his chamber maid a significant bonus and reminded her of discretion after the first night that Hermione had slept over), and of cozy mornings waking up together. God, he was turning into a bird, slowly but surely, or he was turning decent, as Pansy had suggested, he wasn't sure which was scarier. Hermione groaned softly and squirmed beside him. He kissed the top of her head, something that he had been doing far too often lately, as she woke up.

"We sleep together too often." She groaned and then tensed. He chuckled, unable to help himself. "I heard it too." She admitted, and he watched as she pushed her hair off her face and revealed the blush spreading across her creamy skin.

"If we were sleeping together too often would be an impossibility." He teased and felt himself smirk.

"Prat." She grumbled and hid her face in his chest again. "What time is it?" He grabbed his pocket watch from his bedside.

"Just after seven." He said gently. She groaned.

"I have to get up." She complained. He sighed. He very, very badly wanted to ask her stay but he had already made the mistake of letting her think that he didn't value her brain and it put her in an awful mood. He wasn't eager to do it for a second time. She stood slowly, moving like it hurt and stretched, reaching her hands towards the ceiling. Her slip rose with the movement, creeping up her legs. It was more of her than he had ever really seen, even if he wasn't really seeing much. He had taken off her corset and outer garments the night before, guessing that it would be difficult to sleep with all of the layers on. It had been difficult to keep his mind focused on the task at hand but passed out Granger was not the one he really wanted to be undressing in his bed. "Merlin I have the worst headache."

"Hangover Remedy is on the desk, purple bottle." He answered easily and then felt… oh yeah, morning wood. That was a thing he had to put up with for the time being. He grabbed a pillow and
strategically dropped it in his lap before Hermione could turn around.

"Thank you." She chirped, grabbing the aforementioned bottle and chugging the toxic concoction in one go. He had already been impressed with her tolerance but that was just scary. She was kind of scary in general but apparently that was his type. "Now I really have to go."

"Don't your roommates ask where you've been?" He asked earnestly. She scoffed, lacing up her corset with ease. It lifted her breasts magnificently before his eyes.

"No, a lot of them work the night shift and the others don't give a shit. I'm not the only one who doesn't come home some nights." She admitted, shrugging. He briefly considered asking what she thought they were doing, as he assumed most weren't having illicit affairs, but something about her demeanor told him not to.

"I see." He murmured.

"Would you mind me leaving some clothes here?" She asked, her voice timid as she deliberately kept her back to him.

"Not all, but why?" He asked curiously, finally sitting up all the way. She finished the lacings on her dress and then started arranging her hair in his mirror.

"It'll just save me time in the morning, that's all." She shrugged even though it was clear that she was uncomfortable. "The chambermaid won't ask questions?" She asked anxiously.

"She had been very well compensated to not ask questions, plus I don't generally have her clean my bedroom. I can manage the charms just fine myself and I enjoy the privacy." Okay that wasn't strictly true but it would probably save her some stress and a relax Granger was a happy Granger and a happy Granger well, that was well worth a little white lie. "Are you okay now?" He asked gently. He shoulders tensed, rising gently and when she turned to him, she was biting her lip.

"Yeah, I think, I think the stress just got to me for a little. I'm okay now. I'll apologize later today and start over." She shrugged, and he could tell she was a little embarrassed so he dropped it quickly.

"Sounds like a plan." He nodded.

She laughed, smiling as she bounded back over to the bed and kissed him gently.

"Thank you." She grinned earnestly before bounding towards his door. "Should I expect to be yanked out of a hallway sometime today?" She teased.

"Probably." He admitted, smirking. She blushed and turned around from her spot in the threshold.

"See you then." She smirked right back and slipped out of sight. He heard the door click shut behind and sighed, flopping back. The pillow fell away and he looked down at his straining cock.

"You're a bad influence, you know that? That was an entirely innocent interaction you prick." He chastised, well aware that he was ridiculous. He chuckled. "Heh, prick that was funny." He groaned and slipped a well practiced hand beneath his sheets, settling in for a nice wank. He let his eyes drift shut, vividly remembering the feeling of Hermione thighs against him as she sat on his lap. She had squirmed so perfectly, smelt fucking amazing, and pulled at his hair just right. He groaned, speeding up his practiced strokes. He could draw this out and sometimes he would, but this was not one of those times. The precum already leaking out of tip was enough to keep the friction from being unbearable but it wasn't exactly comfortable. It was easy to adjust the memory, to image her delicious
body naked in his lap, grinding and rolling on his dick as those beautiful breasts bounced.

He came with a low grunt, and flopped back against the bed. Okay, that was enough work for the day. He surely deserved a nap by now. He told himself, casting a quick scourgify and resolving to fall back asleep for at least a few more hours. Wanking always made him tired.

…

Teas with Astoria were a very stressful thing, even if it was stressful for a new reason. Before, he was stressed out because of how terrible it was going to be and he spent too much time wondering how terrible it was going to get. Now it stressed him out every time it went well. It turned out all Astoria really needed to flourish was him to lay on the charm first. If he started, she could go along with it, agree with his ideas, laugh at his jokes, and very occasionally offer a new perspective. If this were any other situation, that would be a good thing, but with Hermione chaperoning it just made it so much more awkward. If he had it his way, everything would be different, unfortunately, he didn't have it his way so he had to just do his best and hope she didn't run for the hills.

He had another tea with Astoria this afternoon and was slowly making his way to the garden. Procrastination was a blast.

He tapped the giant tapestry of the Malfoy crest as he walked by. Sure most of his ancestors were asshole but some deserved the homage, it was an incredible minority but still.

He stepped into the garden and adopted a ridiculous smile, nothing like the real thing, and sat down at the terrible wrought iron table they usually frequented. The servants bustled around, Blaise's red head poured him a cup of tea. He nodded thanks to her before she disappeared back into the kitchen. He wondered briefly if Blaise had considered that one for the trickster making his life hell but she looked too soft to be that nuts, plus what Weasley would be willing to take that risk? No one had that much nerve.

Hermione entered next, blushing as she took out her book and started reading. Astoria fluttered in moments later. He stood and pulled out her chair and gently pushed her in. She smiled up at him pleasantly as he rounded back to his seat. Astoria went to grab her tea cup and then froze, color draining from her face. There was that panic again.

"How remiss I've been in manners! Your chaperone should join as at the table, poor girl, you must be famished." He addressed Hermione quickly, deliberately pretending to have forgotten her name.

"It would be my pleasure," She simpered, grabbing her chair and pulling it up to the table. She sat on Astoria's left and took the girls hand under the table. He pretended that he didn't see, but smiled to himself as he looked down at his plate. The redhead brought out a plate of sweets, of which Astoria took the smallest. Probably not wanting to seem gluttonous or vain. He took what he wanted because gender roles were cruel that way but it sure as hell wasn't his fault. Hermione took nothing but sipped at the tea the waitress delivered. It was peppermint, which she took with no sugar or milk. He smiled to himself, everything about her seemed to only endear him more to her, even when she was freaking out. He turned deliberately towards Astoria, smirking in her direction.

"What have you been up to since I saw you last? it's been far too long." He lied easily. She answered eagerly, detailing the book she had begun reading and the events of her day, which seemed mind bogglingly boring, no matter how funny and charming she tried to make them. He watched Astoria carefully as they spoke for the remainder of the next few hours, but carefully reached for Hermione's wrist under the table. He ran his fingers along the sensitive skin. She stayed perfectly still beside him and sipped her tea even as the tension drained from her body.
Hermione

He faced forward, not acknowledging her existence in the slightest, she would've been hurt. She would've felt small and useless if it weren't for the gentle feel of his fingers stroking around her wrist. She was just worried enough to need the touch, small and subtle, undetectable at best and easily rationalized as an accident at worst. They couldn't hold hands, but he could slowly, deliberately trace the veins on her wrist with his thumb. The contact sent chills arching through her nerves, and centered her, kept her grounded and present rather than flying through the clouds in her own mind.

It was good. This was good, in a way that she had never had before. She felt okay, and she was willing to do whatever she needed to do to feel okay. She deserved that. She was worthy of that.

Soon enough, the tea was finished and the small plate of pastries was empty. Draco broke the steady, calming contact and stood. He bowed to Astoria and kissed her knuckles gently. They said pleasant goodbyes and Draco left. Astoria sighed, slumping in her chair and turning to look at Hermione. The older girl noticed the dark circles under her friend's eyes for the first time.

"Are you okay?" Hermione asked genuinely. Astoria chuckled darkly.

"No." She admitted. "But who really is?"

"Is there something going on?" Hermione questioned gently, resting her hand on Astoria's knee. The other girl just shook her head.

"No, I'm fine. Probably just PMS, you know?" Astoria shrugged. Hermione laughed.

"Trust me, I know." She admitted with a chuckle. They giggled for a beat before Astoria took her arm as they set off. It was just close enough to normal that Hermione could convince herself that everything was going to be fine.

...

Hermione found herself waiting around a corner, vividly remembering when she used to scare the living daylights out of Ginny and Harry whenever she could. This was a slightly different aim. She heard Draco talking with Blaise about... something, and waited until the Italian's voice slipped away before leaving her little niche and scooping the hallway quickly before grabbing Draco's hand and pulling him back with her. Draco laughed quietly as the slipped behind a statue, totally out of sight from the casual passerby.

"I was wondering where you went."

"What can I say? I'm very stealthy."

"I guess so." He laughed and kissed her gently. He tasted sweet, but with no trace of mint. She wanted that mint back. She wrapped her hand in his hair again, pulling his head down and tugging gently. He groaned, the hands on her waist sliding down to cup her butt. She took the opportunity to plunge into his mouth, tasting him, devouring him, tasting... mint! The sweet taste of success.

"You taste like mint." She breathed confidently.

"Oh?" He murmured, kissing just below her ear and fuck that felt good. He sucked just beneath her jaw line and she was pretty convinced that he was well on his way to making another hickey. Another few days of loose hair and concealment charms it was.

"You taste like mint when you're horny." She informed him. He laughed.
"Could be worse." He shrugged and teasingly flicked his tongue against that spot beneath her ear. She jumped and giggled in surprise. He took out his wand and cast a quick muffliato around them.

"I bet it could." She admitted breezily.

"Do you believe me about the apricot now?" He asked her, smirking as he caught her up in a kiss before she could answer. He pulled her tight against him, and the warmth of his body felt like a drug against her as she let her lose herself in his mouth.

"That depends, what do I smell like now?" She asked him, feeling devious. His eyes flicked down her body and he smirked.

"Perfection." He breathed, loosen her corset but just lowering it, not taking it off entirely. He ran his hands along her ribs, smoothing her thumbs beneath the base of her breasts. She moaned as the feeling sent shockwaves to her center. She squeezed her legs together, trying to get some relief. She felt like a live wire, just waiting for some contact before she burst into flames. "And sex." He added lightly. She laughed.

"Something tells me you're not wrong about that one." She admitted and he kissed her again. and again. and again.

...

What felt like either moments or hours later, he laced up her corset again and kissed the base of her throat. She peeked first and with one last chaste press of her mouth against his, she slipped back into the real world. Finally, she felt ready to deal with it all. She was strong enough and she was in control, at least, when she needed to be.
Control, Cards, and an Unfortunate Turn

Hermione

Their sessions were different from that point forward. For one they couldn't exactly be called sessions anymore, more like snogging. Lots and lots of snogging. Sometimes she went down, floating through O Space. It made everything feel surreal and the tiniest touch felt unbelievably strong. Sometimes she just skirted around the edges of it. Sometimes she didn't go anywhere near it. Those were the times he let her take a lead. Like that day.

She was in his lap, wrapping her fingers through his hair again. He ran his fingers through hers in turn and started to go towards her neck.

"Wait." She breathed, pulling back. His eyes were dilated as fuck. Hell yeah. "I don't want to go down."

"Okay." He agreed easily. She immediately started unbuttoning his shirt, kissing the smooth skin as it was revealed. She made it all the way to the trail from his navel before he was groaning and pulling her back to his mouth. "I wouldn't." He advised. She nipped his lower lip, pulling on it with her teeth firmly. He groaned as she released him.

"Wouldn't what?" She teased, smirking.

"Start things that you're not ready to finish." He answered coolly but with concern.

"Who says I'm not ready to finish it?" She smirked, all bravado.

"You." He answered simply.

"True." She shrugged. "Need to cool off?" She suggested, teasingly.

"I can control myself." He smirked up at her. Her stomach did a little flippy thing which was entirely unhelpful. Hmm, Draco, control. She liked the sound of that, but not right now, now it was her turn.

"Sure you can." She chirped sarcastically. His hands skimmed down her back, tracing along her spine.

"You're awfully confident for someone so turned on." He declared. She stiffened as color rushed to her cheeks.

"I... how did you..." She stuttered uncomfortably, feeling very much like the blushing virgin that she was.

"Well other than the obvious, and the apricot, you're flushed," He ran the back of his fingers down her cheek. She closed her eyes and tried to focus on her breathing. "Why do you insist on me proving that I know that you're turned on?" He questioned.

"I..." She started, but the words died in her mouth. She didn't have a good explanation. She just didn't want to believe that she was so transparent.

"I want to know your body. Every inch of it. Why does that embarrass you so?" He continued, kissing down her throat.

"I'm just, I'm not used to things like this." She admitted.
"Okay. I can understand that." He nodded as if convincing himself.

"Now, can we get back to important matters?" She asked brazenly, tucking away those insecurities to deal with later.

"Of course." He agreed. "I do have a lot of learning to do." He smirked, eyeing her deliberately. She blushed, wondering if her curves held up to scrutiny.

"Later, right now, it's my turn." She reminded him. She dragged her nails gently through that oh so tempting trail of hair and he groaned.

"Fuck, feels good." He gasped. She traveled back up, skimming her hands along his ribs. A muscle in his stomach twitched. She moved back down, sliding her thumbs down his hipbones. He groaned again. She focused on learning his body, discovering the spots that made him twitch, the ones that made him groan, and the ones that made him harder where he pressed up against the vee between her legs. She stored the information in the back of her mind as she sucked a bruise into his neck. He groaned, loudly as she pulled away.

"You're not the only one who can feel possessive you know." She told him. His hands reached out to her hips, leaving their spot where they had been gripping his poor couch. His weight shifted, and she knew he was going to lift her. "Stop." She ordered, grabbing his hands and placing them back on the couch. "It's my turn." She reminded him, feeling a giddy little rush. This was totally against his nature, he was never supposed to submit, but he was doing it, and enjoying it. It wasn't nearly as satisfying as O Space, but it was fun, exhilarating, a change of pace.

Her spot on his neck was turning a lovely shade of red and she went back to it, nipping with her teeth and then sucking hard, determined to get it purple by the end of the night. He groaned, and she swore that she could feel him twitch against her. She was soaking wet and she wondered briefly if he could feel her as well as smell her. The thought only made her more desperate. God, she would need so many calming charms later, or she could… she blushed at the thought. This stuff, right now wasn't really new but was she ready for anything else? She sighed and sat back, slipping off his lap. He sighed and his head dropped back.

"Need to stop?" He asked, already resigned to his answer.

"Yeah, sorry." She admitted and sat down beside him, focusing on breathing through her mouth, carefully not to take in too much of his scent.

"Don't be, I could use the cool down to be perfectly honest." Draco admitted easily.

"So, how's everything?" He laughed.

"That's really your transition?" He asked, wrapping his arm around her shoulders. She dropped her head onto his chest.

"I don't know what else to say." She admitted, blushing. He ran his hand through her hair gently.

"Silence works just fine." He told her. She blushed again. Usually her snogs with Viktor ended with them both scurrying off to work. There was no time for conversation. There was just so much that she didn't know. "Do you need to leave?" He asked gently.

"I have a while." She admitted and bit her lip. He reached out with his thumb and gently pulled it out from between her teeth.

"Don't be so harsh with my things." He instructed, she rolled her eyes.
"Who said that it's yours?" She laughed. He smirk.

"I did." He announced confidently.

"You really are so spoiled." She teased, his thumb slipped into her mouth. She flicked her tongue against it and he groaned.

"Of course I am." He reminded her and slowly pulled his tongue out of her mouth.

"You're lucky I'm good at sharing." She smirked. It made her stomach twist with nervous anticipation at the thought of him owning her body. It shouldn't, part of her was furious, but the other part of her wanted it more than anything.

"Are you though?" He asked, his voice gentle as he pushed back her hair.

"I shared with Astoria my whole childhood, Katie and I split her hand me downs." Hermione reminded him, smiling gently.

"Daphne didn't pass any along?" He asked, seeming genuinely interested, that was a surprise.

"Daphne read and she wasn't letting go of any of those books." Hermione laughed.

"Is that why you ended up in my library?" He asked, smiling.

"I like books." She admitted, blushing a little. She was such a nerd, but he didn't seem to mind.

"What are you reading now?" He inquired.

"Entreaties on Espionage during the Roman Empire." She grinned.

"Huh, any good?" He asked. She smiled.

"Great topic, terribly written, but I'm learning a lot." She answered easily.

"Why is Minerva having you read that?" He marveled.

"Well, I've also read Sun Tzu, you know as well as I do that court politics may as well be war." She reminded him. He cringed in solidarity.

"So the manager of the Greengrass household actively works on politics?" He wondered. She was well aware that the Malfoy's didn't value the position nearly as much as the Greengrasses, Narcissa took on the majority of the duties, the rest was covered by something barely more significant than a head maid.

"She should be aware of them." Hermione shrugged noncommittally.

"Why?" He looked actually puzzled, and there was that little wrinkle between his eyebrows again.

"Seating charts, meals served, dance cards, they're all part of the politics and they'll all pass through me first." She explained. She couldn't hide the little bit of pride she felt at the reminder. She liked the idea of working behind the scenes, knowing everything and handling everything so that Astoria just has things happen around her, exactly as they should. She didn't need glory; she just wanted the satisfaction of efficiency and running a well-oiled machine.

"It really makes you happy, huh?" He mused. She blushed but nodded. He kissed her forehead. "I'm glad, but I'm afraid I have to go." He sighed, stretching as he stood and slipped his shirt over his
head. He donned his coat next and she watched as he did up the buttons. It all felt pleasantly domestic. "I promised I'd meet with Blaise today."

"Have fun." She suggested, smirking. She knew that other girls would be offended by Blaise, Astoria talked all the time about wanting to separate him from his friendship with Draco, but he was just a mildly annoying factor in the equation, kind of like his tendency to drink too much. She wasn't perfect and they were faults she could live with.

He kissed her once more before slipping out of the room. She sighed, leaning back as she thought about how long she had to wait. They had perfected a system. They never left together, and she always carried a note addressed to Draco so she had an excuse for being there. They had a good system, they could do this, they were experts at stealth, had been trained in it since birth; she still felt like they were going to get caught at any moment.

She sighed, everything was going to be okay; she wouldn't accept any other possibility.

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Draco

Hermione Granger was the best shag Draco had ever had and he hadn't even shagged her yet. Other than a handful of heavy snogging incidents, they hadn't done anything yet. But he knew, without a doubt, that Hermione was the best. There was no debate, no close seconds, she won, head and shoulders above the rest.

And what caused it? What made it so special?

He had no idea. He had always thought that she wasn't spectacularly pretty in the traditional sense, but that didn't stop him from losing his train of thought mid-sentence because he got distracted by the gold facets in her brown eyes, or the way her eyelashes cast shadows on creamy skin. Maybe it was the way she looked at him, always carefully, always consciously, she never glanced or did anything without thought, without intent. At the same time, she wasn't the most experienced, he knew, but she learned so goddamn quickly, and with a drive he never would've anticipated. She explored his body every chance she got, studying his face for a reaction the whole time, never just chasing her own pleasure. He'd tried to offer advice once, and she had shushed him, and then discovered a spot that he had no idea was an erogenous zone. He stopped trying to give instructions at that point.

Maybe it wasn't even the focus and the intensity, maybe it was the fire. In the beginning, he had always been the instigator. It had always been him pulling her into embraces, distracting her with his mouth and hands, but now it was just as often her setting aside her book in a quiet moment and settling herself into his lap without a word. The days passed by quickly, excursions to the garden and tucking themselves away in his room filled their time. Painful dates with Astoria were bookended with snogging in the hallways. It seemed like when they weren't snogging they were laughing. Hermione had the sharpest wit he had ever encountered yet her barbs never stuck, her words never intended to hurt. She was warm hearted, like no one he had ever met. She had faced all of this sadness, had struggled so much, but she still had so much hope.

Blaise cleared his throat and Draco looked up from where his gaze had fixed on his cards. He bet, not quite sure what his cards had actually been.

"Theo wrote to tell me that he intends to visit." Blaise announced, matching the bet with a smirk. Oops, Blaise didn't have a poker face, and he didn't bluff, if he was smiling it was because he was certain that he would win.
"Hmmm," Draco muttered as Blaise flipped over the river, revealing a third ace. He grinned. Draco sighed and folded.

"You really have become so annoying since you started shagging that O." Blaise groaned as he scooped up his winnings.

"Fuck off Blaise." Draco snapped. Blaise had been bitching almost continuously, always claiming that he was acting in his friend's best interest.

"How good of a shag must she be if you're willing to risk so much for her?" Blaise demanded. Draco grip on his glass tightened.

"Stop with all that. We haven't..." He started to say and then remember that he definitely shouldn't be sharing that info. He felt his face color.

"What the fuck do you mean, you haven't... You haven't fucked her yet!" Blaise gasped, shocked.

"Shut up Blaise." Draco groaned, already exhausted.

"Draco Malfoy, who shags before learning the bird's name, has been seeing a bird for weeks and hasn't fucked her? Holy shit! Did you turn religious or something?" Blaise demanded, far too blunt. Draco cringed.

"It's definitely not that. It's just different with her, alright?" Draco confessed, waiting for the inevitable mockery. It came immediately.

"God, she has you whipped, you gonna start wearing her mark now too?" Blaise accused. Draco recoiled. He had no problem with letting Hermione take control during a snog or two but a mark was an entirely different issue. "Fuck no!" He snapped. "And how about you? Do you really expect me to believe that you turned down Pansy the other day for no good reason?" Draco pivoted easily. Blaise stilled. He was constantly moving, rolling a marker between his fingers or tapping on his glass, but in that moment, he stilled, and Draco knew that he had stumbled on something important, even if he could never get Blaise to admit it.

"Maybe I just wasn't in the mood for leftovers." Blaise snapped cruelly.

"You and I both know you wouldn't turn down a shag just because a girl was lacking her virtue, and especially not if it was Pansy." Pansy had made her own choices but she was still their friend, neither of them thought of her that way.

"I just didn't want my tormentor to use it as another opportunity to humiliate me." Blaise lied, and not even well.

"Try again." Draco ordered, unimpressed.

"Okay, it's just... complicated alright." Blaise admitted, groaning. "I don't even know what's going on for sure. It doesn't make sense to bring in another chess piece."

"Do you have any suspects?" Draco inquired easily and took the deck, shuffling quickly before dealing to both of them.

Blaise threw in his ante and then waited as Draco did the same. They both took up their cards, Draco's hand was weak but he had always been better at this game, as long as he was paying attention.
"A few." Blaise mused, and bet modestly. He was trying to slowly raise it. Draco double the bet. Blaise smirked and matched him. Draco burned one and then dealt the next three. They weren't what Blaise had been looking for, but he was still hopeful. Good. Draco smirked. Blaise bet modestly again; Draco tripled the bid. Blaise called.

"Care to name them?" Draco questioned. Blaise paused heavily as Draco burned one and flipped another. "Care to bet them?"

"Hmmm?" Blaise reacted cautiously.

"I win, you name your suspects." Draco pushed. "I lose you keep them to yourself."

"Deal." Blaise conceded.

Draco dealt the river. It was a two of clubs. Blaise groaned aloud.

"Check." He grunted. Draco bet. "Fold." Blaise huffed, flipping his cards. Draco looked at his own: a two of hearts and eight of clubs. Utterly useless. He smirked as he pulled the pot to him.

"What did you have?" Blaise demanded. Draco laughed and shuffled his hand back into the deck. "Oh, fuck you."

"The names?" Draco reminded him.

"Yeah, yeah." Blaise huffed and leaned back. "Lavender Brown, Angelina Johnson, and Ginny Weasley."

"Are those the only girls who you've slept with recently?" Draco remarked, surprised.

"They're the only ones with a real reason to be angry." Blaise clarified.

"Ah, they're the ones who you couldn't satisfy, huh?" Draco smirked. "Again, shorter list than I expected."

"Shut the fuck up. At least I could get them to bed." Blaise snapped.

"You never shagged Weasley though, if I'm not mistaken." Draco checked.

"No, thanks again for that, by the way." Blaise huffed.

"Just returning the favor." Draco reminded him. "After..." He trailed off, absolutely unable to remember the bird's name.

"Why exactly won't they turn your arse pink?" Blaise snapped with resentment. Draco just smirked.

"I prefer to be on the giving end of that particular act." He corrected, well aware that Blaise did not mean that.

"That is more information than I ever wanted, but less horrifying than the reverse I will admit." Blaise cringed.

"On that note, how's your fiancée?" Draco asked. Blaise rolled his eyes.

"She called me a pillock." Blaise groaned.

"What exactly does that mean?" Draco asked nervous for the answer.
"Idiot, or cock… I had to look it up." Blaise explained.

"That's wonderfully horrifying." Draco realized, storing that information for later.

"She hates me more than I thought was possible." Blaise groaned, rubbing his temples.

"Good luck." Draco offered unhelpfully.

"She's been researching how to break the contract. I'm just hoping that she will succeed." Blaise admitted easily.

"You're not trying to help her, are you?" Draco checked anxiously.

"Of course not. Her parents would slaughter me if they found out. She's far enough away from mine that she will be fine." Blaise shrugged.

"Good luck with that." Draco checked his watch. "We have another dinner tonight; I should go and change."

"Here's hoping there will be less soup spilled this time around." Blaise announced, raising his glass to the prospect.

"It's concerning that you're hoping for 'less' rather than 'no.'" Draco observed.

"What can I say? I'm a realist." Blaise laughed as Draco left, shaking his head.

Hermione

When Hermione arrived at Astoria's quarters that afternoon, she was armed and ready. She was focused and this was going to be the most successful formal dinner the Manor had ever seen. She would make sure of it. Astoria would glow with beauty, Daphne would hold her tongue, and Draco would be polite. Who cared if it was all bullshit? It would be successful and it would be because she was prepared and capable.

"Tori! It's time to get ready!" She announced, opening the door with a flourish. The girl in question was on the floor, her hair in matted clumps, stuck to her head as she curled up with a chamber pot. Her body curled, convulsing as she heaved. It looked like it hurt. Hermione fell to her knees immediately, gently, stroking Astoria's hair off of her face. "Shhh... it's okay, just breathe." She reminded her.

Astoria finally stilled and raised her head, wiping her mouth with a rag.

"I don't think this dinner is going to happen Mione." She admitted, eyes watering.

"It's okay, don't worry about it." Hermione assured her, even as she heaved again.

So much for that plan then.
Dreams, Confusion, and Discussion

Draco

Her eyes were hooded as she knelt down in front of him. She was nude and his mouth water at the site of her bare breasts, her full hips, and her plump rear. She leaned forward and took his cock in her mouth, letting it slide into her mouth and down her throat. The warm heat was all encompassing, dizzingly pleasurable. She bopped her head, stroking her tongue over his head. He gasped, and his hips bucked forward but she didn't gag, she didn't even flinch, she just took it, beautifully. He groaned and he felt his lower abdomen clench as he came down her throat in a rush. He groaned and his eyes flew open. The was sun on his face and there was a pool of spunk on his stomach. Fucking awesome.

…

Draco's morning fucking sucked, but there was a light to this day. He hadn't had to sit next to Astoria at dinner the night before, and as such his crotch remained totally soup free, and word was that the girl had come down with the flu and wasn't going to leave her room for at least a couple days.

Unfortunately, that also meant that Hermione was spending all of her time tending to her charge. And not her lover. That was just plain old unacceptable. He should be tended to. He had needs. Needs that hadn't been met in way too long. Longer than since before he started having sex. He wouldn't lie the temptation was there, to just convince one of the girls he has slept with months ago for another round. It wouldn't even be hard. Three minutes of chatting, five at the most. The only problem was that the thought of actually doing it made his stomach turn. He didn't want them. For the first time in his life he wanted someone in particular and he couldn't have them. At least not the way his dick wanted. Hermione was a virgin, that much he already knew. He couldn't rush her, it wouldn't be right, plus he doubted trying would even work. Not that he would, because he was a decent person now, and yeah, she deserve that, and wow, was he really thinking that? This was new, and weird.

The point was, he had far too much time on his hands. So he started doing weird things, like people watching and drawing.

He hadn't sat down and sketched in months, hadn't had the time, or the inspiration, but since his energy wasn't being put to good use elsewhere, why not? He took his sketch pad out from the bottom of his underwear drawer. His father had never approved of his art, had torn up the drawing Draco had given his father when he was only five years old. He opened his desk drawer and fumbled around until he found the stick of charcoal at the very back. He kicked open the door to the outside ad meandered through the hedges until he finally got to the pool. The rock ledge was hard underneath him as he let his legs dangle over the ledge. He warmed up with the waterfall, an image he had drawn so many times that he could probably sketch it from memory, right down to the rock that jutted out a little farther halfway down. He smudged the lines, trying to get the shading and the way that the early morning light caught the water just right. He got bored easily, and found himself sketching a woman's shoulder, with the lightest suggestion of her damp slip, dangling off. He drew the freckle that rested just above her collarbone. Soon he found himself sketching her face, struggling to get the eyes just right. It was always the eyes. He could manage her cupid's bow mouth and perky little nose just fine but he couldn't manage the mischievous, all knowing glint in her eyes. He huffed in frustration and flipped the paper over, focusing on the curve of her neck and how the curls of her hair fell over it.

He was a ridiculous sap but hey, the pictures turned out pretty good. Maybe he'd show them to her.
someday, not right now, it was definitely too early to show her this, not that he had ever shown anyone his sketches, not even Pansy, and especially not Blaise. It was his private escape and he kind of wanted to keep it that way, at least for now.

…

*Hermione*

Astoria had finally stopped vomiting at about noon. Before that, it had been frantic rushing to the chamber pot every fifteen minutes. Hermione spent her time dabbing her face with cool cloths, bringing her water, and keeping her hair out of her face. Poor Astoria was miserable and immediately collapsed into bed as soon as she could. Hermione called for a maid, who took away the pot as she flung open the shutters to get the air moving. Astoria groaned as Hermione pulled the blanket out from under her, tucking it around her to keep away the chills.

"Go." She breathed, a raspy, mumbling sound.

"Absolutely not." Hermione murmured, holding the water up to Astoria's lips. She sipped gently and tried again.

"Daphne needs a real chaperone, mother won't let Pansy actually fill in." Astoria reminded her, thinking of her sister even while sick as a dog.

"You need me more, Daph will be happy to get out of her date." Hermione reminded her gently. Astoria laughed.

"She needs them, they have to get along, one of us should end up happy," She groaned.

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked softly, surprised by the harsh words.

"Nothing, nothing, I suppose the fever's just getting to me. You should go. I don't want you to get sick too." Astoria sniffled and made shooing motions with her hands. "Besides your keeping me up, I can hear your worrying, it makes it difficult to sleep." Hermione rose slowly, tentatively moving towards the door.

"Only if you're sure." Hermione checked one last time. Astoria laughed.

"I am." She said stubbornly.

"If anything happens…" Hermione started to reassure her but was quickly cut off.

"I'll get a messenger if I need you." Astoria finished, smiling slightly, even though her skin was still pale.

"And…" Hermione tried to continue. "You'll come running." Astoria chuckled. "Now go, you'll be late."

…

Daphne and Pansy were sharing a chair. The two had always been insufferable but they were now displaying a closeness that Hermione had only seen with the French. They were sitting beside each other in a large armchair that was clearly meant for just one person. Pansy's head was on Daphne's shoulder and Blaise seemed ready to burst when Hermione arrived.

"I apologize for my tardiness, I was tending to Astoria." Hermione announced, curtseying briefly
before straightening and settling in at her usual seat. She could hear the flutter of each individual page as she opened her book and begun reading.

"So, Pans, when are you running away?" Blaise shattered the silence, his voice acerbic.

"Excuse me?" The beta snapped, sitting up straight and glaring the alpha down.

"You don't normally stay in one place so long, I'm just surprised." Blaise smirked, all false courtesy.

"Trying to get rid of me?" Pansy tilted her head, the challenge clear.

"I'm sure that's not what my fiancé intended to imply." Daphne broke in, resting her hand on top of Pansy's clenched fist.

"No, of course not." Blaise pacified, still smirking.

"Good, because I'm afraid you'll have to deal with me for quite a bit longer." Pansy announced, the suggest a threat if Hermione had ever head.

"Not too long." Blaise smirked, giving a pointed look towards Daphne's hand, where the engagement ring with the Zabini crest sat.

"Hermione, you're dismissed." Daphne snapped suddenly. Hermione jumped, surprised to be addressed directly.

"Excuse me?" She asked tentatively, she was definitely not allowed to leave.

"You know as well as I do that the idea of us needing a chaperone is a farce, if you'll give us some time?" Daphne asked, her tone softer and her eyes pleading.

"Of course. I'll just go pick out another book." Hermione offered nervously.

"I'll find you in a few once we resolve this." She nodded at Blaise and Pansy and Hermione didn't envy her attempts at mediating. It must suck if your fiancé didn't get along with your best friend.

…

There was a hidden section of the Malfoy library. It was tucked in the back corner and entirely out of sight from passerby and anyone not explicitly looking for it. Or at least, that would usually be true. Hermione just happened to have the good fortune of stumbling upon it. She didn't catch the titles at first. What caught her eyes was the bright silver letter on the emerald spine. Then she noticed the title. "A Witch's Guide to Lovemaking." Her eyes widened as she paused and took the book off of the shelf. She… she could use this. She immediately started scanning the shelves, noticing titles like "Female Alpha hood: the Unnoticed Struggle," "Best Ways to Achieve O Space," and "How to Introduce Power Exchange to your Lover." She blinked dizzily as she pulled the latter two off the self. She had some reading to do, to say the least.

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Hermione had completed the first two guides and had quickly moved onto "The Art of Submission." It was all so fascinating and occasionally highly erotic. She stored all of the information frantically, making note of anything that could be useful. She wanted to know everything; she wanted to be ready. Would Draco expect her to know all this? She didn't want to seem ignorant. She had never dealt well with not being versed on a subject, there were few academic topics that she didn't have expertise in. How had she missed this one? She should take some books with her, study later. She
didn't want to seem like a virginal little flower. She was one but she still didn't want to seem like it. She didn't like feeling stupid.

"What are you reading?" A teasing voice asked from behind her. She jumped about a mile and immediately gripped the book in front of her like, well, like a dirty novel.

"Noooothing." Hermione answered uneasily. She looked up to see Daphne peering over her. Hermione tried to hide the books but Daphne was too quick.


"It's not what it looks like." She asserted frantically, feeling herself turn into what she was sure was a frightful shade of red.

"Then what it is?" Daphne asked skeptically, very clearly not impressed. She cocked one thin eyebrow and smirked at her.

"They're for educational purposes?" She tried awkwardly.

"You're researching how to fuck?" Daphne asked, laughing at her humiliation. Hermione was never doing her another favor ever again.

"Daphne! Language!" Hermione snapped, hiding in chaperone mode with ease.

"Mione, you're reading about sex positions and O Space, you don't get to be a prude right now." Daphne pointed out, grinning.

"You can't tell anyone about this." Hermione ordered. Daphne rolled her eyes.

"Of course not, mother would insist on getting rid of the books and who am I to stand in the way of your education?" Daphne teased and winked as she sat down at the table. Hermione looked up at the dusty ceiling, beckoning whatever deity was around to end the torment now and just get it over with. "Now, do you have any questions? You can't really learn about sex from a book Mione, it's too.. Nuanced."

"How would you know?" Hermione snapped, not liking the superior tone Daphne was taking on.

"You'd be surprised what I know." Daphne said mischievously, eyebrow waggle and all. Hermione rolled her eyes.

"We both know that you're just as virginal as I am." Hermione huffed, not amused by Daphne's put upon superiority. The older girl just smirked.

"Only in the most traditional sense." She admitted, shrugging.

"Daphne!" Hermione gasped. If Daphne had been with a man, in any way, her virtue could be questioned, she could be thrown out on to the streets.

"Oh, step off of it Mione, I've never laid with a man." Daphne assured her, rolling her eyes as if it was obvious.

"Then what, exactly are you talking about?" Hermione demanded.

"A lady doesn't kiss and tell." Daphne answered coyly.
"Since when?" Hermione asked, laughing. Daphne had never been shy about the blokes that she had snogged in the past.

"Since it started to matter." Daphne said coolly, her eyes darkening as her words took on a more serious tone.

"And when was that?" Hermione questioned, studying her friend. She seemed sincere.

"Earlier than you'd think." Daphne answered and laughed slightly to herself, shaking her head, as if it were more true than Hermione could realize. There was a heavy pause before Hermione remembered what she really needed to ask.

"What happened out there?" Hermione demanded, straightening her shoulders and remembering that she was supposed to be in charge now.

"Blaise and Pansy have a history." Daphne explained meaningfully.

"I know, it was in all the briefings, but rumor was, that was casual, they're friends now." Hermione reminded her. It was a highly popular rumor that Pansy had slept with Blaise and Draco in quick succession, and no one but Pansy likely knew the order after a fit of pique. There had been no emotions involved in that little faux love triangle, there was no reason for such hostility.

"Yeah, it's not about that." Daphne laughed coolly, as if the idea was ridiculously amusing to her.

"Then what?" Hermione demanded, her temper returning.

"I can't tell you Mione, okay? It's not something I can share without her permission." She responded sagely.

"I stuck my neck out for you Daph, do you know what would've happened to me if someone found out that I left you alone with him?" Hermione reminded her pointedly.

"I wasn't alone!" Daphne huffed, exasperated.

"Pansy doesn't count." Hermione reminded her, rolling her eyes.

"Why wouldn't Pans count?" Daphne demanded, as if she didn't know.

"Because she's..." with a dark look from Daph, Hermione changed tracks, softening her tone, "she's your friend, she'd do anything for you, including help you have improper relations with your fiance." Daphne laughed and threw her head back. It took a few moments before she calmed down, wiping her eyes as she gave Hermione a significant look.

"Trust me Mione, that is one thing that Pansy would never, ever help me do."

...  

Draco

He hadn't been expecting to see her, and when he did, it would have been foolish not to take advantage of it. He grabbed her hips as she exited the library, easily pulling her into a broom cupboard. She gasped, flailing for a moment until she took a breath. Apparently scenting him, she spun around quickly and poked his chest.

"You should stop doing that, one of these days someone is going to see you." She instructed primly.
"Someone will only see me if I stop to ask first, this maintains the secrecy." He smirked.

"One of these days someone will see me leaving a broom cupboard and assume I'm shagging some bloke, whether they see you or not." She reminded him cheekily.

"Well I'm not really just 'some bloke,' now am I?" He reminded her. She kept her face impassive.

"Really, what's the difference, a shag is a shag right?" She suggested blithely. He leaned into her space, smirking as he murmured the words in her ear, smoothing his thumbs along her hips as he did.

"When I have you... When I fuck you... You won't be able to walk. You won't be able to fucking stand... Or think. It won't be 'just some shag' and it will certainly matter that it was me." He vowed darkly. She shivered and started pumping out pheromones so quickly that he could taste the cherries on his tongue.

"That's big talk. Really think you can live up to it?" She challenged breathily, still pretending that she was unaffected, despite her short breaths and shaking voice.

"Absolutely." He smirked and start kissing her neck.

"Because I've heard things you know. Rumors. Those kitchen girls talk." She slowed her voice meaningful, and he watched those soft lips turn into a devilish smirk. He straightened, unable to take this affront to his masculinity.

"My reputation in bed is unmatched, Granger. Don't try to pretend otherwise." He reminded her, utterly confident. He was an excellent lover.

"Really that's what you think? Because in my experience, your reputation isn't only matched but exceeded." She insisted. It was like a violin hit a wrong note at a ball.

"By who?" He demanded.

"Oh I can't tell but you shouldn't feel too bad, you know what they say about those Italians." She gave him a meaningful look. His eyes narrowed.

"Blaise?" He guessed. She shrugged, adopting an innocent expression, but he saw through the facade to the trickster beneath.

"Mmm, I said nothing of the sort." She reminded him airly.

"Exceeded my ass." He grumbled, well aware he was pouting like a child.

"Well I guess you're just going to have to prove it." She offered smirking at him. He laughed, and reached for her hips again.

"I guess I will." He agreed eagerly. He'd show her "exceeded."

"Of course, I will need to sample the control group, for comparison." He froze and glared at her, even as she smirked.

"Don't even think about it." He warned. Blaise and Hermione was an appalling thought, one he had literally, never ever wanted to consider. Why did she torment him so?

"But the muscles Draco..." Hermione trailed off and bite her lip as she closed her eyes.

"I'm plenty muscular." He reminded her.
"But are you strong enough?" She asked meaningful, her eyes flicking down his torso.

"Of course I am." He insisted. She had spent hours worshiping his torso just the night before, she couldn't now pretend that he was some shrimp.

"Because I was doing some reading and some of the more intriguing positions require a great deal of… muscle." She smirked, speaking slowly.

"What intriguing positions?" He asked, playing along.

"Against walls, against nothing…. From what I can tell it can get fairly acrobatic." She explained easily. He felt his eyes get wide as he took her in, absorbing this new facet.

"Granger, are you talking about sex positions, kinky sex positions?" He demanded.

"Is that okay?" She froze, the vixen disappearing in an instant, his shy virgin appearing once again. He hurried to backtrack.

"Yes, that is absolutely okay. In fact, I'd like to hear more. Where else did your reading lead you?" He asked softly in her ear, going back to kissing her neck. She seemed to have an easier time when she couldn't see his reactions anyways.

"O Space." She started, her voice still tentative.

"Hmmm." He encouraged.

"It's supposed to require pain." She explained, her voice unsure.

"From what I've read it usually does yeah." He agreed.

"Read? You haven't..." She trailed off meaningfully. He straightened again.

"You are the first and only omega that I have sent into O Space." He told her gently.

"Oh." She looked down and it seemed to take her a moment to process that.

"Why is that so surprising to you?" He asked, feeling himself smile.

"You just seemed like you knew what you're doing." She admitted, shrugging. Well, it was good to know that the act had worked because he had definitely not been sure of himself that first time.

"I made a point to learn about it after..." He trailed off.

"The library." She finished for him.

"Yeah, after that I researched a lot about omegas, and then after I that day in my father's office I researched some more." He admitted, shrugging. It was important knowledge, especially if they were going to keep exploring it.

"Good to know." She concluding, nodding to herself.

"So, about that pain, would you be into that?" He asked gently, unsure whether she'd run away from the idea entirely.

"I have no idea what I'd be into. Some things seemed interesting in theory but I have no idea how I'd feel about them in practice." She explained reasonably.
"Okay, so we'll go slow." He suggested.

"Is that a problem?" She asked nervously.

"No, it is absolutely not a problem. Tell me more about those things that you found interesting." He suggested, pressing kisses along her jaw as she spoke.

"Well, certain charms." She admitted breathly. He could only imagine.

"Mmmmmm hmmm." He encouraged.

"and… other things." She finished weakly.

"C'mon Granger, don't chicken out on me now." He taunted.

"I don't want you to judge me." She murmured nervously. He pushed her hair behind her ear.

"I could never." He reminded her gently.

"Some of the things that seemed interesting weren't well, normal." She told him nervously. Now his imagination was racing.

"I can't tell if I'd be willing until you tell me." He reminded her.

"What about you?" She demanded.

"Hmmm?" He murmured against her throat.

"What are your kinks if we're talking about it?" She demanded. He laughed at the irony.

"Why are you so brave confronting me and so timid sharing?" He inquired.

"Self-protective instincts." She reminded him easily.

"How about this: a kink for a kink, I tell you mine, you tell me yours." He suggested.

"Fine." She huffed.

"I like lingerie Granger." He told her easily.

"On who?" She asked sharply. He rolled his eyes.

"You're going to have to show me those books sometime. I like birds in lingerie." He stated firmly. He had never had the desire that some blokes had to try on the garments themselves, but all the more power to them he supposed.

"That's an obvious one." She huffed, clearly disappointed.

"Rules are rules, your turn." He insisted. She mumbled something incoherently. "Speak up Granger." He teased, sucking a mark above her collar bone.

"We are technically in public." She reminded him. He cast a quick muffliato. "You didn't do that first?"

"I could not have been expected to predict this conversation." He defended himself, it had taken a very unexpected turn. "Now fess up. You're avoiding the question."
"Alright… bondage seems intriguing." She admitted tentatively.

"Fuck." He groaned deeply as his prick went from intrigued to painfully hard in an instant.

"Sorry! I'll never…" She hurried to back track, but he cut her off. He grabbed her wrists in his hands, easily raising them above her head. "Fuck." She breathed as he leaned in and kissed her hard. She squirmed but his grip didn't falter.

"You remember your word?" He asked quickly as he nipped at her ear.

"Yes." She breathed, her chest rising and falling rapidly, her breasts practically calling to him.

"Use it if you need to." He reminded her and kissed down the hollow of her throat.

"Okay." She gasped. She kept squirming and he realized quickly that that was part of the fantasy. The cold metal of her cuff dug into his palm but he ignored it in favor of the bounty before him. He kissed along her collarbones before dipping into her breasts kissing and sucking over the tops of the soft mounds. The scent of apricot flooded his senses and he groaned as he realized that he could smell how wet she was. She panted, obviously desperate to touch him back but there was no anger in her eyes, just desire. It was like a power trip, the most perfect drug. He was desperate in instants, pressed up against her thin frame easily. He transferred both of her wrist to one hand easily, and used the other to cup her plump bottom. She squirmed and jumped a little, easily wrapping her legs around his waist. He groaned as her skirt fell around her and he pressed against her center, separated by just the thinnest layers of fabric.

"Wait!" She gasped, her legs dropping quickly. He quickly let go of her wrists, stepping back. It wasn't quite the word, but he knew she wasn't quite at the point to rely on that solely. "Sorry, I just... I'm really into you and I just really don't want to lose my virginity in a broom closet." She huffed, a blush rushing up her cheeks. He chuckled and kissed her gently.

"No worries, and we still have a lot we can try before we get to that, stop stressing about it." He instructed gently. Sex was supposed to be fun after all, and he was more than willing to show her that it wasn't fucking or nothing. There were quite a few intermediate acts in there too.

"Okay." She agreed unconvincingly. "I should go anyways, check in on Astoria." Ah, yes, who needs a cold bath when he can just be reminded of his ill almost fiancee.

"Of course, go." He offered, waving towards the door. She slipped out slowly, but her lingered, wondering for a moment if any of that had really just happened and how the hell he got so lucky.
Hermione

Hermione felt bad that Astoria was sick, she did, truly, but she had to admit that it did great things for her schedule. After checking once more, bringing the poor girl water and wiping the sweat off of her brow, Ginny found her, happily pulling her into the stable. She laughed, going easily as the sound of clopping hoofs and the rustle of brushes caught her ear.

"Harry's on break." Ginny announced breezily.

"So he's working with Buckbeak." Hermione guessed.

"Exactly." Ginny agreed jovially. Some of the younger stable hands nodded to them as they passed by. A few of the resident staff gave them confused looks but they both ignored those.

"Door." Hermione called as they reached the arena.

"Okay." Harry grunted absentmindedly, not letting go of the lead line or taking his eyes off of the gray stallion trotting in a loop. Buckbeak was a grey stallion, his coat dark with sweat from what was obviously a good work out. Harry flicked his shoulder with the whip, and Buckbeak pivoting, circling in the opposite direction. Hermione and Ginny waited at the edge of the ring. The thuds of Buck's hooves in the sawdust were a peaceful rhythm that they both knew Harry sometimes lost himself in.

Based on a cue only Harry could understand, he called for Buck to slow, slipping into a walk. The cool down would continue for a while, but now Harry could think of other things. He looked up, suddenly remembering that he had let other people.

"Hey." He called, even as Buckbeak continued circling.

"You need to take an actual break before the only person you can talk to is that horse." Ginny called stubbornly.

"Fine" Harry huffed, pulling Buck in closer. "I need to untack first." He admitted, patting Buckbeak's flank absentmindedly. The horse tossed his mane.

"You have people for that." Ginny reminded him.

"Who are doing their jobs." Harry reminded them. Ginny rolled her eyes. "We'll help, you know we love Buck." Hermione offered despite Ginny's dirty look to the contrary.

The foursome trudged into the main stable as Harry finished Buck's cool down. Harry hooked Buck in by his bridle and they set to work. Ginny undid the saddle and set off for the tack room as Harry undid the bit and Hermione set about brushing out Buck's coat. They settled into a familiar routine and Hermione found herself musing on how similar settling Astoria in for the night and taking care of Buck was. He lifted his hoof for Harry as the man cleaned it out, Ginny brushed out his mane and tail and Hermione washed the tack. They worked quietly in tandem until Harry declared Buck thoroughly pampered and walked the stallion into the paddock.

"So what was it that you wanted to talk about?" Harry asked, wiping sweat from his forehead with ease.
"Is it a crime to want to see our dear friend?" Ginny asked breezily. Harry rolled his eyes.

"Fine, beat around the bush, what do I care?" He huffed.

"What has you feeling so testy?" Hermione asked, a little too brightly if she was being honest. Harry studied her carefully as she tried to keep a poker face, she was having a harder and harder time not smiling like an idiot all of the time lately.

"Nothing, just, do you ever feel like something's wrong?"

"Yes, quite frequently and then I put my shoes on the right feet and try again." Ginny answered flippantly. Harry rolled his eyes.

"I'm serious. Haven't you ever felt like you were meant for more than this?" Harry gestured to their surroundings, the dusty paddock and literal horse shit.

"Harry…" Hermione said slowly. Harry turned away from what she was sure were her "concerned mother" eyes.

"I know, trust me, I know, it's just been bothering me more than usual is all." Harry shrugged, and there was something significant in his express but she had learned one thing about Harry Potter over the years, it was if he didn't want to share it wasn't going to happen and no amount of needling could change that.

"You know, sometimes I don't mind being a servant." Ginny announced easily. Harry and Hermione both turned to her with skeptical expressions. "I mean it! There's a power in it, in being overlooked. We can do so much shit that nobles can't even dream of, can manipulate them without any heat, can choose our own path."

"Until we get killed for it you mean?" Hermione cut her friend off, her pleasant mood evaporating.

"It's different for you Mione," Ginny reminded her softly. Hermione fumed. There were times when Ginny got like this, all romantic portrayals and distortions of reality and whenever Hermione called her out on it, the younger girl would always bring it back to her golden shackle.

"Fuck off." She snapped, Harry started to stutter something out before Hermione strode away, needing some air. She only stopped in her rooms for the briefest moment, unlocked the small box in which she stored her belongings, grabbed a book and set outside. The warm summer sun kissed her skin as she burst into the gardens, frustration and indignation fading with every step.

She settled beneath a tree beside a section of lavender bushes, determined to pretend that the scent didn't remind her of anyone because that would be pretty unreasonably sappy, and cracked open the novel. It was fantasy, full of dashing heroes and terrible villains, but it was also beautifully written and never failed to relax her. The breeze was cool but the sun was warm where it filtered through the leaves and when she finally reemerged, she was two hundred pages in and gauging from where the sun was, likely going to be late for her other duties if she didn't hurry. She straightened warily. Her joints popping as she stretched and made her way inside the manor.

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Draco

Draco had been drawing, and not just doodling in the margins of the books Severus had him read, but actually putting work into elaborate pieces. He was slowly shaking the rust off, and decent work was taking shape. He found himself drawing lots of flowers and rivers and while that wasn't exactly
new the additions were. He found himself drawing Hermione, a lot. Never a full portrait, that would be too difficult to explain if he found it, but just aspects of her. Her hands, her hair, what he legs would look like tangled in his sheets all made their way into his sketchbook. Maybe she'd let him draw her eventually. Maybe she'd model for him. It was an exhilarating thought, if a far off one, and he settled for now, or tucking his sketch book and setting off to find her.

…

Hermione

Hermione stowed her book back in her makeshift trunk and hurried to the library for her most boring duty of supervising Blaise and Daphne. Her shoes clipped against the cobblestone as she hurried down the corridor and she vaguely heard someone round the corner behind her, but paid them no mind.

"Mione!" The shout echoed down the hallway and she jumped. Turning, she was only partly surprised to see the red headed waiter hurrying to catch up with her.

"What Ron?" She snapped, not in the mood for his accusations. Even though they weren't that far off from the truth it was still none of his business.

"How are you?" He asked slowly, skidding to a stop in front of her with the grace of a new born giraffe.

"Huh?" She sputtered dumbly. In all their years of knowing each other, she wasn't sure that Ron had ever asked that question genuinely, but there was no reservation or hidden meaning in his expressions.

"You just seem different lately. I just wanted to make sure that you were okay." He shrugged, as if it wasn't a big deal, as if it wasn't a problem, that she was acting differently. She didn't know how to react.

"Yeah, I'm. I'm really good." She admitted, unable to help the goofy smile that stubbornly pushed up the corners of her mouth whenever she thought of Draco, and she found herself doing that a lot lately.

"I'm happy to hear it." Ron answered sincerity pouring from him. She warmed even more, something like acceptance from someone who was something like a friend was always a nice thing.

"Thank you." She smiled "How are you, Ron?" She inquired softly, still waiting for him to snap back to either Desperate-Ron or Judgmental-Ron.

"I'm just happy that you are happy." Ron shrugged but she saw something change in his expression.

"That's not really an answer." She reminded him. He laughed darkly.

"It isn't, is it?" He agreed and disappeared into the kitchen.

…

Hermione had been in the library for approximately .3 seconds before Draco appeared. Her eyes widened comically as she watched him slip along the side of the room, smirking as he went into the little used reference section, keeping eye contact with her until the very last moment. She blushed and shifted. The leather couch she was sitting on made a very loud noise. Blaise looked up from the potions book he was pouring over to glare at her. She raised her hands in surrender and glanced
quickly at Daphne, who was still pouring over law records, before slipping into the back of the library a little too quickly to even pretend to be coy.

Draco was smirking as he leaned against a bookshelf. Hermione desperately tried to ignore that devious glint in his eyes that did things to her insides.

"What are you doing here?" She hissed, glancing over her shoulder. She could just picture Daphne bursting in on them and the hell fire that would rain down on her life if she did.

"I can't want to see my girlfriend?" He asked casually. She blushed like a foolish tween at the word. A part of her wanted to reject it, but it was kind of true so she could go with it.

"You very rarely just want to see me." She reminded him. He laughed, wrapping his arms around her waist and spinning her around so she leaned against the shelf; she laughed.

"True." He admitted easily and started kissing down her neck.

"You're horny and looking for a snog." She observed a little more breathily than she would have liked personally.

"Is that such a bad thing?" He asked and she felt him smirk against her neck.

"No. Not at all." She answered easily, pulling her head to hers and kissing him frantically.

**Draco**

Hermione was a bad chaperone. Really a good chaperone watched the people they were supposed to be watching. A good chaperone would never let their charges out of their sight. A good chaperone would never think of doing something else when they were supposed to be watching. A good chaperone would definitely not be snogging their significant other in between the stacks. A good chaperone would not be sighing so happily as said significant other sucked a mark onto her collar bone. A good chaperone definitely wouldn't have let him pull down her blouse and unlace her corset in the corner of the library but who was Draco to complain.

His jacket was already gone, haphazardly tossed to the side minutes earlier. His shirt was unbuttoned and she continued to trace the muscles on his chest. Occasionally she drifted lower, just barely brushing the waistband of his trousers. He was rock hard, aching really. He might die.

He finally got the laces on her blouse loose enough to slide them down and she froze, stiff as a rail. She looked up at him and her eyes were dilated as fuck. The smell of apricots and cherries was thick in the air and he just knew she was wet, fucking soaked, for him, just for him. His slid his leg between hers, that seemed to snap her out of her pause. She squirmed, her body trying to grind down on his even if her mind didn't know that's what she wanted. He pushed down the loosened corset just a few inches, exposing the top of perfect mounds of flesh. Her skin was light and creamy with a few tiny freckles. He traced the top of her breasts with his fingertips.

"Just do it." She whispered, careful not to let her voice carry in the silent library. He pulled down the garment the rest of the way and had to take a moment to think about anything other than what was in front of him. They weren't the largest breasts he had ever seen or the perkiest but they were pretty goddamn awesome. One because hey boobs, and two because they were hers.

"Beautiful" he murmured. Twin peaks stood out in perfect little dusty pink buds and he immediately wanted to suck them, to nip them, to worry them with his teeth until she was whining and begging for release. At the moment, his mouth needed to stay on hers, because she tended to moan and he
tended to not want to be caught petting in the library. He ran his hands along the outside of her breast, feeling the silky skin and the weight of the soft flesh. He traced the sensitive skin beneath her breasts, one of his favorite spots because of how soft and reactive it was, in the very best way. Hermione’s breath caught and the scent of apricots got heavier. He breathed in her hormones, those perfect, drug worthy little scent boosters. He followed a gentle spiral to the center of her breasts before tracing the little bud, which was just beckoning to be touched in the cold air. He brushed it with his thumb in a tiny circular movement, her breath caught and he nipped her lower lip, tugging it firmly with his teeth. She whimpered, the sound quiet but still delicious to him.

She squirmed, her hips canting on his leg. Her head fell back. He trailed his lips down her neck, lingering on her throat. There was something powerful about how her neck looked, stretched like that. His cock twitched as her fingernails dug into his arms. He lifted her up and her legs wrapped around his waist. That was a much better angle, he dipped his head and flicked the tip of her nipple with his tongue. She tasted sweet, like cherries and just a tiny bit of sweat. Her legs tightened and she gasped. He pinched the other one and she hissed but he eased the feeling by rolling the delicate bud. Her breathing had just returned to normal, so he nipped the bud that was in his mouth, pulling at it with his teeth. She moaned, way too loudly but eh, he's made worse mistakes. He used his tongue to apologize, laving and rolling the bud. It went on like that for a while, deliberately altering between a hint of pain and as much pleasure as he could manage. Eventually he looked up and her head was resting against the shelf.

"You still with me?" He whispered. It took her longer than it should've to respond. He felt a rush of panic, quickly putting her down. She was limp and he barely caught her. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He tilted up her chin looking closely at her eyes. They were dilated and hooded.

"You with me babe?" He asked again. She nodded and blinked. Her eyes cleared immediately.

"Please don't stop." She whimpered gripping his biceps tightly.

"Only if i know that you're up." He insisted.

"I'm up." she snarled, her eyes dark in a way that they never could be during o space

"Okay. Do you remember that word?" He asked, reminding her.

"Yes Draco, I remember it." She told him dryly.

"Good," He smirked, hiking up her skirts as he lifted her again. He could feel the heat of her center even though their two layers of clothes, and he felt drunk with the thought of how wonderful she'd feel on his cock. She whimpered as he rocked against her, hopefully catching her clit in the process. He returned his mouth to the tip of her breast, sucking it and nipping it in equal turns. If he could tell anything from the scent in the air she was close to coming, just skirting the edge of it if he had to guess. He doubted just nipple play could get her there, but this had its own merits. He loved teasing her.

"Draco!" A feminine voice called. Fuck. His head dropped forward, thumping painfully on the wooden shelf in front of him over her shoulder as his cock rapidly deflated. Nice to see you buddy, we'll catch up later. He thought warily.

"I'm sorry, If I don't go she'll just come looking for me." He explained.

"Coming mother!" He called, groaning. Hermione stiffened and looked up at him nervously but he pressed a gently kiss to her forehead. "Wait ten minutes after I leave. I wouldn't put it past her to leave spies waiting behind." Hermione nodded.
He groaned again before hastily casting a spell to rearrange both of their clothes and stalking out of the aisle and back into the real world. It was not a pleasant transition.

...  

He kissed his mother's cheek briefly in greeting and she took his arm as they walked towards the garden. She stayed quiet. When she got like this Draco knew there was no way to rush her through it. His mother would say whatever was on her mind when she got around to it.

"You'll make a wonderful husband Draco." She announced softly. He stiffened and held open the door for her. Narcissa glided through it before taking his arm again.

"I'll certainly try, Mother." He assured her noncommittally.

"No. You won't try. You will succeed, Draco." She pushed. The insistence in her voice was chilling.

"We both know that I can't guarantee that, Mother." He reminded her gently.

"You won't be your father Draco, after what he put you through, you won't be like the rest of them." Narcissa hissed, winding on him. There was something scary in her eyes. Her love was still there but so was fear, a fear he wasn't ready to face. He didn't want to talk about this. He yanked his arm out of her grip and left, striding back into the manor with too many thoughts flicking through his head, too many memories haunting him. He couldn't, he couldn't deal with this right now, not ever.

He stormed into the manor, whirling through hallways, sending servants scuttling away and desperately needing to break something. He needed to rip, to shatter, to hurt. He got like that sometimes. When he was younger he used to give in. He used to kick the shit out of house elves the same way his father would kick the shit out of him. Now, he dealt with it. He went to the top of the north tower with a bottle of scotch and a crate of wine glasses and drank until he got blurry and then hurled the glasses at the walls or the ground below. It wasn't healthy, but it worked. He passed his father's office, only to skid to a stop as he heard raised voices. His father didn't yell. He was always cold, contempt and icy cruelty, yelling was far beneath him.

"Of course I can't go back on it! Nott has already done too much." His father roared and Draco crept closer to the door, resting his ear against the heavy oak. He didn't dare cast a spell to allow him to hear better, certain his father had set wards against that sort of thing.

"Isn't there…" The other voice started, too distorted by the crackling of the flames in the floo to make out. He was quickly cut off.

"No! It's been sixteen years, there's nothing left to do." His father sighed.

"I heard from Yaxley…" The stranger started but quickly pitched his voice lower, as if the next part was too crucial to risk being overheard. Draco couldn't make out the words but his father helpfully cleared it out.

"There was child!" He bellowed, and yeah, ow, that hurt.

"There may have been a child." The other man hedged nervously.

"There was a brat, around that time, goddamn it..." His father trailed off, clearly furious as he made some realization. Somebody clearly fucked up, badly.

"Are you sure?" The voice checked.
"Mostly..." There was a heavy pause and Draco could just make out the sound of his father pacing."The foolish brat doesn't know. We just have to make sure that it stays that way." His father resolved ominously and Draco very slowly backed away.

He didn't feel the need to break anymore, but now he really just needed to go some place where life would make sense again.
Hermione

She was a terrible attendant, really, pretty awful. After awkwardly standing in the corner while Blaise and Daphne ignored each other for the remainder of their "date," she had checked on Astoria again, who was paler, clammy, and more nauseous. Hermione had been banished quickly, Astoria insisting that she only wanted to sleep. She wove through passages quickly, hurrying to see Draco as soon as possible. She was quickly becoming one of those girls, the girls who spent all of their time with their lovers the moment they could. It was a little embarrassing. She still couldn't seem to stop herself. She exited right outside of Draco's room and knocked quickly.

"Come in." The order was strange, almost grunt like. Hermione hesitated briefly before pushing open the door. She did not see what she had been expecting. Draco was upside down, hanging on a bar, that had definitely not been there earlier, by his knees.

"Hello?" She greeted him nervously. He was sweating, not profusely, but enough that he was glistening, perfectly defined muscles shining. His face was flushed from effort and his hair was rumpled. His expression quickly turned to surprise and he cursed.

"Hey, sorry, I was just finishing up." He announced, stomach flexing while he reached up and grabbed the bar. He tucked his knees in, dropping easily with hardly a sound. It was impressive, but she wasn't paying too much attention, too distracted by what she had noticed on his back. There were pale white scars, angry, raised marks, crisscrossing against his skin.

"Draco. What… what happened?" She asked softly, her blood running cold. He froze, his hand immediately flying to his back.

"Oh, that? Nothing, childhood injury." He stuttered, turning around quickly, color flashed across his cheeks, shame apparent in his expression. He picked up a shirt from his chair, hurriedly pulling it on, but leaving the buttons undone.

"Why didn't a healer get a look at it, a proper one?" She demanded. Those were angry scars, clearly never having been treated, ever. They were wizards! He was a lord; there was no good reason for his skin to be marred that way.

"It wasn't that kind of injury." Draco admitted, his voice cold as he stared blankly at something on the ground.

"Did your father do this to you?" She demanded. Lucius's cruelty was a palpable, ever present thing. She knew that. She had never imagined him turning that cruelty on his own sun.

"The whipping boy was sick." He stepped away, running his fingers along his bookshelf, unable to look at her.

"What does that mean?" She asked tentatively. Draco's pacing got more frantic, his fingers never leaving the shelf as if he needed something to ground him.

"Violent flu, he was quarantined to his room." He continued, still not looking at her.

"What's a whipping boy?" She demanded. He turned to a painting, as if she wasn't there.

"I bumped a vase, and my father was home, and a business deal had just gone wrong." He was stuck
somewhere else, reliving something terrible. She desperately wanted him back.

"Your father did this to you?" She repeated, stunned. She wondered if it still hurt. Her wrist always hurt, but it was constantly reopened. How badly did you have to hurt someone for it to ache years later?

"You don't believe you're the only one with scars, do you?" He asked seriously, finally turning to face her. There was something dark in his expression.

"Lie down." She instructed suddenly, knowing what she wanted to do before she even realized it.

"What?" He jolted, surprised at her reaction but he was back and that was what was important.

"You spend all this time taking care of me, right now you just need to lie down." She instructed easily, pushing his shoulders towards the bed. He stepped towards it briefly, but then turned back towards her.

"I don't want to be stared at like some freak, it's from my past, it doesn't bother me." He instructed firmly, clearly others hadn't reacted with empathy in the past. She wondered briefly how many other people knew. It couldn't be many, but hopefully he had had someone to talk to these few years.

"You're not a freak and I'm not staring. Lie down." She repeated, unwavering, even as she smiled up at him. He was still timid, cautiously turning around as he abandoned his shirt to the side anxiously. He lied down in front of her warily, his muscles taut with stress. She knelt down beside of him and took inventory of her magic quickly. She had just enough. She smiled as she transfigured the water on his bedside table to oil, like the kind Astoria used occasionally. Another quick charm let it slowly warm. She pressed a gentle kiss to his shoulder. He tensed but she ignored him, kissing down his spine. He lied down in front of her warily, his muscles taut with stress. She knelt down beside of him and took inventory of her magic quickly. She had just enough. She smiled as she transfigured the water on his bedside table to oil, like the kind Astoria used occasionally. Another quick charm let it slowly warm. She pressed a gentle kiss to his shoulder. He tensed but she ignored him, kissing down his spine. She very deliberately didn't linger on the pure white and silver strips, paying them no more attention than the rest of his skin but not ignoring them either. They bothered her because she didn't like thinking about Draco suffering but she certainly wasn't disgusted or repulsed by him because of them. If he really didn't have a problem with them she would have seen them before now. The least she could do was assure him that he had nothing to be ashamed of. He was still tense, even as she reached the waistband of his trousers. She kissed her way back up his spine, pausing when she reached the back of his neck. She knew that he was struggling with staying still, that this went against every single one of his urges as an alpha but what could she say, she was a caretaker by nature, if this was going to work he had to be willing to be taken care of once or twice. She reached for the oil, pouring a little into her palms. Slowly she rested her hands on his tense shoulders. He sighed at the warmth of the oil as she languished over the muscles, rubbing and kneading them until she got all of the knots to relax. She traveled lower and lower down his spine, letting his muscles relax as he melted into the mattress. His breathing evened out as she languished over his skin. She focused on his shoulders, the tense muscles slowly relaxing. He went lax and it took her a moment to realize that he had fallen asleep. She kissed gently between his shoulder blades once more before slowly rolling off of the bed. She tiptoed nervously out of the room, sliding on her shoes clumsily. As she tried to close the door he sat up quickly, sleep in his eyes.

"Wait, stay awhile, let me return the favor." He grinned sleepily. She chuckled.

"How exactly do you plan to do that?" She asked fondly.

"I know you secretly love cuddling, you have that written on your pretty little forehead." He informed her. She crooked an eyebrow.

"I do, do I?" She teased, walking back towards his bed. He grinned.
"Keep me company, just until I fall asleep." He requested, a smirk in his eyes. She laughed but got under the covers with him all the same. Just for a little while

...

The next morning Hermione woke up with a start. She looked around frantically and it took her a moment to remember how she had gotten there. Ah yes her conniving little snake of a lover certainly knew how to persuade her. She rolled her eyes and dropped heavily back onto the luxuriously soft mattress. Draco groaned beside her, his hand landing heavily on her hip as he rolled her into him, burying his face in her hair.

"We sleep together too often" She reminded him warily. He huffed with laughter. "I heard it too." She sighed, rolling her eyes at her own unintentional innuendo.

"If we were sleeping together too often would be an impossibility." He announced easily.

"Prat." She scoffed and then paused heavily. "Are we going to?" She asked nervously.

"Huh?" Draco froze, his tone still a little sleepy as he pulled back and looked at her like he was reading a passage he couldn't quite figure out. His hair was mussed with sleep and his eyes looked heavy. She could only imagine what he bush of a head of hair looked like.

"I know we've kind of joked about it, joked isn't the right word but, we've hinted but would you actually want to? You know, sleep with me?" She muttered, feeling the color rush to her face as she stumbled over her words. The sane part of her was shrieking in the background but her mouth had apparently mutinied because she couldn't stop talking.

"You're asking if I'd like to sleep with you?" Draco clarified slowly; she looked away.

"Yes." She admitted nervously, entirely unable to see his reaction.

"If I'd like to make love to you?" He continued; she looked at him nervously and he was just barely smiling.

"Well... Yes." She acknowledged, blushing at his tone.

"If I'd want to fuck you for hours until you came screaming my name?" He pushed, his eyes getting dark with lust as he stared at her.

"Yes?" She agreed, giggling nervously.

"If I'd like to get you so unbelievable horny that you'd beg for my cock before finally giving you what you so desperately needed?"

"Is that a yes?" She demanded, determined to not dwell on that very vivid imagery until she could do something about it.

"Of course I want to do all that. And more by the way…" He grinned like this was all obvious and kissed her forehead indulgently. "When you're ready." He stressed, positively saintlike with patience.

"You know this isn't normal?" She pointed out.

"What?" He asked gently, playing with her hair and okay, that felt good, like distractingly good.

"You're the guy, you're supposed to be pressuring me into sex constantly, I don't quite believe that
you are this patient."

"Well if you really want to know the key factors are being utterly enthralled by you and wanking a truly appalling amount." He answered breezily.

"Hmmm." She found herself thinking… interesting thoughts. Maybe it was just that he rational side hadn't quite woken up but she liked the thought of that.

"What?" He asked warily. It was her turn to smirk.

"I just like that image, you... Wanking while thinking of me." She grinned. It was true besides from the obvious intriguing imagery, it made her feel deliciously sexual to know that he thought of her like that, and frequently if the designation appalling was to be believed.

"Oh you do?" Draco asked slowly, his eyes lighting up with mischief.

"Mmm hmmm makes me think about what you look like when you come." She smirked, looking up at him from beneath her lashes.

"Want to see?" He offered, clearly meaning it as a joke.

"Yes actually." She answered, feeling a little devious. Draco's eyes widened comically with shock.

"What?" He sputtered, all calm suave behavior long gone.

"I want to watch you come." She clarified.

"Merlin Hermione you can't just say shit like that." He groaned, turning away from her and flopping heavily down.

"Why not?" She asked curiously. He groaned again, rubbing his brow.

"Because it hurts to get that hard that fast especially when it has to stay like that for a bit." He explained blithely.

"Who says it has stay like that?" She asked deviously.

"What?" He sat up in shock and yeah that was definitely a very hard dick in those pants.

"What if I wanted to watch you take care of it? Just watch." She suggested nervously.

"Huh?" He sputtered again.

"You can say no if you want to. No pressure." She reminded him gently.

"I don't want to say no but are you sure? I mean why?" He stuttered, clearly lost.

"Because I think it would be hot?" She explained simply, shrugging. Did she need a better reason?

"Okay, will I ever get a turn watching?" He asked, grinning at the prospect.


"Fuck." He groaned.

Draco shucked his trousers and pants immediately, his cock standing proudly up as it strained towards his stomach. She didn't have much to compare it to but it seemed large, about as wide
around as her wrist and long. She couldn't imagine fitting that inside of her. Fuck, well, yes she
could, but she had the feeling it would be a stretch… in the best possible way. She licked her lips
reflexively and he groaned.

"Fuck" He repeated. "This is going to be embarrassingly short." He warned her.

"Looks pretty long to me." She smirked without hesitation.

"You are an odd bird." He remarked, cupping his balls in his hands and squeezing them gently.

"But you like it." She reminded him. He groaned, finally reaching up to stroke his shaft.

"Yes I do." He admitted. He stroked himself roughly twice before focusing on the head and getting
his hand wet. Precum was beading at his slit and fuck she wanted to lick it. She squirmed, shifting
her weight and her heel pressed against her core. She pretended the pressure on her clit wasn't a
desperately needed relief. "You smell fucking amazing." Draco groaned, his hand going faster now.
His hips bucked into his fist and his head fell back as he groaned. Sweat beading on his hairline and
Hermione couldn't take her eyes off his thrusting cock. His other hand went to his balls, and he rolled
them easily as his grip tightened and he groaned, the sound almost a little pained. The room was
silent, only the slick sound of his hand sliding against skin filled the room. She watched eagerly,
taking in ever second, wondering if she'd ever get to watch again. She wanted to touch herself,
wanted to ease the need she felt building as she clenched around nothing, but she couldn't imagine
doing that in front of him, not yet.

"Fuuccck" Draco groaned, the sound low and desperate before his hips bucked up one more time
and his head fell back. His cock twitched and spurted thick white come on his stomach. Three more
twitches as Draco kept tugging at his cock and Draco sagged, dropping heaving on his mattress.

He reached for his wand blearily and vanished the quickly drying cum from his skin. Heavy silence
filled the room as Hermione realized that she had no fucking clue what she was supposed to say
now. Holy shit, what was she supposed to say? What was she supposed to do? Was she supposed to
do something?

"Chill out." The command was so casual that Hermione jumped. "You're panicking, I can feel it, just
come lie with me." He suggested without sitting up, patting the spot beside him. She laid down
timidly, carefully arranging herself with her head on his arm. His fingers gently ran through her hair.
"You wanted to see." He reminded her gently.

"I know, I don't like regret watching or anything like that. It was really hot." She realized aloud. He
chuckled.

"I try." He shrugged self-deprecatingly.

"Don't even, I will not stroke your ego, Draco Malfoy." She scoffed he laughed.

"Who said anything about my ego?" He smirked.

"Har har. You do such a lovely job stroking that yourself." She teased poking his chest. He laughed.

"Which you can now attest to." He reminded her. "If it wasn't the voyeurism, what made you freak
out?"

"I guess I just like structure, knowing what I'm supposed to do." She admitted.

"I hadn't noticed." Draco deadpanned.
"So teach me, what do you do after that?" She asked nervously. What was the process?

"Well you're more than welcome to finish yourself off." He suggested, grinning.

"Yeah no." She shook her head and laughed. Though she definitely was turned on enough for that she just, she wasn't ready.

"Do you not?" He asked, smirking and raising an eyebrow.

"Of course not!" She protested immediately, blushing as she remembered just how much of a lie that was. "I mean, sometimes, occasionally, birds get stressed out to you know!"

"You do not need to defend wanking to me Granger." He laughed good-naturedly.

"I know that it's just, embarrassing, you know. All of the governesses always said it was something dirty, to be ashamed of, that it sullied our virtue." She explained, blushing.

"Yeah, no. It's totally natural and hot as hell, so.. Go for it." He grinned, his eyes flicking down her body suggestively.

"The mood's kind of dead." She reminded him, scoffing.

"Pity." He observed, his eyes still lingering on her salaciously.

"Maybe later." She offered, smirking.

"I might just hold you to that." He grinned, wrapping his arms around her again and pulling her in.

"So what do we do now?" She asked again.

"Now we do this thing, it's this great new invention, it's called relax." He teased.

"Aren't orgasms supposed to make you more pleasant? Reduce sarcasm?" She asked.

"Panic isn't really conducive to afterglow. Have you never heard of the concept of pillow talk?" He asked, teasing again.

"My entire knowledge of sex other than reading those books the other day was a governess yelling at us to not have sex before marriage, being told to spread my legs and think of my country, and Ginny Weasley drawing a penis on my homework when I was thirteen to traumatize me." She recalled.

"Silence in the afters is the golden rule Granger, just relax and think about how great the sex was." He instructed easily.

"What if it's not great?" She questioned.

"If I have it my way that is not a circumstance you will ever come up against." He insisted, pushing her hair out of her face.

"Oh really, you never underperform?" She demanded skeptically.

"No." He grinned like a shark and something told her that he wasn't wrong.

... Every time she left his room it got harder and harder to come back to reality. Nothing felt less
important than her work for Minerva and her duties for Astoria but she still had to leave. She knocked on Astoria's door reluctantly, surprised when it flew open. Astoria stood there in her night gown, smiling happily as she immediately turned back around and settled on her pink and orange sheets.

"You're feeling better." She observed, all traces of sickness missing from her person.

"Sit with me. Come on, eat! You know my mother will lose it if she hears this plate isn't finished." Astoria pleaded, biting into a strawberry happily and patting the spot beside of her.

"She worries." Hermione defended the lady quickly.

"Of course she does." Astoria rolled her eyes as Hermione picked apart a croissant.

"I heard from a little birdie that you didn't come back to your room last night." Astoria announced, eyeing her with suspicion.

"I..." Hermione felt her heart stop.

"It's fine. Don't tell your best friend about your lover. It's not like she'd want to know or anything." Astoria flipped her hair and laughed playfully.

"It's not like that Tori." Hermione assured her.

"Do you love him?" Astoria demanded, her eyes lit up with misplaced joy.

"I... I don't know." Hermione stuttered, not sure what her answer even should be.

"Liar." Astoria accused gleefully.

"I'm not!" Hermione protested, her cheeks coloring violently.

"Keep telling yourself that." Astoria scoffed fondly.

"I just can't share right now Tori." Or never.

"If you tell me i can ask my mother for permission to release you, try to arrange the marriage." Astoria reminded her.

"Merlin Tori were definitely not there yet." Hermione shook her head violently.

"Have you slept together yet?" Astoria demanded grinning ear to ear.

"Tori!" Hermione blushed, outraged by the suggestion even though she didn't really have a right to be.

"Are you going to?" The other girl pushed. Hermione blushed, thinking of that morning's conversation. "You are!" Astoria predicted, giddy with her own self proclaimed genius.

"No, of course not. I'd never." Hermione sputtered.

"You're always saying that you don't want to get sold to some duke. This is a pretty good way to guarantee that and think about it, if he gets you pregnant my mother couldn't say no to the marriage." Astoria advised sagely.

"Tori are you nuts? I'm not getting pregnant to trap a guy into marriage." Hermione insisted, horrified
at even the prospect of that idea.
"Of course not, tell him the plan too." Astoria answered as if it obvious. That was even worse.
"There's no plan." Hermione promised firmly.
"Of course." Astoria winked knowingly and no, that, that was not what was going on either. "But really who is it? One of Malfoy's servants?" She guessed, clearly thinking of every make servant on the ground.
"I could have Daph order it out of you." Astoria threatened.
"You wouldn't." Hermione felt a chill run up her spine at the serious look in Astoria's eyes. It softened quickly and Astoria laughed, dispelling the tension in a moment.
"True but I could." She laughed as of it wasn't a terrifying breach of trust.
"But you wouldn't." Hermione repeated firmly because if she said it enough it would be true, right?
"No. But it's sooooo tempting." Astoria announced before biting into a pear happily. Hermione laughed, though nothing felt particularly funny.
"Would you even be able to get Daphne in the room for long enough? She hasn't left Pansy's side since she arrived."
"Good point." Astoria conceded.

Draco

His father was looking at him. And... And that shouldn't be strange. It shouldn't be bizarre that his father had wanted to speak to him. It shouldn't have sent his blood pressure rising or his stress exploding. It should have been a good thing. Draco stayed perfectly still, feeling like a mouse facing down a viper. His father was silent, his expression thoughtful as he stared down his son. Draco resisted the urge to squirm or look away, just staring him down. His back felt better than it had in years and he sat up perfectly straight. He could do this. He wouldn't break. The grandfather clock in the corner ticked ominously. Seconds stretched into moments and minutes without either of them saying a word.

"Have you propositioned her?" Lucius demanded suddenly.
"Excuse me?" Draco demanded, utterly confused.

"Astoria? Have you bed her?" His father asked nonchalantly, as if that was a fucking normal question to ask.

"No." Draco snapped. He had never had an opportunity to, and even if he had been given the opportunity he wouldn't, especially right now. He thought back to that morning with Hermione in his bed and was very aware of how badly he would give anything to wake up that way for a very long time.

"You should. It's all your good at after all." His father spit out, the words laced with venom. That was... well, highly unnecessary to say the least.

"Wouldn't that be distasteful?" Draco asked, kind of like this conversation. First he gets yelled at for
having sex now he's being reprimanded for not having sex.

"Of course it would. You're too stupid for your own good. If you fuck her she can't leave before this
engagement is resolved." His father explained, his tone icy as he spoke as if Draco was a particularly
dumb child. He flinched.

"Why is this so important to you? It can't be just about the sacred twenty eight anymore." Draco
demanded, this level of cruelty only came out when his father was truly worried. His father didn't
even seem to react until her was shoving back his chair and flicking his wand as the grandfather
clock exploded. Draco jumped, hurried to cover his face as glass and wood splinters flew across the
room. As the dust cleared, his father slammed his hands on the desk in front of him.

"There are forces at work that you couldn't hope to understand. Dark things. Risks. People who seek
to destroy this family. Do you want that?" He roared.

"Of course not!" Draco promised, leaping up and backing towards the door. His father calmed eerily,
sitting back down with a serene expression.

"Then don't be a fool. Fuck her. I don't care how." Lucius ordered, his soft tone totally at odds with
words.

"You're thinking too short sightedly. We have wards. Protections!" Draco reminded him, pacing
now with frustration.

"All truly useless in the face of a traitor." His father reminded him.

"Then don't do anything worthy of betrayal." Draco advised spitting cruelly.

"You truly are a worthless son." Lucius told him. It was testament to Lucius's rage that Draco didn't
even flinch at that any more.

"Happy to be of service." He spit out blithely, slamming the door behind him as he burst into the
hallway.

His mother was waiting outside, the dutiful little wife arriving to soothe her husband's injuries.

"Save it." He ordered angrily. Walking towards Blaise's room in a hurry. He needed a drink.

"He's under an immense amount of stress." His mother reminded him as if that made any of it better.

"I'm sure he is." Draco scoffed.

"You shouldn't provoke him." She instructed, the same phrase she used when he cut up Draco so
badly he almost died.

"You should leave him." Draco advised easily. His mother stopped, her shoes squeaking on the
stone.

"Draco!" She hissed, clutching his arm. He shook her off before continuing.

"Or kill him. Are the social ramifications really worse than his treatment mother?" He snapped
cruelly. She flinched before smacking him across the face.

"How dare you? That is your father and my husband. I am your mother." Narcissa hissed. "Your
father has never been anything but good to me, he has a temper but you've always gone out of your
way to provoke him. Leave him be." She ordered before walking off without ever looking back.
Coping, Calls, and Interventions

**Draco**

"Scotch." Draco demanded, shoving Blaise's door open. The other man was in his arm chair with a book in his lap. He looked up; his expression bored.

"Huh?" He answered slowly.

"Where do you keep your scotch here?" Draco clarified, Blaise didn't have a bar in his guest room but he had to have scotch here somewhere, he pulled down books, looking behind but there was nothing there.

"You don't want scotch." Blaise insisted, shaking his head.

"Trust me, I want scotch." Draco promised.

"No, you used to want scotch." Blaise announced as if that was supposed to mean something.

"What?" Draco sighed, not up for the word games.

"When you had a shitty day you used to reach for the things that would help you forget, scotch, potions, slags, whatever." Blaise reminded him as if it wasn't his life that they were talking about.

"And?" Draco groaned, wishing he would just get to the point.

"Now you don't really want scotch, you just think you want scotch, but because you really don't want scotch, the scotch won't help." Blaise talked in a literal circle and Draco was very lost.

"Can you get to the fucking point?" He snapped. It was too late for this bullshit and wow he really was getting old scarily quickly.

"Find your O, you'll feel better." Blaise ordered wisely and went back to his book. Draco waited but he apparently wasn't going to get up or tell Draco where the fucking scotch was so he walked out. He wasn't going to stick around but he also wasn't going to find Hermione because he was a fucking alpha and he didn't take orders from Blaise fucking Zabini.

…

**Hermione**

The note from Draco was unexpected to say the least. His typically neat scrawl was smeared, as if he couldn't wait for the ink to dry before sending it.

"Please come as soon as you can, I need you." It was unexpectedly vulnerable, she folded it hurriedly and tucked it into her bodice before heading out. She'd toss it in the fire as soon as she could but for now she had to hurry to Draco's room.

…

Draco was pacing, his shoes squeaked against the stone. The stress looked as if it could burst from underneath his skin.

"You okay? Your note said that it was urgent." Hermione asked gently as she closed the door behind
"Fine. I mean…” He trailed off, looking meaningfully at the full glass of scotch in his hand. "I'm sorry this is stupid…fucking Blaise." He sat down heavily. She leaned on the back of his love seat. "Just tell me." She cut him off quickly.

"My father has just been being… my father more than normal right now? And my mother. You know, she never, she never did shit about it, not about any of it. And now, now she's taking his side, again! Goddamn it. I hate it Hermione. I hate every goddamn moment in this castle. I hate every one of my wretched family and there is nothing I can do about it. " He ranted, his hand clenching and unclenching. She walked around the couch nervously.

"I'm sorry." She offered, not sure what else she could do. Draco scoffed.

"It's sure as hell not your fault. " He reminded her.

"Do you, do you want me to take your mind off of it?" She offered, her mouth moving before she knew that she was going to do it. That's what she was supposed to do, right? Draco froze.

"What?" He studied her carefully as she walked closer.

She slid over to him with confidence that she didn't have. He put his glass down deliberately with a solid clink as she nudged his legs open with her knees. This she knew, she had read about; it was what a girlfriend was supposed to be. His eyes were heated as he watched her and her confidence flew right the fuck out of the window. She was ridiculous. A child playing a woman's game. He must've noticed her anxiety because he reached for her hips pulling her closer with a smile.

"Relax." He ordered gently. She nodded. "Will you submit for me?" He asked, smiling sweetly. She froze. "What?" She asked, her turn to be surprised. "Just, it's peaceful, taking care of you, helps me relax." He explained, shrugging as if it was no big deal.

"Isn't it more responsibility?" She asked. He grinned.

"Only the good kind." He explained. She wasn't, wasn't quite sure what that really meant.

"I'm not really in the…" She admitted reluctantly.

"Not sexual Granger." She raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Okay, a little sexual, but I'm not gonna ask you to do what you just thought about doing."

"What was I thinking about doing?" She demanded.

"Getting me off." He smirked. She blushed.

"This is not the point this conversation." She reminded him firmly.

"No, but will you submit for me anyways? I'll make you feel good but no pain play, no bondage and you'll even keep your clothes on." He smirked at the suggestion.

"Alright," She admitted nervously, "Where do you want me?" She asked.

"Kneeling, center of the room." He stood, not even glancing at his glass. She kneeled nervously, squirming as she settled into place. "Now I want you to cross your hands behind you, one palm on top of the other." She complied anxiously, the orders following quickly, one on top of the other. "Keep your back straight but your eyes on the ground about two feet in front of you. Don't move
The words carried just the tiniest hint of an Alpha voice. She knew she could resist but why would she want to.

"Yes, Alpha." She agreed immediately. His hand went to her hair, gently pushing her hair back and off of her face. He stepped away briefly, she listened closely to his footsteps as he moved back quickly. He gathered up her hair and tied it back carefully if not perfectly. He kissed the top of her head. She smiled softly. He stepped away again, cushions rustling as he settled into the chair closest to her. He shifted closer, his left hand gently tracing over her neck. She sighed, feeling warm all over. She loved this, loved O Space, even when it was only partial. The soft sound of charcoal on paper surprised her. The swishing noises were punctuated by the occasional scratching sound. It took her a moment to realize that he was sketching. That, that was news. She knew most of Draco's secrets, or at least she thought she did, but drawing wasn't in any of her files. He started massaging her neck more firmly and started working down her spine. She kept her eyes on the ground but didn't feel his eyes on her. He wasn't looking at her but he was thinking of her, looking after her. It felt good, blissfully good. Time passed faster than she expected and she slipped slowly into O Space, feeling blissfully warm and relaxed.

"Good girl."

It was the last thing she heard before sliding all the way under.

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Draco

He tucked Hermione in gently, she reached for him and shivered, chilled even on the balmy summer night. She shifted uncomfortably as he placed a glass of water on the table beside her. He stretched and cracked his back. His omega was well taken care of and his alpha may as well have been preening with happiness. He felt like a storm had calmed unexpectedly. He felt... healthy. His floo crackled loudly in the other room and he kissed Hermione's forehead gently, a fond habit that he hadn't realized had been developing until now. She made a soft noise in the back of her throat as he stood up and carefully left the room. The fire flamed green again and sighed.

"Here and alone." Draco announced instantly and Theo's head popped through.

"I have fantastic news mate." The fire skewed his brown hair but Theo still looked as pinched as always. His mother had always commented that maybe Theo would grow into his mousy looks but it just never really happened.

"What is it Theo?" Draco sighed.

"C'mon this is a good thing get excited!" Theo practically shouted. Draco flinched, glancing back to his bedroom on reflex. When he turned back, Theo was smirking.

"Got a bird in there?" He guessed.

"Shut the fuck up." Draco snapped. Having Blaise know about Hermione was difficult enough, the idea of having Theo know made his skin crawl.

"Since when do you let them stay the night?" Theo pressed. Draco rolled his eyes. Not every shag in his life left immediately, Pansy stayed for an hour or two, occasionally, when she was tired.

"I mean it." Draco threatened. Theo laughed.

"Fine, fine, so touchy all of a sudden." He mocked.
"What's your news?" Draco demanded.

"Since my parents have decided I follow the trends and settled down I'm coming to your party tomorrow night." He grinned as if that should mean something to the other man.

"Why am I always the last to know about these parties?" Draco asked the universe in general.

"Mate, you're missing the point, me, you, Blaise, and all the noble birds this country has to offer?" Theo trailed off meaningfully.

"Mate, did you miss why the Greengrasses and Blaise are living in my house?" Draco reminded him.

"So what, people like us don't have to worry about things like fidelity. We don't marry for love Draco." Theo preached patronizingly.

"Trust me, I know, but circumstances have proved unfavorable to outside liaisons at the moment. " Draco explained vaguely.

"You have a bird in your bed right now." Theo pointed out smarmily.

"Yes, discoverable romantic relations are the largest problem here." Draco clarified. Theo smirked and nodded in agreement.

"Ah, I see, but you'll still hook me up tomorrow, right?" Theo checked, clearly focused on the important matters.

"Sure Theo, sure." Draco placated, rolling his eyes.

"See you tomorrow then!" Theo announced cheerily before cutting out the call. Draco sighed and leaned back in his chair for a moment. His headache was coming back and he just wanted, more than anything, to go to bed. He stood, stretched and made his way to his room.

Hermione was sleeping restlessly, rolling and turning. He cursed under his breath. He knew better than to leave an Omega alone so soon while she was still coming up, even if she was asleep. He hurried to her side, slipping under the sheets. She relaxed immediately as he pulled her close, stilling easily as he breathing evened out. He fell asleep dreaming of cherries.

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Hermione

Theo Nott's arrival was an unexpected and unfortunate issue in Hermione's plans in every sense. While Blaise had been helpfully distracted by his tormentor these last few weeks, Theo was not in the slightest bit willing to be pulled away from Draco's side. Also, he was flirting with Pansy almost nonstop and tormenting Harry and Ron with ridiculous demands. Hermione wasn't quite sure who was most infuriated among the people in her life, though Draco certainly appeared to be the front runner. Theo was constantly in his room, constantly trying to get Draco to play wingman. He had hit on Ginny twice, Astoria once, Pansy six times, Katie three times, and Hermione once. That last one really put Draco in a great mood but none of them bothered to comment that even Theodore Nott didn't have the balls to hit on Daphne.

The scariest thing: he hadn't even been there for a full day yet.

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She smiled across the room as she caught Draco's eye. He winked cheekily. She rolled her eyes.

"Alright here?" Hermione jumped, not having noticed Katie's arrival. She hurried to make her face a blank mask of professionalism.

"Of course." Hermione assured her. Katie smiled knowingly and that was probably an issue.

"I'm going to slip out, let me know if our girls need anything, yeah?" She asked.

"Sure," Hermione shrugged. Katie could keep her secrets too. Although Harry had that night off too, and that was certainly telling. The other girl slipped away quickly.

Astoria was doing fine, charming everyone in the room with her smile. It was so easy for her, with everyone but Draco. She danced with all of the right people, laughed warmly at all of the worst jokes, and smiled fondly at Narcissa and Lucius, even if Hermione knew that they made Astoria's blood boil out of pure sketchiness. Hermione couldn't quite believe that she had learned to hate the elder Malfoys even more since spending time at the manor, any more than she could believe how very far along the spectrum she was from hating the youngest Malfoy. But that was for another day. At the moment all she could do was watch and wait for someone to need her. Somebody always did.

It was easy from her niche to scan the ball room. Despite all the perfect hair and swirling dresses Hermione could already see facades starting to crack. Pansy had been chatting up a local Duke who was very single but she had slowly drifted back to Daphne's side. The latter girl had in fact been making the effort to be nice to Blaise, who was very confused. Theo was currently chatting up three girls at once; she could only imagine how well that would turn out. Narcissa was trying to play the perfect, welcoming hostess, but she was watching Draco like a hawk. Bitch.

The music was loud, the chatter was inane, and everyone was wearing too much perfume. She and Draco had planned to meet in the garden at the end of the ball, when Katie was coming to relieve her, and she just had to make it till then.

Draco

Draco slipped out into the garden, content to wait out here until Hermione could sneak away. Of course, there was another couple snogging against the outside wall. He rolled his eyes when he spotted the embellishments on Theo's coat. His mate never could attend the party without getting into some poor bird's knickers. The bird in question was making a fair bit of noise as she squirmed around. Draco was just about to leave when he caught what she was saying.

"No! Get off of me!" She protested, and now Draco could see that what he thought was passionate groping was actually her trying to shove Theo the fuck off. Draco groaned, striding over to his friend quickly.

"Theo! What the fuck are you doing?" He asked, pulling him back by his collar. Theo brushed off his grip and kept his hold on the poor girl.

"Fuck off Draco, she's an omega, it's what she's made for. She wants it." Draco sighed, looked up at the stars for a beat while he collected himself and then yanked Theo back with his full force. His friend stumbled and rounded on him, reaching for his wand. Draco sighed, and mustering every ounce of fury he possessed, he punched Theo in the face.

His mate crumpled into the dirt, where he could sleep this off. He might be pissed in the morning, but it was far more likely he was too sloshed to remember any of this.

"Fuck. I needed that." Draco shook out his hand, the sting easing quickly. "Are you alright?" He
asked the omega. The girl was quickly fixing her blouse and straightening herself up.

"Yeah, yeah… I'm fine." She sighed, stepping off the wall as she raised a hand to her tousled hair. Even in the dim light, he could spot the vivid red strands in sharp definition.

"You're Blaise's omega, Weasley, right?" He asked slowly.

"I'm not sure I agree with that title but you're not wrong. Where is Blaise?" She admitted, shrugging. She glanced around as if she expected the Italian to emerge at any moment.

"Not sure, were you supposed to meet him?" He quizzed.

"Of course not." She snapped, defensively, but continued to look around. There was something in her expression. It wasn't the giddy eagerness that he usually saw, nor was it the lust he'd sometimes notice in the new ones. There was something deeper in her expression.

"Something happened with his mother. He didn't take it well." Draco explained, knowing that Blaise would flay him alive if he knew he was saying this aloud. Ginny just nodded knowingly. He supposed the Zabini family drama wasn't entirely private.

"Did he take something?" She asked, no judgement in her eyes, just concern.

"How the hell would you know about it?" He questioned bitingly.

"I found his stash when I searched his room." She admitted easily. That was, unexpected. She said it with such openness as if it wasn't that horrifying of a thing to say. Maybe because she had done far worse before.

"So you're the one making his life miserable." He concluded.

"I never said that." Weasley reminded him pointedly.

"Why did you tell me?" Draco pushed, knowing someone who could get away with so much didn't give it all up for no good reason.

"Debt?" She suggested, not even attempting to make him believe the lie.

"You're not the type." He stated firmly, knowing it was true with certainty.

"It was about time he found out. I'll be in the great hall in an hour if he wants to talk about it." Ginny announced and walked away with confidence, as if she hadn't just been assaulted.

"Haven't you had enough trauma for one night?" He asked. If he were in his shoes, he probably wouldn't get out of bed for a year or two.

"What can I say? I'm glutton for punishment." She called over her shoulder as she slid back into the ball room seamlessly. She was an odd bird, to say the least. He could see why she and Hermione spent so much time together.
Watching and Debriefs

Chapter Notes

This chapter borrowed some inspiration from the CW show, Reign, specifically the scene with Fleur and Bill. The idea was not mine.

_Hermione_

Katie showed up sooner than Hermione had wanted. The table were being cleared and the last few nobles were still trickling out. Astoria was in the middle of a lively conversation with a bishop, a duke, and Pansy so there was still some more time to wait. Draco had gone out to the garden a few minutes ago after giving Blaise what certainly didn't appear to be good news.

The younger girl grabbed her wrist. Hermione jumped, not even having noticed her and yanked her arm back.

"Let's go, right now." Katie insisted, grinning like a maniac and bouncing on her toes.

"What?" Hermione demanded. Katie rarely got like this.

"C'mon, she won't mind us bailing her out. We should get them both back like now." Katie needled.

"What's so important?" Hermione hissed even as Katie pulled her along.

"Trust me, you'll see." She insisted before dragging her to Astoria, who came along quickly. Hermione spared one passing glance towards the garden before hurrying away. She could only hope that Astoria didn't mind getting herself ready for bed tonight.

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"Come on Mione, let's go." Katie ordered, grinning as she took the other girls wrist again as they stood outside Astoria's door.

"Where are we going?" She asked, laughing. Sometimes it was easy to forget that Katie was just as mischievous as Gin, when given the opportunity. There had been few times in their adolescence that Katie had really been free to run wild but when she had, merlin help anyone who got in her way.

"Well I would've told you about it days ago if you had been around, but since you've been so absent lately…" Katie gave her a pointed look as she pulled her into one of the passages.

"Spit it out Katie." Hermione rolled her eyes, whispering as their footsteps echoed on the cobblestone.

"Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour's wedding is tonight." Katie told her meaningfully.

"Oh, of course, let's wish them well." She shrugged, wondering why the passageways were necessary for something so innocent.

"Yes, that's exactly what I had in mind." Katie whispered and rolled her eyes. Hermione sensed that
she was missing something, but there was no time to question further as Katie wove through passageways with ease.

"Katie where are we?" Hermione whispered as the other girl slowed.

"The ceremony was this morning and they kept it just family, but aren't you curious?" Katie smirked as they rounded a corner and Hermione spotted the heavily embroidered grate. Light was pouring in from the other side and Katie peeked through eagerly.

"Curious about what?" Hermione demanded.

Hermione's breath got stuck in the back of her throat as she caught sight of what was going on in the other room. Fleur Delacour was beautiful but more than that, she was bare for all the world. Her back was arched as she threw her head back, caught in the throes of passion. Goosebumps stood out across her pale skin. Bill Weasley was beneath her, his strong hands gripping her waist as he thrust into her. Bill was broad, taut muscle with sheer power. His skin was slicked with a sheer layer of sweat. She caught the briefest glance of his member parting the his bride's folds. Their groans and the slick sounds of their coupling carried towards the two servants. The obligatory witnesses were present in the room for the consummation, but Hermione couldn't take her eyes off of the couple. Hermione had known the mechanics of it, had read plenty on the subject but nothing could've prepared her for this. Fleur let out a high pitched moan in the back of her throat, and Hermione’s breathing continued to get shallower. She licked her lips, imagining rocking into someone that way, being caught in that passion. She could feel those hands on her body and her lower stomach clenched. Her knickers were getting soaked and as the witnesses started to file out of the room, she glanced at Katie. The other girl was flushed, her mouth parted. They both turned away before scurrying out of the passageway.

"I'm just going to, yeah.." Katie panted before dashing away. Hermione was still dazed and she leaned against the entrance. She squeezed her legs together, hoping to ease some of the tension, but got no relief. She needed, she needed...

"Granger?" She looked up, forcing her eyes to focus on the here and now again. Draco smirked and she felt as if she may as well have been nude for the way he looked at her. He stepped close to her, leaning into her space as he put his hands against the wall beside her head. He smelled like heaven, the mint in his natural pheromones was stronger than ever. He leaned even farther in, letting his lips brush against her ear as he spoke.

"You reek of sex Granger," He breathed, her knees buckled at the way his mouth wrapped around the words, slow and sensual. Would he make love to her like that? Or would it be animalistic, wild passion? Would he be as loquacious as he was in everyday life or would he dissolve into sensual groans? She wanted to know, badly. "What has you all wet without me?" He asked. Her nipples hurt as they tightened into little pebbles, pressing against the cool satin of her gown. Her knickers were ruined, that was for sure. She realized she was supposed to say something, but she had forgotten how to say words. Suddenly, Draco leaned back, a smile crossing his face as he glanced at the wall behind her.

"One of those Weasleys got married tonight didn't they?" She nodded, and he leaned back into her, and whispered the rest of his sentence against her. "You watched; you watched them make love like a naughty little voyeur." She nodded, feeling dirty and wrong at the admission. "Did you wish it was you instead, getting fucked? By Weasley?" She shook her head frantically. He traced the lace at her neckline with a gentle touch, and delicious chills shattered across her skin. "Who did you imagine touching you, inside you?" He asked, but didn't bother to wait for the answer and dragged his lips
down the side of her neck, nipping and sucking gently.

"You," She moaned as her head went back, exposing more of her neck to him. She felt the first whisper of O Space creeping in and she blinked, straightening and nudging Draco off. He watched with surprise, but she pulled him back down, catching his mouth in a kiss. Her responded in kind, but let her lead. His hands went to her waist, his thumb slowly stroking beneath her breasts. She wanted him so badly and she tried to say with her kisses everything that she couldn't say with words.

"Good." Draco groaned, his hands grabbing behind her knees as he hiked her up. Her skirts fell around him and he ground into the sweet v of her thighs. His hand cupped her butt, pulling her into him and she realized she had been foolish to doubt his strength. She whimpered as his hard member brushed her clit with every pass, sending jolts of up her spine that made tears prickle in the corner of her eyes. She was so close, panting heavily, as her body reached for something her brain didn't understand.

"Draco" She whimpered, it felt like little shocks were racing into her and her thighs twitched. She felt herself careening towards an edge, tears were building up in her eyes.

"Shhh..." He whispered to her. "I've got you." She whimpered as he ground into her again. "Come for me." He ordered. She moaned as the pleasure peaked immediately. Every muscle in her body contracted as he rocked into her, carrying her through it. Everything went white, and it felt like she was floating. She breathed heavily as she came back into herself and collapsed onto him. Her legs were totally incapable of holding her weight and her whole body felt like wet noodles. She could just melt into a puddle of happy girl goop onto the floor. Draco chuckled and picked her up, his arm behind her knees like she was a damsel or something. She could totally walk, she just really didn't want to. He nudged open the door to the hidden passage way and led her through the maze. She couldn't have followed his route if she wanted to, so she just hid her face in his chest. Everything felt good. Not quite like O Space, just relaxed as fuck. Unwittingly, her eyes started watering, and she found herself crying without any idea why.

It was only when they made it back to his room that she pulled her away. His arms tensed as he realized she was crying.

"What's wrong?" He asked quietly as he sat down, turning her so she sat neatly in his lap.

"I'm sorry, I'm just... I don't know." She admitted in between strained breaths.

"Shh, baby it's okay. You're okay." He assured her. She slowly relaxed, her breathing becoming more and more even as the tension ebbed from her body.

"I'm sorry. I guess I just, got overwhelmed I guess." She chuckled self-deprecatingly.

"Granger, was that your first orgasm?" He asked carefully. She stiffened, hiding her face in his shoulder.

"No of course not." She mumbled, feeling the heat rising on her cheeks.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of." He assured her gently. It would be so much easier to lie to him if he weren't so decent.

"They're not normally like that." She mumbled. "That was the first time I've..." The word got stuck in her throat so she just moved on "with another person." She peeked at his face, unable to resist anymore. He was smirking, the asshole. "You jerk! Don't you dare make fun of me Draco Malfoy!" She warned tensely. He laughed.
"You'd think a mind blowing orgasm would calm a bird." He teased and gently pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I'm not making fun of you. I'm just… I guess you could say feeling a little territorial." He admitted casually.

"Are you going to pee on me next?" She challenged.

"I'm not really into watersports Granger but we both know that I have no problem with a little kink." He smirked and she felt herself blushing again. That was just really not what she meant.

"I…" She stuttered.

"Relax, I'm teasing you, not about the kink bit but I'm well aware you didn't mean it that way." He grinned. "Your biology makes you want to please me; My biology makes me want to be the only one capable of making you feel good." He explained. "Plus, it does boost my ego a little bit, I will admit." She laughed.

"Happy to oblige." She answered dryly.

"You really just skipped that whole afterglow bit, didn't you?" He teased. She blushed.

"Do you want me to…" She trailed off, not sure if she could even follow through, just knowing what she was supposed to say.

"I'm good." He assured her, even though she could feel his very prominent erection poking her.

"Quite the martyr aren't you?" She teased.

"You make it very difficult to be a good person sometimes." He admitted.

"It seems unfair." She shrugged. She didn't like debt.

"Don't do anything just because you think it's fair." He cringed.

"Okay what if I want to do it?" She asked tentatively.

"Want to do what?" He asked, his eyes carefully studying her even though his tone was sure.

"Something." She answered neutral, not exactly sure what she even meant.

"Do you want to do something?" He asked again.

"Yes. Yes, I think, I think that I do." She said, dropping her shoulders and straightening her spine.

"Okay." He nodded.

"So how should I?" She asked nervously, her hands shaking.

"Do you want instructions, would that make you feel more comfortable about trying this?" He asked her earnestly.

"Yeah, I think, I think that would." She answered timidly.

"Okay." He agreed. She shifted backwards, straddling just above his knees so that he was in easier reach. He laughed and shucked of his shirt. She smiled as the panes of his chest appeared, all firm, lithe muscles. Her hands immediately went to his shoulders, skimming across the smooth muscles before tracing his abs happily. He laughed again, his stomach tensing under her hands. "You seem to
need very little direction."

"Well, I've done this part before." She admitted blushing as she let her hands skim lower, brushing along the thin line of hair that disappeared into the waist band of his trousers. "I've never um..." She trailed off.

"It's okay, I figured." He shrugged, cutting her off. "We'll go slow." He assured her, and she noticed that his trousers were doing very, very little to hide the very prominent bulge now.

"Not that slow." She suggested.

"Yes that would be preferable." He admitted. She laughed and in her brief moment of courage, began undoing the snaps at the top of his trousers. His hands pushed hers away, before nudging the offensive article of clothing off. It was a bit of a process to get them past her seated position on his lap but they managed it, albeit with significant fumbling and laughing on both sides. His thighs were strong underneath her, thick muscle and soft blonde hair. Her eyes slowly traveled to his pants, silk boxers. "Touch me through the fabric first, to get used to the shape and the idea of me." She nodded, carefully touching the fabric on his thigh first, taking in the cool material. She look again at the outline of his dick through the fabric and barely resisted the childish urge to poke it and see what happens. His cock twitched as if it could sense her eyes on it, and wouldn't that be weird. Draco groaned helplessly as she gently traced a line up his cock. It twitched again and she cupped him in her hand, curious what it would feel like. It felt warm and firm under her hand, though not as hard as she would've expected, especially after feeling it grinding against her.

"It went down." She realized aloud. He chuckled, but groaned as she tighten her grip a little bit more and yeah, that was better.

"You were freaking out, generally not a turn on for me." He admitted, and she felt more than saw him fill a little bit more.

"Can I?" She asked, tugging at the waist band. He nodded, grinning like a kid being presented with candy. She gently pulled down the fabric and his erection sprung out with what could only be described as eagerness. She smiled; it was kind of charming. He wasn't what they called cut, which she knew from the various diagrams Ginny had drawn to explain the concept to Astoria a few months ago. She watched as a tiny drop of fluid pooled at the tip. She swiped it away with her finger, and she got the vague impression of soft skin before sticking her finger in her mouth. Draco moaned, staring at her as she sucked his taste off of her skin. It was salty and a little bitter but not bad, all things considered, certainly not as bad as some of the kitchen girls had suggested. She shrugged and traced one of the veins along the side of Draco's hardened member. He made a sound in the back of her throat.

"What should I do now?" She asked before she could have time to freak out. Draco cleared his throat as his head went back. When he spoke, his voice was tight and pained.

"There's lube in the draw beside you." He groaned. She reached for the handle, and there was the half empty bottle of translucent liquid sitting plainly inside. She poured out some of the fluid onto her hands and noticed it tingled slightly on her skin. She rubbed her hands together quickly because she doubted that cold liquid would feel very good right now. Draco groaned again.

"Touch me." He ordered, and then quickly softened it with a grimace "Please, when you're ready." He was bigger than she had been expecting and her hand couldn't wrap all the way around. She wasn't sure where he stood by comparison in terms of length but she had the feeling that it was significant. She tentatively moved her hand along his length, feeling the soft skin in her palm. His skin was just a little bit darker than the rest of him here, though she suspected from her research that
that had to do with blood flow, and the dark brown curls at the root were closely trimmed. "A little firmer." She nervously tightened her grip. She didn't want to hurt him. He groaned appreciatively as she squeezed him again. She let go of him thoughtfully before returning to the tip of his length. There was more fluid there and she smoothed it over the top, pulling back the foreskin to reveal his head. She ran her thumb over the slit and was rewarded with another drop of fluid and a very happy moan from Draco. She did it again and his hips bucked up and she went on like that for a while, alternating between stroking and twisting his length and exploring all of the sensitive spots on the head of his cock. He stopped giving instructions and she didn't really need them. She just followed her instincts and watched his reactions carefully. His cock was getting harder and it started throbbing in her hand but her wrist was really starting to hurt. With a shrug and a nervous little flutter in her stomach she slid off his lap and onto her knees on the floor in front of him. Draco stuttered something that was probably supposed to be words but she ignored him. The foreskin on his cock was pulled back naturally now and his head looked so sensitive that it hurt. She tilted her head as she studied it and his precum was flowing steadily now. Something that sounded suspiciously like a plea spilled from Draco's mouth and she leaned forward and flicked the head of his cock with her tongue. The taste was not pleasant when mixed with lube but she could get used to it, she supposed. She continued exploring with her tongue for a while, and when Draco's hips started twitching again, she finally tried taking him in her mouth. She barely made the realization that it was soft and warm and tasted a little like sweat and his natural scent before he was pulling out of her mouth and coming into his cupped hand. His face contorted in what looked like a painful mix of ecstasy and overstimulation and she came to the sudden realization that she was wet again. After a few moments Draco collapsed, boneless, into the couch.

"Good?" She asked nervously, not quite ready to get up yet. A part of her felt so very at home here, at his feet. He laughed.

"Yes, very good." He answered heavily. She got to her feet, sitting beside him. He picked up his wand with a right hand and made a move as if he about to vanish the pool of cum in his hand, again.

"Stop" She ordered, he turned to her in surprise, but she dipped a finger in the fluid curiously and put it in her mouth.

"Fuuuuuucckkkk." He said slowly and appreciatively, his eyes not leaving her mouth. The taste was strong here, but also had a layer of sweetness that she hadn't been expecting. The longer she processed it, the more notes of his scent she could decipher.

"Not bad," She declared and then waved in the direction of his wand. "Go ahead, I'm all set. I just had to try it. In the interest of science and all." She shrugged. He glared.

"Science?" He asked incredulously as he vanished the sticky fluid from his hand in distaste. "You're an odd bird you know that?"

"That's not a very nice thing to say." She gasped, as if she was really affronted. If odd meant efficient then she was find with that. "I'll do better next time." She offered happily.

"What? There was nothing wrong with that." He assured her firmly. She knew that. She watched and tasted the evidence of that just a few moment before, thank you very much.

"Of course not, but it's a new discipline for me, lots of room for improvement with experimentation and refinement." She explained, and even she could feel herself slipping into the mode she got in when giving Minerva reports. She wanted to excel, at everything.

"Please don't tell me you plan on treating sex like arithmancy. " Draco groaned, and not in the good way as he rubbed his eyes.
"How different is it really, you put tab A into slot B, repeatedly." She explained and shrugged. Draco groaned again.

"Yes, that is the physical aspect on the most basic, not arousing level, but sex is more than that, can be more than that, as I'm sure you saw tonight. It's spontaneous and wild and fun and can sometimes be very romantic and emotional, I've been told. You shouldn't think of losing your virginity as a final exam that you're taking practice tests for. I'm not judging or grading you." He looked at her seriously. She took a moment to process it, even though it was difficult to think about it in those terms for her, personally. Everything was so much simpler if you were objective, thought of it like a complicated rune or potion and kept your emotions out of it, but Draco was right, she couldn't keep emotions out of it. She wouldn't succeed and she didn't really want to. She already felt things for Draco she couldn't just tuck that away during sex for fear of messing up.

"You're right." She agreed uneasily. "I'll try to be less mechanical."

"Hey, don't misread this okay? I like you're hyper functioning side just as much as the rest of you, I just don't want you to stress yourself out over something that you're supposed to enjoy." He wrapped his arm around her shoulders, and she leaned into him easily.

"You're right, and I did enjoy it okay? I promise." She reassured him. It had been fun, taking him apart and she supposed giving was almost as fun as receiving. Almost.

"I'm very glad to hear that." Draco answered laughing a little.

"You taste salty." She announced without preface. Draco sputtered in shock and she had the feeling that he would've spit something out if he had been drinking.

"Thank you for informing me of that fact." Draco stuttered out.

"I want to try a blow job next." She admitted. She only got to taste for a few moments, hardly got to do anything at all.

"Not discouraging that desire but let's not openly plan so much, yeah?" Draco suggested, cringing.

"Okay." Hermione agreed, and yeah, that would probably make it better. The hallway had been fun after all. Yeah, she'd definitely be up for some more of that.

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**Draco**

Draco was so fucking relaxed. His omega was in his lap, agreeing to experiment after giving him a handjob (he hadn't enjoyed a handjob so much since his first if he was being honest) and orgasming in public. He mused her hair with his fingers; she was still a little dazed, if he had it his way she'd stay the night again but something told him that he wouldn't get that lucky. Almost on cue she sighed.

"I should leave." She reminded him.

"You make it really hard to give good aftercare, you know that right?" He pointed out. He should be tucking her into bed with a cookie and a glass of juice to make sure that she didn't drop, not letting her run off by herself especially not to sleep on her self described cot on the floor.

"I know, I'm sorry." She sighed and kissed him quickly before standing. He tried to pull her back but she shook him off.
"You're sure?" He checked. She nodded. "Just, eat something please?" He asked. She shrugged and he picked up a tray from the top of the bar and handed her a scone. She nibbled meekly, barely eating half of it before dropping it on the tray and heading out.

"Sorry, gotta go!" She called over her shoulder above his protests. He rolled his eyes as the door clicked shut. She really was an odd bird.

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*Hermione*

Debriefs were serious business. Hermione always had flashbacks to the practical portions of the exams that her tutor had always put her through. Daphne and Astoria were always seated across from their mother while Katie and Hermione fell in behind them.

"The party last night" Lady Greengrass started ominously. She folded her hands on her oak desk, perfectly in the center of the fine white doily. "How would you evaluate your success?" She asked. There was a painful pause. Neither girl ever knew how to answer that question. "Astoria?"

"I thought I did well Mother." Astoria admitted, crossing her fingers in her lap. If she claimed she did well when her mother disagreed she'd be reprimanded but claiming she did poorly when she did well was declared false modesty and that was even worse.

Thankfully, their mother smiled.

"You did immensely well Astoria, you were charming, knowledgeable but not threatening, and Narcissa only had wonderful things to say about you." The lady praised. Astoria blushed and smile profusely.

"Oh, that's… that's wonderful." She sat up straighter, pride straightening her spine. It was true, Astoria was remarkable last night, a true picture of grace.

"One question, who did Draco take to bed last night?" The curt question took them all by surprise. Everything stopped.

"I'm sorry?" Astoria stuttered. Hermione's heart was pounding in her ears.

"Draco left the ball early last night, first he went out into the gardens, where he lost my spies by slipping into a passageway, but there were reports of him hurrying a girl into his room last night, they failed to identify her but I assure you, she wasn't there to compare herbology notes." Their elder rattled off, staring her daughter down meaningfully.

"I didn't know." Astoria admitted, her fair complexion going pale.

"All those years of preparation and you don't know. I expected better from you." Lady Greengrass scoffed, disappointment dripping from her tone.

"What do I do?" Astoria asked desperately.

"Clearly the threat of losing this engagement is not enough for him. Your reputation would greatly suffer if this engagement does not go through. The only solution is to seduce him." Her mother offered as if it were a totally normal thing to say. Astoria's face when straight back to blushing and Hermione wondered for a moment if such sudden changes hurt.
"But I…" She protested, years of modesty training most definitely coming back.

"There's plenty that can be done without compromising your virtue. We both know that you are not that oblivious." Her mother rolled her eyes.

"I just…” Astoria tried again. Her mother cut her off.

"Hermione, you'll coach her." She turned to the slave with an expectant expression.

"Me?" Hermione jumped, um she was most definitely not, okay, she was the most qualified for this job, but not in any way that they would know about.

"You'll figure it out." The older woman decided dismissively. "Daphne?" She asked brusquely.

"I thought I did okay." The older girl shrugged.

"You were passable. Be better and stop spending so much time with Parkinson, there are rumors." Her mother announced meaningfully.

"I" Daphne tried.

"You're all dismissed." She decided firmly. The four girls looked at each other warily before curtsying and slipping out.
Expulsion and Theft

Draco

He heard her before he saw her. Quiet gasps and whimpers echoed down the empty hallway. Draco slowly edged around the corner, not sure what he'd see. There was a girl on the ground. He couldn't see her face because it was tucked between her knees underneath a bush of blonde hair. He cringed but walked over anyways. He wasn't sure what Hermione would say about this situation but he had a feeling that she wouldn't be all for him leaving her behind to suffer.

"You good?" He asked uncertainly. The blonde head of hair popped up but when she saw him she gasped and tried to make herself even smaller. Something was very, very wrong.

"I…I'm…." She stuttered and then shook her head frantically, rocking back and forth. That was not a good sign.

"Hey, relax okay? You're fine." She shook her head frantically. "Okay, not fine. Can you tell me what's wrong?" He asked gently. She hiccupped and flinched, frantically shaking her head. "Okay, how about your name?" He tried again.

"Penelope, sir." She stuttered. He cleared his throat uncomfortably.

"Don't worry about the 'sir' part for now, okay?" He offered gently. This was not the time for standing on formality.

"Okay." Her hands were shaking violently and his eyes finally caught sight of the band on her wrist, but no O. At least she wasn't dropping, that was something.

"I want you to just focus on your breathing okay? I'm going to ask you some questions but just nod yes or no, okay?" He suggested wearily. He had no fucking clue what he was doing hear but he doubted anyone was coming to bail him out anytime soon.

She nodded.

"Are you hurt?" He asked gently. He only had the most basic knowledge of healing charms, if she was seriously hurt he'd need to find help and soon.

She started to shake her head no and then paused and rolled up her sleeves. There were fresh, ugly purple bruises all the way down her arms.

"I'm sorry." He told her earnestly, she shrugged but her shoulders began shaking with renewed vigor. "Hey, it's okay, relax, no one is going to hurt you." She scoffed.

"Can you tell me who did this to you?" He asked gently. She nodded painfully slowly but didn't speak.

"Will you?" He pressed.

"It's not my place." She muttered, looking at her feet.

"You have rights." He reminded her. Slave rights were pitiful but technically, you had to ask for the owner's permission before laying hands on a slave. Something told me that whoever did this didn't bother to get permission. Penelope scoffed.
"More than an O whore but not much." She sneered. Draco flinched. It had been so easy the past couple of weeks to forget how fucked up the world was outside of his little bubble.

"Do not speak like that in my presence." He ordered immediately, his voice harsh.

"Sorry." She winced. Draco paused, prejudice be damned, he still wanted to help this girl.

"Did this person, compromise…" He asked gently.

"No, but he came close, beat me up when I said no." She answered sadly, her eyes flicking to her feet again.

"Who?" He asked again.

"I'm just a slave; he can do whatever." She reminded him as if he could possibly forget.

"Not in my house." He told her firmly. Fear resonated in her eyes as she seemed to remember who he was talking to. "Now who did this?" He demanded. She hesitated. "Help me make sure that he doesn't do this again." He pleaded earnestly.

"Theo Nott."

…

It was easy most days to forget about his father, to forget that they were related, to forget just how similar they could be. Draco had seen his father on a warpath, had felt that wrath turned on him, and had turned that wrath on others. He had felt vulnerable to that anger, a victim to the fury that pumped in his veins like adrenaline. Now he got to use it. He blasted open Theo's door with a flick of his wand. The room was dark, smoky, with clothes strewn around the room. Theo was on the floor. Draco sent the shades flying upwards and Theo groaned. A second flick sent Theo's clothes flying towards his trunk.

"What?" Theo moaned, shielding his eyes.

"You're a bastard Nott." Draco announced coolly, sending the rest of Theo's things thudding into his truck.

"Is that news to you?" Theo laughed bitterly, still not getting it.

"You don't get to attack women in my home." Draco told him firmly, closing the trunk and whisking it towards the fireplace.

"Jesus Drake, that's what this is about? They're not people." He cackled. Theo was the most disgusting type of Alpha, the kind that never outgrew the power rush. They thought that they were gods, utterly above reproach and that omegas were there's for the taking, and when those kinds of alphas were also nobles their prey included slaves. Draco had known that Theo was like that, but he never thought that he'd act on it, he never thought that his friend would get violent, and now he needed to go. Draco moved quickly to the fireplace and lit the coals quickly. Theo sat up slowly, still covering his eyes.

"Both of those girls that you attempted to rape last night have far more humanity in them than you could ever dream of." He snapped. He shouldn't have just let Theo sleep it off last night after the Weasley girl. He should have ended it right then but he had been distracted. Penelope was his fault.

"When did you get all gallant? We're not those people Drake." Theo presumed. Draco grabbed the
back of his collar and hoisted him to his feet. Theo struggled but he had always been scrawny. It was easy to toss him around.

"You may not be. I am. Now. Get. The. Fuck. Out. Of. My. House." Draco snarled, flinging floo powder into the fire with his left and tossing Theo in just behind. "Nott Manor!" He called over Theo's protests and in an instant, Theo was gone. He tossed the trunk in behind with the same instructions and took a moment to adjust the wards. Theodore Nott was very firmly blocked from entering Malfoy Manor and Draco was going to do everything in his power to keep it that way. He left with determination. Now that that miscreant had been banished from his house he could move on. A tiny part of him was throwing a minor celebration over how much progress Draco had made on this "good person" thing but it felt a little less genuine to acknowledge that bit.

…

Hermione

She was in a daze, following Astoria out of the meeting. Daphne and Katie broke off with some excuse but Hermione was too distracted to pay attention.

"Mione!" She jumped about a mile at the voice. Astoria laughed as the redhead approached. Ginny curtsied quickly towards the other girl but turned to Hermione quickly. "Can we talk?" Hermione looked at her mistress who nodded and smile indulgently.

"Go." She urged. Hermione curtsied again before following Ginny away, not sure what they were doing. Ginny took her out into the garden and waited until they were deep enough in that a casual passerby wouldn't overhear them. She stopped and turned to her friend urgently.

"What is it Gin?" Hermione asked gently, despite her suspicions.

"I'm so sorry Mione. I never should have been so insensitive." It took her a moment to remember what the other girl had even done. Ginny's false romanticism had pissed her off then but farther away from it, it didn't endue the same mind blowing rage that it used to.

"I get it Gin, you don't have the same perspective as I do." She offered gently but Gin shook her head.

"I do though, in a lot of ways, I just wanted to believe the world was a good place." She laughed at herself.

"Gin, are you okay?" She asked gently.

"Yeah, Mione I'm fine." Ginny assured her but Hermione could spot the lie as easily as she watched the other girl's ears turn red.

"No fun left to be had in tormenting Blaise?" She teased. It had been entertaining to watch these last few weeks. "No, I think I'm done with all of that." Ginny admitted, shrugging.

"Did you get what you wanted?" Hermione pressed, it wasn't like the other girl to just stop.

"I…I think so." Ginny declared with almost no certainty.

"Was it as good as you thought it would be?" Hermione pressed. Ginny's face got sadder. "No, but that's okay too." She admitted, shrugging.

"As long as you're happy." Hermione conceded nervously, watching her friend closely.
"I'm… I'm getting there." Ginny's mouth twisted into an uncertain purse as if she wasn't sure that she bought that.

"Good." Hermione agreed.

"Now, anything you want to tell me?" Ginny asked, smirking at the other girl. Everything Hermione had ever done immediately came rushing out. "What?" Hermione asked nervously, feeling her shoulders climb to her ears.

"Well you weren't at Bill and Fleur's ceremony, I assume you had a good reason?" Ginny pressed. All of Hermione's faith in a benevolent god disappeared.

"Oh my gosh Gin, I'm so sorry, with Astoria being sick and Daphne and Blaise being, Daphne and Blaise, I couldn't get away." Hermione hurried to explain, quickly repressing the other memories she had of Ginny's brother and sister in law.

"Fine, fine, but my mother expects you at dinner and soon." Ginny told her pointedly. A Weasley dinner invitation was not something to take lightly.

"I'll do my best to make it there." Hermione answered noncommittally. Everything was just too nuts to commit herself to the five hour long affair that a Weasley family dinner tended to be.

"You'd better." Ginny warned lightly. THey both knew that Molly would not take lightly to two refused invitations, even if her anger was more likely to be expressed in the form of motherly coddling and hovering than actual wrath.

"Now I really should get going." Hermione sighed, gathering her skirts and hurrying off back into the manor. She had errands to run today, unfortunately, and that meant that she was probably going to be spending her day running around like a tight bound ball of stress. Or at least, that was the plan.

_Draco_

"Accio" He whispered, flicking his wand quickly when no one was looking. Hermione jumped, looking around frantically. Her knickers tugged at her feet as they tried to slip away. When she almost lost her balance, she stepped out of them surreptitiously, hoping no one would notice. They flew around the corner, and he caught them happily, watching as her eyes tightened when she saw him. She stalked towards him, crossing her arms, and dragging him into a niche by his arm. He grinned as she cast a quick muffliato before rounding on him. She held out her hand, even as he casually stuck the garment into the back pocket of his trousers.

"Give them back." She glared, her voice curt and tight.

"No." He smirked, even as she curled her hands into fists. He was quite suddenly reminded of a wet kitten, pure rage in a tiny little bundle that you couldn't even try to take seriously.

"Draco!" She hissed, stomping her foot.

"Hermione!" He mimicked, raising his voice about eight octaves, her eyes narrowed to slits.

"I don't have time to go back right now." She protested. He grinned. Oh what a pity.

"Then you don't really have time for this conversation then, do you?" He suggested innocently.

"Why?" She hissed, eyes flicking to her knickers again as if she could will them to her.
"I told you I like lingerie Granger, that includes lack thereof. It's hot," He smirked as she blushed, pressing her legs together nervously.

"Maybe for you!" She snapped. There was anger in her eyes but also curiosity. She knew as well as he did that she could use her word if this really bothered her.

"You'll agree later." He assured her with total confidence, stepping away.

"Draco!" She hissed and dragged him back. He laughed.

"Just one day, if you hate it, we never do it again." He suggested, watching her cave just a little bit.

"We?" She sputtered. Good point.

"Well you, but you get my point." He conceded, grinning.

"Draco." She glared at him, clearly infuriated.

"Do this one naughty little thing, just for me. No one will ever know what a naughty little omega you are, going bare underneath your dress for your alpha." He breathed in her ear. He felt her heart start to beat faster and her breath falter slightly. His omega was turned on. "Good girl." He said simply, walking away. "And by the way, no touching yourself." He added firmly. He didn't need to look over his shoulder to know that she stayed standing there, stunned for just a beat too long.

…

Hermione

Hermione was uncomfortable. Not in that twinge if you move just the wrong way kind of uncomfortable, in that, going have a break down if you don't get relief right this goddamn moment kind of uncomfortable. She hadn't thought it would be that big of deal. She had been wrong. With every step she felt the soft fabric of her slip against her skin, or a cold draft. She was squirming on her chair and very very quickly her thighs were damp because she was very, very literally dripping. The only thing that could've possibly made it any worse is if she had no possibility of getting relief. But oh wait! Her lovely alpha took care of that too. With no possibility of slipping into a cupboard and taking care of it herself, her only option was to just take her mind off of it. Except every goddamn movement made her acutely aware of the fact that she wasn't wearing knickers, the fact that her alpha had her goddamn knickers in his back pocket, and the fact that at any given moment he could pull her into an abandoned room, lift up her skirts and start fucking her. Oh no, she wasn't thinking of that at all because if she was thinking about that it would make all of this so much worse. Too late.

She knew she could get out of it if she really wanted to. She knew she could find him, say her word and get her knickers back that instant but she didn't want to. It was a deviously thrill caving to his will even in this little will. It made it that much hotter.

Her nerves were so frayed by the end of the day, she slammed on Draco's door so hard that she was momentarily worried that she dented it. He opened it laughing, with her knickers dangling off of his finger.

She snatched them up frantically. "What if I was Blaise?" She hissed, pushing her way inside. "Or your mother? Or you know, Astoria?"

"Blaise knows about you, my mother wouldn't come unannounced, and Astoria wouldn't come here period, it wouldn't be 'proper.'" He offered cheerily, plucking the pink fabric out of her hands easily.
She growled, like actually growled. He smirked.

"So you were fine with Blaise seeing my knickers?" She questioned.

"Blaise doesn't knock." He reminded her and rolled his eyes. She laughed dryly for a beat before returning to her scowl.

"Very funny. Give me my knickers." She demanded. He smirked.

"First, I want to hear how your day was." He grinned, lounging on the back of his couch with a smirk.

"Peachy, until someone stole my knickers." She snapped and rolled her eyes.

"But did it turn you on? Going bare, feeling everything, with no chance of relief?" He smirked, his worth getting breathy and suggestive.

"No." She snapped, lying; she was so fucking turned on, kept messing up the simplest of tasks because all she could think about was how turned on she was, and she didn't even mind because she couldn't think about it long enough to mind.

"Tell the truth." He demanded stubbornly, his grin not letting up.

"Yes, but I'm not doing it again." She insisted firmly. Her nerves couldn't take it. He stood up again, his movements feline and predatory as he moved to stand behind her.

"What if I promised to help take the edge off at the end of the day?" He suggested, smirking as his hands rested on her hips. His body was a warm wall behind her even as his arms caged her in. Her breath caught.

"That, that would help." She stuttered as she felt the heat climb up her cheeks.

"When would you like that promise to start?" He asked her suggestively.

"Now. Now would be good." She admitted, her mouth drying out.

"Happy to be of service." He answered, hiking up her skirts with ease. She moaned as his fingers found her folds, sliding through easily. "You're sloppy with it Granger. I'm surprised no one noticed. No one smelled you dripping in the hallway. Even your thighs are soaked."

"Dra" Her voice cracked and she frantically cleared her throat. "Draco!" His finger slid inside her easily.

"Fuck." She whimpered as her knees buckled. He supported her weight with ease. She clenched around him, desperate for me.

"Good girl." He praised, brushing his thumb in circles over her clit.

"I…I..." She whimpered, totally incapable of words. He curled his finger, hitting something inside of her that made her see stars. Her knees buckled, but he held her steady with ease.

"The thought of you, dripping wet for me all day." He groaned as he slowly entered her with another finger. He scissored them inside of her, stretching her gently. She squirmed and then he pressed that spot again. She felt herself teetering on an edge.

"Please," She whimpered, not sure what she was begging for. He gently kissed where her neck met
her shoulder before whispering in her ear.

"Come. Come for me." He ordered and instantly flew over the edge, shattering and coming together into something new all at the same time. Sharp waves of pleasure crashed over her and everything got fuzzy for a little while. She came back slowly and dizzily realized Draco was kissing along her neck. They were seated on the couch with her on his lap.

"You back?" He asked gently. She made a soft noise in the back of her throat. "Was that okay?" He pushed her hair out of her face as she nodded. He chuckled a little. "Not ready to talk just yet?" He asked; she nodded, she wasn't quite ready to come back to reality just yet. She buried her face into his neck. Her breathing was even and he seemed a little concerned that she had fallen asleep until she started kissing along the side of his neck. "Better now?"

"Mmmmm" She murmured, practically purring in the back of her throat. She'd have to leave soon, but for now she was content to just stay with him.

"How do you feel? I read that the first time coming on demand can be jolting." He asked gently, pushing her hair off of her face. She laughed, apparently she wasn't the only research obsessed on between them.

"Me too, and consider me totally unjolted. I'm perfectly stable." She promised, grinning. He laughed.

"It's okay if you're not." He assured her, lifting her chin gently and studying her face.

"I know." She promised, only partially bullshitting. He chuckled.

"My lovely, strong omega, when are you going to let yourself trust me?" He asked seriously.

"I let you take my knickers today." She reminded him.

"Speaking of, how about tomorrow?" He asked, smirking hopefully. She sighed in resignation.

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Draco

It went on like that for a week. Every day, at some point he would accio Granger's knickers. Every day, she'd act surprised and complain but he noticed a distinct change in the garments. They went from plain white cotton things to patterns and hints of lace. They weren't high quality but he appreciated the effort. He really needed to get her some nicer things soon. She deserved the best for the hour or two that she got to wear them. The best part was definitely when she made it back to his room at the end of the day. Part of him always wanted to drag it out longer but each time she showed up she was already desperate. All it took was the smallest touch to her clit and she was coming instantly. It was wonderful for his ego.

He would check in on her throughout the day, not in any dramatic fashion, he just had to figure out where she was and stalk her for a little bit, no biggie. He just wanted to make sure she had an out should she need it. It was all fine and dandy showing up in the hallway that Hermione always took on her way to the kitchen or reading in the corner of the library where she was chaperoning (she insisted on no more snogging in the stacks, much to his disappointment), but now he was seeing something that he definitely didn't want to. After a painfully long few weeks, the Bulgarian merchant had finally finished his dealings with Narcissa and the neighbors and was heading out, but first he insist on saying goodbye to Hermione, which pissed Draco off like nothing else.

Hermione was allowed to have friends. Far be it from Draco to interfere in that way. She still spent
tons of time with the Weasley girl and, goddamn it, what was that stable boy's name? He just did not
like this "Viktor," what a stupid name. The two were chatting animatedly again and Draco had to
frantically repress his jealous streak. She was his. She wasn't even wearing underwear because he
told her to. Fuck. She wasn't wearing underwear and she was hugging this guy. It made his skin
crawl. Yup, nope, this was stopping, no longer hot. He took it back.

**Hermione**

She waved to Viktor's departing carriage with a smile. It was sad to see him go, especially since they
had only gotten to spend a few passing moments together, but she knew he still carried a torch for
her and considering her recent situation it just wasn't what she wanted right now. As soon as the
carriage turned the corner, Hermione had arms wrapped around her waist.

"Hello?" She asked indulgently, recognizing Draco's amber and sandalwood scent immediately.

"I didn't like that." Draco admitted, nuzzling her neck. Hermione sighed, placing her hands on top of
his and letting her neck lean to the side. He pressed soft kisses to the exposed skin.

"I'm sorry." She chuckled. After a week of not wearing knickers every day the novelty had worn off
and she was more than capable of thinking of things other than sex. "You know he's just a friend." She
reminded him gently.

"Yeah I know, doesn't mean I like it." He reminded her. "You can have these back by the way." He
slid what felt a lot like her knickers into her pocket and she turned her head to look at him with
surprise.

"No fun anymore?" She asked, smirking.

"Better to save for a special occasion." He advised wisely. She rolled her eyes at his smugness. He
just grinned.

"Hmm, that'll certainly take some excitement out of my day." She sighed, a little disappointed to
have the game end.

"What? Do you think I don't have anything else up my sleeve?" He bristled at the affront.

"Do you?" She asked, eyebrow raised.

"I always have a plan Granger." He smirked.
Hermione

Hermione felt like shit. She, Daphne, Katie, and Pansy were gathered around the table; she was pretty sure that it was meant for bridge or something, but this was much more like war planning. Katie had been hopefully suggesting things for hours, Pansy kept shutting them down with cold, harsh logistics, Astoria did her best to refine the ideas that got past Pans, but then Hermione would inevitably find a hole and they'd have to start all over.

"I still think she should wear the dress." Daphne sighed, pushing away the empty list of idea with disgust. Astoria huffed, puffing a stray strand of blonde hair out of her eyes. Hermione pinched the bridge of her nose as Pansy leaned back, cracking her back over the chair. Katie rubbed her eyes as if that could make her capable of seeing a clear solution.

"He's seen her boobs; he's seen lots of boobs." Pansy reminded them as she came back up. Hermione had to focus really hard to keep herself from glancing down at her own and wondering how they measured up. Her boobs were okay, not too big, not too little. Draco always seemed to like them just fine.

"I think they're pretty nice." Astoria pouted and looked down at her decolletée pointedly. They were currently peeking out of a muted gray dress. She'd change later but for now they were far beyond the time for lace and pretty beading.

"There's no problem with your boobs, they're just not special." Pansy rolled her eyes at the other girl's dramatics. If the rumors were true, Pansy certainly had a lot of firsthand experience. She was known for her willingness to share, particularly with Blaise.

"Excuse me?" Tori sat up straighter, more than ready to defend her cleavage like it was as valuable as her honor. Hermione couldn't quite believe that this was actually her life.

"Sorry Tori, there are better boobs out there." Daphne declared with confidence which was a little concerning. Oh, lord, Hermione couldn't worry about that in addition to everything else right now. Why couldn't the people in her life just be calmly stable?

"Okay so if it's not boobs what is it?" Hermione asked, trying to get this moving in a positive direction.

"Brains." Katie suggested hopefully.

"That's not Tori's strong suit." Pansy scoffed immediately, which was harsh. Astoria wasn't stupid, she just wasn't as ruthless about it as her sister and the older girl had always treated that like a sign of weakness.

"Hey!" Astoria protested, crossing her arms and pouting unhappily.

"Sorry but it's true. " Daphne shrugged as if she wasn't obviously hurting her sister.

"Men want their mothers; Narcissa is brilliant and highly capable. We have to impress him with how capable she is." Hermione said slowly, very carefully not thinking too much about her own words as she said them. Objectivity was key, as long as she didn't think too hard about it all she wouldn't give herself away.
"He's already seen it. He's seen how she controls parties and works the connections." Daphne pointed out dismissively. Astoria nodded eagerly, proud of her managing, as she should be.

"Loyalty." Pansy declared like it should be self-explanatory.

"What?" Hermione asked, still lost.

"Narcissa is incredibly, fiercely loyal." Pansy clarified, catching Daphne's eye. Daphne straightened, clearly realizing something important that the other three were very much still missing.

"Okay, how exactly does that help us?" Astoria asked, clearly just as lost as Hermione.

"Draco just needs an enemy." Daphne explained with a dangerous, terrifying smirk. Oh no.

Astoria held the umbrella to shield herself from the harsh light of the sun as they walked among the hedges. Draco led the way; Hermione trailing a foot behind. They were chatting pointlessly, discussing nothing of any importance when they rounded the corner. Daphne and Pansy were walking towards them, though still a little ways away, seemingly engrossed in conversation. They both were terrifyingly good actresses, even if Hermione knew better.

"Really I don't know what's wrong with your sister Daph, how are you two even related?" Pansy said just loud enough to be heard. Their parasol was tight over their heads, just enough to obscure their sight line.

"I don't know, sometimes I think she's just a bastard; it would explain a lot." Daphne suggested cruelly. Astoria flinched.

"She's just such an airhead, but Draco's mostly scum so I guess they deserve each other." Pansy scoffed. Draco stiffened, his shoulders tightening.

"Hello Daphne. Pans." Draco called loudly. The girls jumped obviously but convincingly.

"Oh! Tori! Hey." Daphne stuttered, looking away as if she was ashamed. Hermione just caught the smile on the corner of her mouth.

"Nice day for a stroll, huh?" Draco suggested. Both girls nodded in agreement though they couldn't quite meet his eyes as they passed by and scurried away. Damn, Hermione's girls were good. They were all shitty people and she was going to hell for every angle of this charade but her girls were good at what they did. Draco waited a beat for the other two to pass out of earshot and then turned to Astoria.

"Your sister can really be a bitch, huh?" He announced lightly. Astoria let out a shocked laugh.

"Yeah, but I love her, can't really choose family, right?" Astoria shrugged and smiled. They had scripted that line, hadn't expected Draco to be quite that blunt, but had expected that to be the gist of it.

"No, you really can't." Draco agreed, chuckling even though nothing was particularly funny.

"I'm sorry for what Pansy said, I imagine that stung." Astoria offered gently, resting her hand on his arm. He laughed dryly.

"Yeah, she can be a bitch too. Means well, just doesn't think sometimes." He defended her. Shit,
their psychoanalysis had been spot on and now she had to live the guilt from this manipulation for quite a bit.

"You deserve better." She told him gently, sincerity in every inch of her face. Hermione drifted back, keeping them just in sight and just in earshot to give them the illusion of privacy. Hermione felt nauseous.

"What?" Draco asked, his surprise apparent.

"Pansy, I know she's your friend and that you care about her, but she doesn't have the right to say things like that about you." She reminded him, looking up at him with soft, sensitive eyes.

"Thank you, means a lot." Draco snapped blithely and started walking far too quickly. Astoria shot a panicked look over her shoulder and Hermione hurried after them.

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Draco

He was fucking livid, fuming. He was a lot of things but he wasn't an idiot. He knew scheming and he especially knew Pansy scheming. He expected it from her, he recognized it, and he was utterly unfazed by it. But this, this was some higher level shit. Astoria was in on this, Daphne was in on this, fucking Hermione was in on this. He knew court politics and normally he could go along with most schemes, at least until he wanted them to blow up, but he couldn't not with this one. This was far too close to home and too close to almost working. If Pansy hadn't looked away, he would've bought it, all of it, hook line and sinker. As it was, he was still doubting fucking everything.

"I'm sorry my lady, I'm afraid I must depart." Draco declared, bowing to Astoria quickly. Astoria looked like she wanted to protest but Draco was already gone, disappearing into the bushes.

…

The water was slowly lapping against the rocks; Draco's eyes were closed but he could see it as clear as day. The rock against his back was cool; the pounding sun was hot against his skin. He was exhausted, utterly drained and he felt like he could melt onto the rock into a puddle. Wouldn't that be nice? Puddles don't have to think.

"I'm sorry." The voice was timid and he sighed, not needing to open his eyes to know who it was.

"How much of that was you and how much of that was Pans?" He asked, not sure what answer he needed.

"I shouldn't have been involved at all." She sighed and he heard her dress rustle as she sat down in the grass, a few feet away from him.

"How much?" He repeated firmly. "Does it really matter?" She sighed, guilt dripping from every syllable. "To me it does." He asserted. One of them had used his issue to what? Endear him to Astoria?

"I didn't write or contribute to the script and it was Pansy's general idea." She admitted. Great. That was great news. One of his best friends fucking sold him out, though if he was being fair she went for the surface level stuff. Pansy knew more shit about him than any person on the planet, including Blaise.

"What did you do?" He asked, he wasn't sure what he wanted to hear.
"Suggest that Astoria try to emulate the best parts of your mother." Hermione admitted in a voice no louder than a mouse. He sat up; his eyes flying open in shock. He turned to her and she was blushing violently.

"That, that is fucked up." He told her slowly. That was fucking creepy. Did people actually do that shit? Did she do that shit?

"I know, Minerva had me read this book with all these theories a while ago, it just kind of came out." She confessed, her head dropping between her knees.

"Listen, I know you have to do your job, and part of that is helping Astoria." He started slowly, not even sure where he was going with this.

"It's just, really hard to be loyal to both of you." She admitted, slumped further. He could see the stress that must have been bothering her for weeks.

"I can see why that would be hard." He agreed reluctantly.

"I didn't know what to do so I just did nothing and let it happen." She admitted, clearly ashamed. A part of him just wanted to assure her that it was okay, to comfort, but it wasn't, nothing was okay here.

"I know telling me in advance would be betraying Astoria and you don't want to do that." He guessed. She nodded in frantic agreement before sighing and slumping into herself with a groan.

"God this is all so fucked up." She told him like it was news.

"Okay, how about this, promise me you will never, ever use anything I tell you to help Astoria 'charm' me?" He spat the words out; they tasted like acid.

"I promise." She agreed frantically, her eyes were watering and she wiped beneath her lashes.

"And just give me a head's up if something's coming, some manipulative shit like today?" He tried to compromise.

"Okay." She agreed tentatively.

"I know you can't give details, I just want a general heads up." He insisted gently, trying to remember to see her side of this, how difficult all this must be for her. He was keeping secrets sure, but his best friend knew, he didn't have to lie to anyone he cared about.

"I…I can do that." She realized, straightening with confidence. It looked like a weight lifted off for her shoulders.

There was a heavy pause where the only sound was the water rushing over stone.

"So, are we good?" She asked nervously. He sighed.

"Yeah, we're good."

...

Hermione

It was quiet but not quite comfortable. The air felt too tight, everything just felt wrong. Despite his assurance, she knew they weren't good. She knew that there had been a breach of trust, a huge
breach of trust if a necessary one and that it had been her fault. His terms were simple, smart, a
solution she should have thought of, would have thought of if she wasn't constantly in survival
mode. She just needed a break but she definitely couldn't go down right now and she didn't want to
run away from this, something told her that she wouldn't have much to come back to if she did.

"When I was researching I read how some pairs use punishment..." She suggested slowly, not even
really sure that what she suggesting in reality.

"No." Draco cut her off firmly, straightening where he sat.

"What?" She asked, genuinely confused. It seemed like such a perfect solution.

"When you helped them plan today we didn't have ru...an agreement about it or about consequences,
you didn't betray my trust because we hadn't talked about it. You made a judgement call which I
disagreed with, it's going to happen." He shrugged, and objectively she could see his point.
Personally, she still felt guilty.

"So you're really not mad?" She checked again.

"I'm really not mad." He repeated but looked away.

"You seem mad." She observed nervously.

"I'm mad that my fiancee, my girlfriend, and my best female friend conspired to trick me into feeling
something that I don't want anything to do with but I understand your dilemma. I'm really just pissed
with Pans to be perfectly honest." He admitted, shrugging.

"I'm sorry." She told him earnestly.

"Come here." He lifted his arm pointedly. She smiled and gratefully tucked herself into his side. The
breeze caught a few curls and blew them across her face. He tucked them behind her ear easily.

"Are we going to be okay?" She asked nervously.

"Yeah." He kissed her temple gently. They lapsed into silence for a few moments. The sun pounded
down heavily and she felt a drop of sweat drip down her spine. The summer humidity was disgusting
but she was content to put up with it for at least a little while.

"You up for a swim?" She suggested hopefully. Draco cocked his head, clearly needing a beat to
think.

"Sure" He shrugged, standing quickly and lending her a hand. She pulled herself up and grinned at
him as he shucked his shirt. She carefully unbuttoned her overdress and discarded the heavy fabric.
The relief of simply standing in her slip was incredible. She watched a little too closely as he
unbuttoned his trousers. He caught her easily and smirked as she blushed. "This is quite the cycle
we've got going here, huh?" He laughed at the irony. She smiled too, remembering that day, it had
been a kind of beginning for them.

"That's one way to look at it." She agreed.

"Ready?" He asked, stepping to the edge.

"Ready." She confirmed eagerly, standing beside them.

"Okay. On three, yeah?" He told her. She smiled and nodded.
"One... two...three!" He called and she jumped, in midair she turned to see Draco still standing firmly on the cliff. She hit the water with a shocked expression on her face. She sunk, the cool temperature a shock to her heated skin and she emerged quickly.

"Hey!" She cried out angrily. He was laughing raucously at her.

"Geez Granger that is literally the oldest trick in the book, I thought you were supposed to be smart?" He teased. She squawked in protest but then he was jumping in next to her. She sputtered as the water hit her and he came up laughing again before wrapping his arms around her waist. They stayed like that, bobbing gently for a beat.

"I'm still mad at you." She told him firmly, forcing her mouth into what she was sure was a very unconvincing pout. He kissed her nose which was so ridiculously sweet she couldn't help but smile.

"Yeah, yeah I'm sure" He scoffed derisively but smiled. She grinned back. "Now, the important thing that I want to know is what you read that lead you to punishments." She felt her cheeks warm as she remembered the very vivid illustrations that she had stumbled upon.

"I was reading about incorporating certain stimuli and the difference between stimuli that is perceived as positive and stimuli that is designed to discourage repetition of behavior or alleviate guilt for that behavior." She explained uneasily.

"Granger are you talking about the difference between corporal punishment and pain play?" Draco guessed, his silver eyes bright with amusement.

"That's what I said, isn't it?" She raised an eyebrow pointedly. He laughed even though she wasn't quite sure what was funny.

"Is pain play something you'd be interested in?" He asked her, his face taking on that serious expression she dubbed as his "responsible alpha" face.

"Maybe, it seems interesting, you know? Would you be interested?" She asked curiously. He smirked as if remembering something particularly entertaining.

"Yes, I'd most definitely be interested." He told her sincerely, smirking all the while.

"I don't like the idea of corporal punishment." She blurted, suddenly needing to get that straight. "If we ever establish rules and want to take things that way I don't want to be hit for punishment." She hated even the idea of that. She wasn't totally against the idea of punishment, especially considering she still felt a little guilty now even though objectively she could see that hadn't technically done anything wrong, but she knew herself well enough to even a hint of violence in a punishment and it would be over.

"Okay, I've never been a fan of that end of it either so that's no problem for me." He told her firmly and she sighed in relief.

"I get the idea of masochism, have even read about that theory that pain and pleasure are the same and only differentiated by context but I don't get it, what's in it for you?" She asked, genuinely curious. She had read first hand accounts about the bliss that O Space via pain was and even just the pleasure a simple spanking was supposedly extraordinary.

"The same things that I get when you go into O Space, I get your submission, the pleasure of watching your reactions, lots of things." He shrugged and she thought she saw a hint of a blush on those high, aristocratic cheekbones.
"Okay, I guess I can understand that." She conceded.

"Good, we'll just have to see where we're going to go with that." He grinned, running his thumb over her bottom lip. She flicked it with her tongue and he groaned. "You're going to be the death of me, you know that?"

"I'm planning on it."

... When they got back to his room, the sky was a dark azure, richer than any dye or paint and the air was that soft summer warm that just tingled on your skin. Hermione's hair fell in soft waves about her face. It was quiet, words fallen by the wayside in favor of brief, sweet kisses at each turn and behind each hedge. He closed the french doors behind them and she felt him twist her hair to the top of her head. He fumbled for a ribbon from his desk and tied it around the knot gently. He kissed the knot at the top of her spine gently.

"What are you doing?" She huffed. Goosebumps rose on the back of her neck as he traced a straight line along the top of her spine with his finger. The neckline of her dress was tasteful and he stopped at the top of the fabric in the back.

"You won't let me mark you." He stated plainly as if it was a valid explanation. It was painfully obvious he was an only child in moments like these. He wasn't good at settling for anything less than what he wanted. She rolled her eyes and was happy that he couldn't see the fond smile on her face.

"Because you don't own me." She reminded him firmly. If this was just another ploy...

"Hmm, maybe not officially but in every way that matters." He chuckled and then reached for something on his desk. She turned to see what he was reaching for, but he clucked his tongue and turned her back with two firm hands on her shoulders. She jumped when a cold, sticky feeling landed on the back of her neck, followed by a focused pressure. She felt O Space lick at the edge of her consciousness, but she shoved it away deliberately.

"Are you drawing on my neck?" She hissed, he tightened the hand on her shoulder and in hair. Stupid Alpha, stupid, wonderfully artistic and sentimental alpha.

"Mmm hmm." He murmured, continuing the design he had started. She turned to see what he was reaching for, but he clucked his tongue and turned her back with two firm hands on her shoulders. She jumped when a cold, sticky feeling landed on the back of her neck, followed by a focused pressure. She felt O Space lick at the edge of her consciousness, but she shoved it away deliberately.

"Why?" She asked; the hand on her shoulder was warm and the grip he had on her hair created the perfect dull, blissfully decadent pain. It was hard to focus, especially as he started another swirl which arched lower on her neck.

"Because I like thinking that there's something to remind you that you're mine." His breath was warm on the back of her neck as he whispered. "If I can't mark you for real at least I can have this." He finished with a final curve, leading to a swirl higher up on her neck. He whispered a quick sticking charm and then gently kissed what she guessed was the center of the design.

"What is it?" She asked quietly, touching the back of her neck as if she could recognize it purely from feel. He grinned at her happily as she turned to face him.

"A simplified version of the Malfoy seal, mirror image swirls in s shapes to form an M. It's just ink and if you ever don't want it, just use a quick finite and wash it off with warm water." He was grinning now, elated like a little kid, and obviously proud of his plan. A small part of her wanted to
pretend she hated it just to prove that he wasn't right all of the time, but she couldn't hide her own grin. "Do you like it?" He asked, looking like a schoolboy giving a gift to his sweetheart. She blushed at her own analogy.

"Well, I haven't seen it yet, have I?" She teased, and he grinned, reaching for three small mirrors that he kept in his desk. He had he hold on slightly to the right at an angle, and another at a similar angle from the right. He held a mirror directly behind the back of her neck and with a little positioning, she was able to see the stylized "M" on the back of her neck. She blushed and a wave of heat hit her at the implications. His mark, she got to walk around with his mark on the back of her neck. She could keep her hair down, keep it a secret, but her inner omega preened at the thought of being claimed by her alpha. The ideal appealed to both her independence and her nature. She loved it.

…

It became a thing after that. Occasionally he'd add to the pattern on the back of her neck. More often, he'd add designs in other locales. They were never in obvious locations, or outwardly sexual ones. He always respected her wishes, kept the marks away from spots that could be seen. There was one curving behind her right ear, one on her left shoulder, one beside her knee, and one in the center of her back. That was probably her favorite, mainly because of the memory of him tracing it on her skin.

He had her roll up the back of her blouse and lie down in his bed. He had hummed softly while gently tracing patterns on her lower back with his finger as his quill dug slightly into her skin, it was just a slight scratch, but he always apologized with careful kisses and gently traced patterns. It turned her on extraordinarily, having secret marks on her as she walked around the palace. She was claimed, not permanently but it did amazing things for her ego. No one else got to wear his marks, she was special.

She loved the fact that he was willing to open up such a personal, private part of himself, loved the happiness he seemed to get from it, but more selfishly, she liked the fact that she was the only one who knew.

She knew that it did things for him, seeing his seal on her skin, made him fantasize about things that couldn't happen, realities that weren't theirs, but she let it go one anyways. She was just as caught up in it as he was.
Draco

Severus was pacing, rattling off questions and insults with an anger that Draco hadn't been exposed to in years, at least not from his godfather.

"Motto." The older man demanded harshly.

"Purity will always conquer." Draco rattled off easily. Severus had been going for a while, he was now reverting to questions Draco had memorized when he was seven.

"In Latin." His tutor clarified.

"Sanctimonia Vincet Semper" Draco answered smoothly. The pronunciation was easy, Latin a well-practiced language on his tongue.

"Current politicians whose opinions we encourage?" Severus asked, and that, that was harder. There were literally dozens.

"Sage Bragnam, Bilius Finbok, Runcorn… and Bertha Jorkins." He recalled lazily, his energy for this waning quickly.

"Is that at all?" Severus asked slowly.

"I'm sure it's not but those are the easily manipulated and useful ones." Draco massaged the bridge of his nose, struggling for patience.

"Idiot. Every connection is worthwhile, only a fool would let them fall into disarray." Snape reprimanded.

"You're the one who's been telling me to focus on the important people my whole goddamn life!" Draco finally snapped.

"Did I ever say to focus on obvious people?" Severus demanded and Draco was shocked.

"Some people matter and others don't. You've been saying it for years." Draco repeated. It was one of Severus's most pointed and repeated lessons.

"Did I ever tell you that mattering was a societal distinction?" Severus asked. That made Draco pause.

"I have no idea what you are trying to say." He admitted, though not calmly. "People will surprise you if you allow them to. Don't. I'm afraid you may be missing important clues." Severus instructed. It wasn't like him to speak in gibberish and riddles.

"Are you all alright?" Draco asked, legitimately getting a little concerned now.

"That is not your business nor relevant to this discussion. Now, how do you plan to solve your issues with your fiancee?" Severus asked. Draco recoiled. This was not a normal question.

"Are you about to give me relationship advice?" Draco asked dismissively. There was a wand at his throat before he could blink.
"I will say whatever I please and you will listen attentively." Severus snarled, voice slow and angry.

"Yes, sir." Draco agreed slowly.

"Be kind to her. Treat her well. Lie. Act like you have a soul." His mentor scoffed. Draco flinched as Severus lowered his wand.

"Excuse me?" He snapped.

"Have you suddenly gone deaf and not bothered to notify anyone?" Severus accused.

"No, sir." Draco protested.

"Pretend to like the brain dead peace of blonde seaweed and save yourself from the disaster you're currently plunging into head first." Severus hissed. Draco started to protest. He knew exactly what he was doing and didn't appreciate the implication that anything else was the truth. "You're dismissed." Severus snapped and whirled out of the room, his cloak swishing behind him. Draco rose slowly, stunned at what had to be the strangest lesson that he had ever had.

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Hermione

The laundry basket weighed heavily in her arms as she made her way across the castle. Hermione was a little giddy to say the least. Draco's marks on her skin tingled warmly as if charmed when she thought about them and she couldn't restrain her smile.

"Hey! Mione!" The voice echoed down the hallway. Hermione jumped as Harry came rushing down the hallway. He was still in his riding boots and breeches. It was a strange look in the middle of the manor and she hurried to pull him aside. The evening traffic was light but if they were seen they would most definitely reprimand him.

"What has gotten into you?" She hissed, hurriedly looking over her shoulder.

"Did you leave me a note?" He demanded, still out of breath. "What?" Hermione huffed with no idea what he could possibly be talking about.

"Mione! Did you leave a note in my room?" Harry repeated desperately.

"No! Why? What happened?" Hermione questioned, sincerely concerned by his behavior now.

"This was in my loft." He pulled the scroll out from the pocket of his trousers. It was a plain white stretch of parchment from the outside, sealed with red candle wax but without insignia to mark it.

"Well, open it!" She urged. He cracked the seal nervously, and Hermione found herself staring eagerly as Harry clumsily unrolled the parchment.

"It's, it's blank." He announced dizzily. Hermione tilted her head before gasping and eagerly suggesting a solution.

"Try 'Aparecium,' it's a revealing charm." She urged, certain that her magic wasn't strong enough to use it quite yet.

"Aparecium." He repeated uncertainly and then cleared his throat and tried again, "Aparecium." The page still stayed blank.
"I don't know Harry, it must be some sort of prank." She told him uneasily, disappointed herself, though she wasn't sure what she had been expecting.

"I guess... it's just, with everything..." Something seemed to dawn in the alpha's eyes. "I have to go." He announced suddenly with certainty.

"What?" She recoiled in surprise as he bolted away.

"I'm sorry, I'll explain later." He called over his shoulder careening through the hallway at top speed.

"That was weird." Hermione announced to the empty hallway, unfortunately it didn't stay that way for long. A servant appeared, rounding the corner immediately. He stopped short when he saw her alone.

"Everything all right?" Collin asked nervously. He was a short, blonde boy who had worked with the Greengrasses almost as long as she had. He was an excellent messenger, mostly because he seemed to know where everyone was at all times and had an uncanny ability to appear right where the person he needed was hiding.

"Yeah, Collin, I'm fine" she assured him uneasily.

"Okay..." He drew out the word, very clearly not believing her.

"What is it, Collin?" She sighed in exasperation.

"Note for you, from the young Lord Zabini." He presented the black envelope easily. Hermione worked hard to school her features to something like disengagement.

"He's the only Lord Zabini." She pointed out. Collin rolled his eyes.

"Right he is, note's still for you though." He pointed out holding out the envelope again. She took it, focusing on not letting her unease show through. Blaise didn't write her notes.

"Did Blaise give you this personally?" She asked slowly letting her thumb catch on the seal. Strange notes were abounding that day apparently.

"No, he usually doesn't just slid it under the door with your name on it when I came around for the usual mail." Collin shrugged as If that was perfectly normal.

"Alright then, he is an odd bloke. Thank you, Collin." She nodded at him and he shrugged and went on his way, undoubtedly searching out his next recipient. Hermione sighed and opened the envelope with a smile, certain of the author. Draco's fine script greeted her and she smiled happily as she read it.

"My sweet, lovely omega, it would be a great honor if you would come to my room tonight." It read. She grinned, tempted to do a little happy dance as she hurried away. She had a few things to do before she could escape for the night but if she hurried, she could be there within the hour.

...  

*Draco*

Even though he had been expecting it, Draco still jumped when he heard the knock. He rose clumsily, having spent too much time wedged into the corner of the couch with a book for far too long. Hermione came in before he got to the door, eyes wild as her hair streamed behind her.
"Sorry, I got here as soon as I could." She huffed, still out of breath. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her into a kiss. She hesitated for only a beat before meeting him with equal vigor. Her nails scratched the back of his neck and he groaned, nipping her lower lip between his teeth. She whimpered and the scent of apricot flooded his senses. His hands skimmed down her back unlacing her corset with ease. She groaned and he kissed down her neck, just reaching the edge of the curve of his mark. He felt a flare of possessiveness shoot up within him. Tonight he needed something darker. She pulled away and took his hand, leading him into his bedroom. He discarded his jacket behind him as she slid out of her corset. She stepping into the room, grinning cheekily as she gestured for him to come in.

Hermione

He pressed her against the door she had just walked through and pinned her hands above her head. He got like that sometimes, generally after doing something unpleasant. It was like the lack of control outside made him desperate to control what happened here. She certainly didn't mind. His mouth was on her neck kissing and sucking and nipping. She hoped it left marks. Immediately, vivid pictures came to mind, her research coming back to her at a dizzying pace. She remembered a woman's wrist, turning in their frame to show wrists with red chaffing marks. She whimpered and squirmed, feeling his grip on her wrists tighten.

"I want…" She rasped. He stopped, lifting his head and studying her closely.

"Yes?" He asked, his voice was low. She looked down, suddenly nervous. It wasn't exactly an easy thing to say aloud. Some people might even say that it was shameful, and maybe she was trying to suggest it too early. He had held her wrists before and he had seemed into the idea, but now, maybe since it was here he would think she was bizarre for it. Weren't you supposed to make love before getting ropes involved?

Maybe…"Tell me." He demanded, his voice rough as he pressed her hands harder into the oak paneling.

"I want you to tie me up." She admitted. Draco groaned, his head dropping onto her shoulder. "If you'd be okay with that?" She added timidly. He moved her hand easily, cupping her palm as he brought it to his straining cock. She could feel the shape of it easily in her palm, feel the heat of it.

"Do you think that I'm okay with it?" He teased; she squeezed him gently and he groaned again.

"How… where?" She trailed off not sure where to start. He stepped back and kissed her wrist gently before leading her to his bed. He sat her down and laid her hands in her lap. Her breath was shaky as he placed her hands next to each other.

"I want you to tell me if this is too tight." He instructed gently and waved his wand quickly before setting it aside. The wordless spell sent silky ropes coursing around her wrist. The pressure was firm and the rope was soft against her skin. Her breath caught in her throat.

"It's perfect." She admitted. He smirked and pushed on her shoulders until she laid flat on her back. He lifted her hands, placing them above her head. Her breath caught as she felt the slight pull on her shoulders.

"All you need to do to get out is just say finite." He informed her, on his hands and knees about her.

"No wand?" She check quickly.

"The charm was designed for it." He explained easily.
"Good." She breathed out nervously. She couldn't think much past the feeling of the ropes on her wrists and how purely she was at his mercy.

"It's not going to bother your wrist?" He checked once more before brushing his thumb along the scrapes she lived with every day.

"Nope." She assured him.

"Wonderful." He smirked and picked up his wand again. The cold air was a surprise as he vanished her gown and slip easily.

"I needed that." She sputtered in protest.

"Trust." He ordered, and waved his wand again, they appeared draped over the back of the arm chair in the corner. She shivered as she realized she was left in just her stockings and knickers. He ran his thumbs along the garters. She blushed as she realized how bland the garments were, nothing like what he was probably used to seeing on his lovers. She blushed as she watched his gaze linger on her breasts; she figured he probably wasn't that concerned about her undergarments, self-proclaimed kink be damned.

"Okay, here are the rules: you stay perfectly still and you don't make a noise. Can you follow those?" He asked firmly, his gaze serious even though he was smirking.

"Yes." She breathed, her voice failing her.

"If it gets too intense, you will say your word, do you understand?" He checked formally. "Yes." She agreed dizzily.

"Okay, and one more rule, for every sound you make and every muscle you move, you owe me one." He laid out, his eyes alight with desire.

"One what?" She asked quizzically.

"Oh my sweet omega, for every sound or movement you make from this point forward you owe me one orgasm." He explained. "Nod if you're okay with that." He ordered. She nodded fervently, not sure if she wanted to be completely silent or make all of the noise in the world. "Oh, and by the way, if you make it the whole time, I will reward you my wonderful girl." And that, that was tempting. His rewards had always been well worth it and now she was determined to succeed. Nothing could stop Hermione Granger once she set her mind on something.

*Draco*

That had done it. Hermione had that look. That look he had seen when she was deciphering a difficult rune or translating a challenging passage was firmly seated on her features. Granger was determined to win, the only problem was that she had no idea what she was in for. He kissed down her neck, sucking marks as he did. Her breath hitched as he stopped at the hollow of her throat but she stayed still and didn't make a sound. He grinned, proud of her as he did. He sat up and she watched him cautiously as he reached to open his drawer. Her eyebrows widened as he pulled out the palette. The paint was already doled out and blended how he wanted. He grabbed his softest brush first mixing it in the soft blue paint, a light celeste. Hermione's breathing caught on as she realized there was not paper. Tonight, she was his canvas. He brushed a thin layer of paint in the hollow of her throat. Hermione was very clearly trying incredibly hard to stay perfectly still as he swabbed a darker blue with swirls down to her collar bone. She had settled in, confident that she could take this, probably even relieve. She jumped with the stiff straw brush flicked across her
nipples and almost groaned in defeat when she realized what she had done.

"That's one." He told her firmly. It's a good thing he hadn't planned a reward. He smirked as her coated the brush with red paint, starting below her breast and painting a large swirl that finished in a tight curl around her straining bud. He went back to the other end and lingered on her breast bone before starting another spiral which curved around the top of the mound. He finished the swirl, the stiff bristles dragging across the sensitive peak. She stayed remarkably quiet. Ah yes, now she was going for damage control. It was cute. He grabbed a sponge now, dipping it in a purple paint as he did, dabbing clumsy spirals to cover the gap. The sponge was deliberately soft, the most difficult part of this section was the temperature of the paint, which was a little cool. She stayed stoic. Good girl.

"I'm going to spread your legs, that won't count against you." He told her while gently moving her legs apart and turning her legs flat against her sheets. He started at her knees, splattering silver from a stiff brush on her skin. The color hit the sheets but he wasn't bothered. Clean up was going to be extensive as it was. He dipped the same brush in gold and painted streaks in curves around her thighs, loosely tracing the outlines of the muscles just beneath the surface. She gasped as he got close to her hips and then cursed.

"That's two and three." He told her firmly. He took another swab of the gold, starting at the top of her knickers tracing swirls up to her stomach. He imagined this tickled, especially since the paint pulled at her skin as it dried. He let it fade and then grabbed another soft brush, swirling it in the bronze. He drew swirls on her skin again, circling over her ribs. He let the final swirls run up against the red beneath her breasts. She kept her breathing steady and he carefully moved back.

"Stay still or you'll smudge it." He instructed easily. She blinked twice in succession. He chuckled to himself at her attempt at signal. "You did a wonderful job, I am so proud of you." He praised before waving his wand and undoing her binds. "And my challenge is over, you can speak now my lovely."

"Thank you." She sighed in relief, smiling as she looked at her red wrist with a giddy fondness.

"You look wonderful." He told her sincerely. She blushed.

"Can I see it?" She asked eagerly. He laughed.

"You're going to want to wait a couple minutes or you'll end up with a strange colored blob but sure." He acquiesced.

"How do you do it?" She asked curiously, pillowng her hands beneath her head.

"Hmm?" He mused, twirling his wand between his fingers, already planning his next move.

"You're an artist, clearly, but no one knows about it. How do you keep it from everyone?" She asked, searching for answers even when mostly naked and covered in paint. Oh god, how he admired her.

"An overabundance of caution and constant vigilance." He laughed even though he knew she wouldn't get the joke.

"Don't you have a drying charm?" She asked, squirming a little with impatience.

"Haven't you ever heard that the waiting is part of the fun?" He teased her.

"Fine, fine, I'll hurry it up." He agreed lazily, flicked his wand. She gasped as the paint tightened suddenly over her skin.

"How do you plan on getting this off of me?" She asked curiously as she sat up cautiously. He held out his hand and lead her to his mirror. He placed her in front of him, letting her see her body in the mirror. Her lithe frame was covered in designs, the colors varied but blended wherever they met. Her breath caught in her throat, her eyes wide as she took in her body. He gave her a moment to appreciate it before moving. They didn't have all night, after all.

"We can do it quickly or slowly." He proposed.

"What would that entail?" She asked as he traced over the slashes on her hips.

"Nope: quickly or slowly?" He pushed. She paused, thinking about it. "Quickly." She answered. He grabbed his wand.

"Tergeo." He breathed, flicking away the paint with ease. It was gone quickly, her skin shiny and pink where the paint had sat.

"How are you going to collect?" She asked him, her eyes trained on him in the mirror, not herself now. He let his hands linger on her hips, his thumbs drawing circles on her skin.

"Easily. Come." Her knees buckled and she collapsed into him as the pleasure crashed over her. It was sudden, jolting and unexpected but her body couldn't resist the command. She whimpered as he scooped her up with an arm behind her knees. He laid her on his bed, kissing over her breasts and stomach as she came down. Her skin was flushed red and her breathing labored. Her eyes dragged open slowly, utterly shocked.

"That, that was unexpected." She gasped, as she laid heavily on his sheets.

"You okay?" He asked gently, they had done this before, but this was a little different, if she wanted out now it would be completely expected.

"And amazing. Unexpected and Amazing." She continued, smiling. He smirked, crawling over her limp body.

"Good because you owe me two more." He reminded her. She groaned.

"I'm not sure I could..." She trailed off as he flicked her nipple with his tongue. She gasped as he took the delicate pink bud between his teeth and pulled. He released it quickly before turning to the other side and giving it the same treatment. She was truly squirming now as he kissed down her stomach. She spread her legs easily and he eased her knickers down gently. She kept her hair neatly trimmed parted her outer lips with two fingers, her sweet essence shining against his skin. He flicked his tongue over that most sensitive bud and she twitched, her hip thrusting towards him. He groaned, holding her down with on hand as he continued manipulating her clit with his thumb. He slid one digit inside of her and she gasped. He curled it against that spongy wall inside of her and whispered the command into her hip.

"Come." He ordered. She gasped, shattering as she clenched around his finger. He stroked that spot again, causing aftershock after aftershock until she stilled and whimpered in what sounded like pain instead.

"One more." He reminded her firmly.

"I... I can't." She gasped, her eyes were watering, her hair was damp with sweat on her forehead.
"You can. Do you remember your word?" He asked her again. Recognition dawned in her eyes and then steely resolve.

"Yes." She told him firmly.

"Are you using it?" He clarified.

"No." She told him, smiling softly before flopping backwards.

"Do your worst." She challenged, and he grinned. He slid two fingers inside of her and she groaned. He curled them firmly, over and over again on that wall. She squirmed and he scissored his fingers inside of her, stretching her gently. She was warm and soft and oh so wet. He leaned forward and flicked his tongue against her clit. She resisted, not quite there, but she was taught like a bow string. He kissed her bud softly before sucking hard as he curled his fingers against that spot inside of her. She cried out as she came, orgasming hard around his fingers again and entirely naturally. He smirked in triumph as she collapsed. Her arm falling over her eyes.

"That was..." She sighed. He crawled up to her side, falling beside her. He was hard, uncomfortably so but not desperately so.

"Lay it on me, the praise, the adoration..." He trailed off, smirking happily.

"Do you need me to take care of that?" She asked, way too smug for someone who just came three times in a row.

"Can you even move?" He teased, kissing her temple. She groaned.

"In five minutes I'll be able to, I'm sure." She vowed. He laughed.

"In five minutes you'll be asleep Granger." He predicted. She scowled like a kitten having it's favorite yarn ball taken away.

"Then can I watch while you take care of it with the next five minutes?" She suggested, smirking and turning just her head.

"Works for me." He smirked, pulling his cock free from his pants. It was already leaking profusely and the moment he got his hand on it he groaned. This was not going to take long. He moved his hand quickly squeezing firmly around his shaft. It was barely three strokes before he was coming all over his stomach, pleasure crashing gently. He sighed, reaching for his wand but Granger beat him to it.

"Scourgify." She murmured, flicking her wand easily. His jizz was gone in an instance.

"That was an advanced spell." He observed cautiously, eyeing the gold band he tried to ignore as often as possible.

"Oh, don't you know? I'm just an extraordinary witch." She told him cheekily, pulling the blankets over the both of him and snuggling into his side. He sighed happily. She wasn't wrong.
Draco

The early morning sunlight poured through his window, Granger's body was warm beside him and his eyes slowly opened. Hermione was already awake, looking idly at his face. He kissed her gently.

Hermione was in his bed in just a slip; the soft cotton sat gently on her skin. The tops of her breasts were exposed, beautiful white skin peeking out from above her neckline.

"I want to draw on you." He admitted, pulling away from her mouth. Her hands were in his hair and she pulled him back down to her gently. Her legs wrapped around his hips and he could tell that she was in her powerful mood. Half the time, Hermione submitted beautifully, the other half she gave as good as she got.

"I choose where this time." She breathed as he nipped at her lower lip.

"Works for me." He admitted. It was in his nature to dominate, to control, to pin her to the mattress but if he was going to submit to anyone, it would be Hermione Granger. He grabbed the quill first, blinding reaching as he kissed his way down her neck. "Where do you want it?"

"Here." She breathed, tracing a line up her inner thigh through her skirt. Something stuck in his throat and he swallowed heavily.

"Okay." He agreed solemnly. She let her left leg fall open, dropping he side of her knee to lay flat against his emerald sheets. Her skin was like cream, soft against the shine of the fabric. Her knickers were very visible, dainty midnight blue things that he wanted to rip off with his teeth. God it was perfect. She was perfect. He grabbed a quill and an inkwell off his bedside table and rested them both gently beside her hip.

He settled easily between her legs. He could feel the heat radiating from her center and was so close that he could practically taste her but he stayed back. First he would draw and then he would see where they would go from there. Patience, he reminded himself. He took up his quill, holding it in a hand for a moment as he contemplated what form he wanted on her skin. They were cheap imitation of what his mark would actually look like. It would be a simplified version of the family seal, sure, but the charm on it would make it light up when he touched her, it would glow emerald and silver, the family colors, and from what he'd read a strong bond between the pair would result in the mark tingling when he was around. Imagining it on Hermione felt heady, like a drug, like perfect scotch, or the burn of fire whiskey.

He cast the distracting thoughts out of his mind and focused on this mark. He made the first swoop easily, watching the ink bleed slightly as he traced it into her skin. She groaned. He knew that it hurt slightly, had tested the drag and pressure on his palm first before trying it on her. Normally he'd ease the pain with gentle touches, but now he had another idea. He turned his head slightly and exhaled on the cotton of her knickers. She moaned and her hips tilted up. He placed his hand on her hip, holding her down as he went back to the mark. He finished the swoop with a swirl and she whimpered. He knew that Hermione had a thing for pain in bed before their talk in the waterfall's pool, if all the hair pulling was any indication. He could also tell she didn't have any issue with submitting, beside her omega side, Hermione, not her hormones, agreed to going without knickers just because he asked. Though, hormones definitely played a role in that one, even if they weren't the omega focused kind.
Her hand went to her hips, starting to push down her knickers. He tisked, pushing her hands away.

"You'll smudge it," He reminded her. She groaned.

"I need…" She started, but he cut her off.

"I know what you need." He told her, moving on to the other side. The second swirl was always trickier, harder to make neatly. He focused, even as Hermione huffed. He finished the top of it before finally gave her some relief. He touched her through her knickers, stroking her through the satin. The fabric was already wet, he noticed with pride. She was so fucking responsive. His cock twitched in his pants and he reflexively rolled his hips into the bed. It was a cheap imitation but the friction was still ridiculously good. He added a third swirl on the bottom, letting it trail towards her knee. She squirmed and he smacked her other thigh. She jumped and gasped but he knew it hadn't actually hurt, it was more for the sound than anything else.

"Okay, I'll stay still." She huffed. He smirked and licked a stripe up the thigh he smacked. She groaned and he had a fourth, elongated swirl arching even lower. Whenever he did them like this, he was always a little reminded of peacocks. It was a fitting design for his omega. He reached for his wand again and cast the sealing charm. She sighed at the tingling feeling and gasped as he vanished her knickers. He kissed the top of her mound and the licked at her outer lips. She moaned, her hips rising to meet him. She tasted sweet and tangy with just a hint of salt. If he focused who could catch the tiniest hint of apricot and cherries. He smiled and turned to her clit, sucking it firmly. He twitched and moaned. He oh so carefully scraped the bud with his teeth. She squeaked and moaned and got noticeably wetter.

"Good girl." He praised.

"Please." She whimpered desperately. He saw tears starting to form at the corner of her eyes.

He fucked inside of her with his tongue. She squirmed.

"Please let me come." She begged, her hand reaching towards her clit. He grabbed her wrist and pinned it to bed. He leaned away.

"On my tongue or not at all." He ordered firmly. She moaned. He flicked her clit again before moving back to her entrance and sliding shallowly into. She groaned as his nose brushed her clit. He stretched, getting his tongue inside of her as deep as he could, just barely reaching the spongy tissue on her front wall. She whimpered again, panting shallowly. He cupped her ass, lifting her hips to get a better angle. He pulled away and sucked firmly on her clit once more. She came, her whole body clenching as her cream rushed out of her. He licked her clean happily as she sighed. She was only relaxed for a beat before she sat up using her arms.

"My turn." She announced, clearly immensely pleased with herself. She pushed at his shoulders until he flopped on his back beside her. She got out of bed nimbly, excitedly coming around to his side.

"Sit up." She order. He cocked an eyebrow but did as she told him, sitting on the edge. She stood in between his knees for a moment before kneeling down. He groaned as he realized what she had planned. She smirked.

He discarded his silk pants quickly, kicking them off. She grinned and he swore he almost came at the look she gave his straining cock. The tip was pointing directly at her mouth, right up against those soft pink lips. She smirked and stuck out her tongue, flicking against the tip. He groaned, his head dropping back. She used that devious tongue to swirl around his very grateful member. He felt his sack tighten and groaned. This was going to end, very, very quickly. She took him in her mouth, he watched her eyes focus as she watched her teeth and slid down his cock, dipping lower and
lower. He groaned as the hot, silky heat enveloped him. She hollowed her cheeks, sucking hard. He
gasped.

"Gonna, come." He groaned out, reaching to pull out and finish himself off. She smacked his hand.
His eyes flew out long enough to watch her slide further. His cock hit the back of her throat and she
started to gag but pulled back just a bit and tried again. He groaned as she cupped his balls with her
hand, massaging firmly. He felt the heat rush through him and in a moment, he was coming, pulsing
down her throat. Her eyes widened with a bit of panic before she breathed deeply through her nose
and swallowed slowly. He groaned, whiting out for a moment. When he opened his eyes again, she
was pulling off of him, a single drop of jizz at the corner of her mouth. She caught it with her thumb
before sucking it into her mouth with a smirk.

"You're going to kill me." He declared, flopping backwards. She grinned, stepping into her knickers
and dropping a dress over her head.

"That is the plan." She teased, grinning as she ran her fingers through her hair, neatening it in the
mirror. Her voice was a little hoarse and fuck him but he was going to have a problem if he let
himself think about that for too long.

"You practiced that shit." He accused, "That was not a first blow job."

"You know you're the only person I've been with." She reminded him.

"I don't doubt it. So what was it, banana? Toy?" He pressed, the image filthy if a little disturbing.

"Hell no, just read up on the subject." She blanched. That didn't exactly help. Granger tucking in in
the library with a book on fellatio was just too wonderful to ignore.

"Will I see you today?" He asked fondly as she laced up her corset. When it was on loosely, she
spun it to the back. He sat up and stood behind her to finish tightening it for her. She smiled and
rolled her eyes.

"I'd hope so." She laughed and he had a feeling he was missing a joke. "Do you even read your
schedule?" She asked him with a an amused sigh.

"Not usually no." He shrugged. It wasn't as if he put very much effort into following it anyways.

"You have tea with Astoria at two." She told him. He groaned.

"Can't you just poison her food or something, get her sick again?" He suggested hopefully. She
bristled.

"Draco Malfoy, that is my best friend you are talking about and she is a delight." Hermione scolded
firmly. Draco raised an unimpressed eyebrow. "Okay, so she was a bitch the last time you two
interacted but she's just trying to get you to like her."

"Fine, then I'll act like I like her." He conceded.

"Really?" She asked hopefully, her eyes shining brightly.

"Was planning on it anyways, my father's been quite insistent lately." He shrugged, trying to mask
his reluctance.

"That's wonderful news." Hermione smiled and moved towards the door with a spring in her step.
"Granger, I can't do this halfway and I can't imagine that it'll be fun to watch." He warned. She paused to cast him an unimpressed look over her shoulder.

"Draco, it's fine. I'm a big girl. I know the difference between politics and reality. I'll be fine." She reminded him confidently.

...

Hermione

Draco teasingly pulled Astoria's plaited hair and the blonde laughed. Hermione had created that plait. Hermione had cut and dyed that hair. Astoria's natural hair was a dark brown but her mother had decided that Astoria's coloring demanded blonde hair. Draco had suggested that they take their tea elsewhere when they had arrived and she was now sitting on the stone wall beside one of the more opulent of the Malfoy fountains. The marble monstrosity was a depiction of Poseidon with a giant pure silver trident. It was arrogant and garish but also hundreds of years old. Astoria laughed as he flicked a drop of water on her nose. Hermione couldn't hear what they were saying specifically and a large part of her was glad for that. She was close enough that she wasn't neglecting her duties and that was good enough for her. Draco laughed heartily and they leaned into each other, only separated by the smallest breath of space.

"Eh hem." Hermione cleared her throat and stood quickly. Astoria blushed and stepped back, carefully returning to a respectable distance away. "I think it's time to go Astoria, your tutor has been expecting you." Hermione instructed gently. Astoria nodded but wasn't quite ready to look away. Draco slowly took her hand and kissed each knuckle slowly and sensuously. Astoria blushed violently.

"I'll see you soon." He told her. She nodded, seemingly at a loss for words. Hermione anxiously shifted her weight back and forth until the other girl turned away. Hermione took her arm and they walked like that through the hallways. Hermione was careful not to look back.

"That seemed like it went well." Hermione suggested with a smile. Astoria blushed.

"Yeah, surprisingly." She agreed a little hesitantly, her eyes trained deliberately forward.

"You guys seemed like you were getting along." Hermione pressed.

"Yeah, I guess we did." Her charge nodded thoughtfully.

"So, do you think you two could actually end up happy together?" Hermione asked sincerely because she was clearly a masochist. Astoria looked down pensively, her mind whirling. Hermione gave her a moment.

"I think it would be nice if the rest of my life was like today, yeah." Astoria explained, a tinge of sadness on her voice. Hermione stopped, pulling Astoria out of the traffic in the hallway and casting a quick muffliato. It wouldn't be good if they were overheard.

"Tori, is something wrong?" She asked gently. The other girl just shook her head.

"Nothing you could fix." Astoria assured her, turning quickly and setting off down the hallway. Hermione hurried after her, not sure what she was missing here, only knowing that it was important. ...

She had two hours. Normally, she'd buckle down somewhere with her work for Minerva and she
tried to, but she couldn't sit still. She was bouncing her leg anxiously and the word swam in front of her eyes. She knew it wasn't Draco's fault and that he had warned her, but she still couldn't stop thinking about the way he had looked at Astoria. She knew it was acting but that didn't mean she liked it. She sighed, letting the book thud shut. She picked it up sluggishly and set out, knowing that there was really only one way to solve this problem.

... 

She found him in his spot in the garden, tucked amongst the tree roots with a book in his lap. He looked like a painting: Man at Peace in Nature. She watched him for a moment. He looked younger, utterly untroubled it made her heart ache.

"Hey." She called softly after a beat. He looked up with surprise, his expression furious, but when he saw her, it melted into a smile.

"Hey yourself." He called back and patted the spot next to him. She tried not to look too eager as she sat down beside him. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and she cracked open her book. It was a thesis that used Mary Tudor to analyze the social classifications that morphed when a woman became a queen. She was quickly realizing that it was brilliant. She leaned her head on his shoulder as he idly rubbed a circle with his thumb on her shoulder. She sighed happily, realizing how ridiculous her insecurities were. She was okay. They were okay.

... 

She sighed heavily as she stretched and stood.

"I have to go, meeting with Minerva." She explained sadly. He nodded understandingly and then sat up, his mind clearly going a thousand miles an hour.

"How long?" He asked, mischief painted across his features.

"Hmmm?" She asked, smoothing down her skirts.

"How long is your meeting?" He clarified.

"An hour at the most why?" She asked with surprise.

"Doing anything after?" He asked, grinning like a shark.

"No, Astoria's tied up until evening and told me that I could have the night off." She told him, seeing where this was going now. It felt a little ridiculous, spending this much time together but it just felt so right. She couldn't help it.

"Come to my room after your meeting." He suggested, rising to his feet with that inherent grace that she could never pull off.

"Wow, aren't you just insatiable?" She teased.

"What can I say? I'm highly motivated." He shrugged, unfazed.

"Or something." She joked. "Now I have to go."

"That's not a yes." He pointed out as she walked towards the path.

"I'll be there, if you'll make it worth my while." She teased, His eyes lit up at the challenge.
"I might just take you up on that Granger." He called out as she slipped away, smiling to herself.

Draco

She stepped into his room with a playful grin. He was grinning right back at her.

"I want to try something fun." He announced. She tilted her head, her smile twisting as she took in his words.

"How fun?" She asked, mischief twinkling in her big brown eyes.

"Very fun." He assured her. She cocked a skeptical eyebrow. God, how he loved her willingness to challenge him.

"Fun like, stealing my knickers?" She offered, smirking at the idea. He smirked back. That had been a good time, but now he wanted to push her a little bit farther.

"This is a little bit more direct than that. Less idea, more feeling." He explained carefully, smirking at his double meaning. Hermione went stiff in front of him.

"I'm not ready to have sex." She blurted, her eyes worried. He kissed her forehead reassuringly.

"Not what I'm talking about." He clarified easily. He would wait, he could definitely wait, especially if they kept the rest of it up.

"Then why are you being so vague?" She demanded, obviously a little put out. She really did like knowledge, maybe a little too much.

"Because I like surprising you." He reminded her. She didn't like that answer.

"Then just, get on with it, I don't like waiting." She huffed. For a girl who had gone without for so much of her life she certainly was impatient.

"Sometimes the anticipation is the best part." He reminded her sagely, or at least, he thought so.

"Only for shitty things." She argued, her brows lowering over her eyes as she scowled.

"How did coming after being bare all day feel?" He asked knowingly. She blushed. He liked that blush on her.

"Okay, you have a point." She admitted meekly. He took her hand and lead her into the bedroom. She sat down slowly and carefully laid down.

"Spread your legs." He ordered, tapping her outer thigh for emphasis.

"How romantic of you." She huffed but the look in her eyes told him that she wasn't truly bothered.

"My lovely, spirited omega, shut up and spread your legs." He repeated, grinning.

"Fine." He kissed between her breasts gently as she parted for him. He lifted her slip and quickly vanished her knickers. "I liked those." She complained halfheartedly. They were boring plain white things, certainly not something to get huffy about.

"I'll buy you better ones." He gently parted her folds with a careful touch and brushed his thumb
over her clit. She was already wet for him but not quite wet enough. Not for what he wanted at least.

"Oh!" She gasped as he circled the delicate bud with his thumb. He loved that sound. He grabbed his discarded wand from his headboard quickly and pressed it to the raised bud. "Wha.. What?" She gasped, squirming against the unyielding wood. He tapped his wand gently on her sensitive flesh and her breath caught in her throat.

"Commulceo." He whispered and he wondered for a moment if the spell had caught until her head fell back, moaning as her blush travelled down her chest. He flicked her nipple with his tongue, grabbing her hips.

"How does that feel?" He demanded.

"Amazing." She whimpered and she bit her lip as if she couldn't handle it. God he wanted her to not be able to handle it.

"You should trust me more." He instructed.

"I'll work on it." She breathed, squirming as she panted. Her hands drifted towards her hips but he quickly pinned them to the bed.

"No touching." He instructed.

"Why not?" She groaned, squirming more under his hold, even as the smell of apricot ratcheted up. She was enjoying it.

"Because your pleasure is mine." He told her calmly, his assertive nature taking over in an instant.

"Oh fuck, that, that sounds amazing." She admitted as the scents of cherries and apricots flooded his nose as well as hints of Frangipani. She had caught on to the beauty of the scenario.

"Do you want to submit to me?" He asked. She nodded slowly, nervously, and bit her lip again. He released the tortured lip from her teeth with his and kissed her gently. "Good. Stay here." He ordered easily.

"What?" She snapped, her eyebrows jumping comically high on her forehead.

"I have a lesson with Severus that I have to attend." He told her, rising easily and deliberately ignoring the uncomfortably tight sensation in his trousers.

"So you're just going to leave me like this?" Hermione shrieked, sitting up and smacking her palms on the mattress for emphasis.

"Yes, and when I come back, I'll make it worth the wait, if and only if, you're good." He promised.

"Good?" She asked slowly, her eyes lighting up.

"No touching, and no coming, not without me." He repeated.

"Fuck, fine." She agreed sighing as she dropped back on to the bed. She was already squirming, her hands twisting in his sheets. The vibrations, which he had tested first of course, were at a low level now, just strong enough for her to feel and have trouble distancing herself from, not strong enough for her to lose it, at least, not yet.

"Do you want help?" He offered gently. She sighed, clearly admitting defeat.
"Yes" She acquiesced.

He cast the second charm, tying her wrists to his iron headboard.

"If you can't take it, or don't want to, end the charm and do what you want, but if you last until I come back..." He trailed off meaningfully. She groaned and flopped backwards onto the bed. Her hands gripped his sheets, twisting them desperately.

"Hurry." She begged, even as her body stayed perfectly still with nothing touching her, the charm kept teasing her, causing a tingling sensation on the most sensitive place on her body. It shouldn't be enough to make her come, at least, not unless he increased the intensity. He twirled his wand casually and Hermione gasped as the intensity flared and then calmed immediately. It was still there, just easier to deal with. "Fuck you." She breathed as he slipped out the door.

"Save it for later." He advised. He shut the door quickly, silencing the truly impressive curses that were echoing from his room.

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**Hermione**

She was in hell. Whatever charm Draco had used was powerful, it felt like there was something vibrating against her clit. Most of the time, the pleasure stayed at a low level, just there enough to feel it and be utterly unable to totally put it out of her mind. Then suddenly, the pleasure would flare, the vibration would speed up and pulse against her. Her back would bow and she couldn't stop herself from moaning. She couldn't even think. And then it would stop and fade back to the low level sensation, just enough to keep her on edge. It was driving her insane.

She heard the creak of the door suddenly and strained against her ties. Fuck yeah, she couldn't wait any more. She needed relief right now.

"Yeah, I'll show you." Her heart stopped, her breath caught, and she found herself squirming. He wouldn't really let someone see her like this, would he? What if he did? What if someone saw her like this? Soaking wet, sheathed in sweat, squirming desperately, and tied for his pleasure. She was so turned on, just for him. She suddenly found herself entranced with the idea of displaying herself, how in control of her he was; she was dizzy with it.

"I'm surprised. I figured you'd be more possessive." A deep voice answered. Fuck that was Blaise. She wasn't sure how she felt about the Italian seeing her this way, but at least she didn't have to worry about someone talking about it after the fact. She squirmed, unsure of what she should do. She wondered for a moment if she should untie herself, undo the charm, and hide. God help her she didn't want to.

"You know I like to show off the best things in life." Draco announced proudly.

There was a quiet moment, and she waited anxiously as the moment sprawled into minutes, long, painful moments before the charm ramped up again, powerfully throbbing against her. The feeling was so strong that she dropped onto the bed. She rubbed her thighs together, trying to get some friction. A low chuckle broke through the air and she strained to look up.

"Good girl." Draco praised from his position. His voice was like syrup and she could feel his eyes raking over her body. She could smell him from here, the sweet taste of mint on her tongue. "I could smell you from the moment I walked in. God, I have no idea how Blaise didn't notice." She whimpered without being able to stop it. She could barely think, why was he talking, why wasn't he
touching her? "Did you think I'd bring him in here? Was that what was making you so horny, having your alpha show you off?" She nodded frantically in acknowledgement as he stalked towards her, slinking up the bed and hovering over her. She spread her legs easily, but he ignored her straining hips. "I don't think I'm quite ready to share how you look right now with the rest of the world." He admitted and kissed her suddenly and passionately, as if he couldn't wait even one more moment. He tugged her bottom lip between his teeth before soothing with his tongue. She wrapped her legs around his hips, straining to reach him. He ground into her, the coarse material of his trousers scraping against her in the most blissful way imaginable after so much time with nothing. She was going to come, any moment, it was right there.

"Stop." He ordered, carefully keeping his voice neutral enough that it wasn't a true alpha command. She lowered her legs reluctantly and even as they thudded onto his mattress she kind of regretted it. "Be patient. I'll make it worth your while."

"I thought I was getting a reward." She reminded him, huffing. He smirked.

"Of course, when you tell me what you thought was going to happen if we walked in here." He smirked and she groaned. It was hard to think about anything other than the fact that she need, needed so desperately she was dizzy with it.

"I thought..." She started uneasily. "I pictured you walking in here and waving to me, like a piece of art. Blaise would look at me, but I could only look at you as you talked about how desperate I was, how I was such a good omega for being so ready for you." The words came easily once she started, the ideas heady and naughty with both desire and the knowledge of how deliciously wrong it felt.

"Fuck. You never cease to amaze me." He groaned, his voice gravely as his head went back, his neck extended as if just her words had somehow been strong enough to tantalize him that much. "All I could think about was you, I got every question wrong thinking about you tied up and squirming in my bed." He admitted before nipping and sucking on her neck, paying special attention to the spirals that slid around from the back.

"Please." She whimpered.

"The charm was connected to my wand, every time that I twirled it, I knew that you were squirming as the pleasure became too much." He told her desperately as he kissed between her breasts. He lingered on her stomach.

"Please, Draco, please let me come." She begged, panting as she squirmed. He finally reached her mons, parting her folds with his tongue. "Fuck." She breathed. He flicked her clit with his tongue before taking it between his lips and sucking, hard. She screamed, her back arching as she hurtled over the edge; her whole body was taught like a wire, and he had plucked it. She felt like she was ringing out a true, bold note. Stars exploded behind her eyelids and she fell back to reality. She opened her eyes blearily, just in time to watch Draco shudder between her legs, his head dropping onto her thigh as the waves of his orgasm went through him. He stilled and she ran her fingers through his hair soothingly as he caught his breath.

"So have any more of those charms?" She asked breathily. He laughed, lifting his head with a smirk.

"A few." He answered, clearly very pleased with himself. She really was a glutton for punishment.
Discovery and Reprimand

Hermione

Minerva had called her down early the next morning. Hermione was confused to say the least. They had met two days before, she still had time to do all of her work. Hermione knocked uneasily and the call to come in came quickly. Minerva was seated behind her desk with her hands folded. Hermione curtsied low. She was tired and she hoped that this was important.

"Take a seat." Minerva ordered coolly. Hermione cautiously lowered herself into the chair. Minerva's temporary office was clean and luxurious, decorated with emerald velvet furniture and silver embellishments.

"I sent a servant to find you last night." Her mentor told her. Hermione felt herself grow cold. "You weren't in the room with your fellows so I had them look harder. I found out that you have been missing frequently lately and this morning, someone saw you leaving somewhere you should not have been."

"I…" Hermione felt herself pale as she realized that she had nothing to say. She had no defense for her actions. She had done, she was having an affair with Draco. It was wrong and she had done it.

"What? Are you going to apologize?" Minerva snapped. Hermione had never heard the woman sound so harsh.

"I…I don't know." Hermione admitted. She knew there was nothing to say but she still felt like she should be saying something.

"I went out on a limb for you to train you. I put my faith in you and you betrayed that." Minerva snapped at her.

"Disappoint? You've disgrace me. You've disgraced your entire household. Do you know what would happen to you if I informed Lady Greengrass where you were last night? If I told her who you were with?" Minerva demanded.

"Are you going to?" Hermione asked softly.

"No." Hermione sighed with relief. "You're a fool for this." The older woman snapped at her.

"I know." Hermione admitted, feeling her face color with shame. She was supposed to be smart, competent, not this failure.

"He is going to leave you. He is going to marry his pureblooded wife and leave you in the dust." She told her harshly. Hermione flinched. "You do not live in his world." Her mentor continued. "He's going to settle down with Astoria and adjust and they'll make perfect little pureblood babies. It will be best if you just accept that."

"Why…" Hermione started to ask, still stunned that this was actually happening.

"Women like us don't get happy endings, we get jobs and careers. It's time that you learn to accept that again." Minerva instructed. "You're dismissed." Hermione rose slowly, her legs shaking as she stumbled out of the room. How had it all gone so wrong so quickly?
It was fun, all of it, the sneaking around, the kissing, the running around to hiding spots, and the secret rendezvous. It made her feel pretty and soft and all of the things that she never allowed herself to be in her real life. Fresh from Minerva's reprimand, she was still shaken, her eyes still red when she found herself in the main dining room. She hadn't meant to be there, she hadn't known where she was going but she knew that she didn't want to be here. The two families were seated at a long table as waiters fluttered around serving food. She stayed frozen in the doorway as she watched him.

He whispered in Astoria's ear, who just tilted her neck to hear better and smiled coyly. Was this what she looked like when he whispered sweet nothings to her? His hand moved to Astoria's under the table, hidden from others view but perfectly obvious from Hermione's vantage point. He was tracing a pattern along her inner wrist with his thumb the same as he had done to her hand countless times.

Astoria laughed, and it was beautiful and melodic and everything her coarse voice wasn't. Astoria was everything that Hermione wasn't. Astoria was beautiful, her ivory skin was regal and elegant and her long locks of blond hair only showed that Astoria was the ideal. Her waist was tiny and she had gorgeous curves and perfect long legs. Hermione was painfully plain; plain and dull and boring. She was short and flat chested and had a wider waist. Her only notable feature was detrimental bush of brown hair. Her skin was marred and she had callouses and blisters and a freaking omega brand on her wrist. She was nothing, worse than just a servant, she was a slave, and worse than a slave she was an omega slave. Property. She wasn't even human, why on earth would she think that she was entitled to some form of a happy ending?

Because of love? No man, no matter how fun the brief rebellion was, would ever choose her over Astoria. She wasn't even aware it was a competition, and she had already won without needing to try.

She scrunched her eyes together, finally able to break through her trance, and quickly turned to leave. She collided hard with a server, whose tray fell onto the ground with a large clang. Red wine spilled down the front of her dress, and she tensed, her shoulders climbing up towards her ears as she tried to make herself smaller, as if that would make this less of a scene than it already was. There was a hush in the dining hall, and she felt eyes on her back, his eyes. She couldn't turn around, she couldn't face him, not like this. Humiliation coursed through her veins like acid and she wished for a sweet merciful death and the ability to avada herself into oblivion.

Narcissa broke the silence with a scoff and a waved off rebuke, "Don't just stand there like lost children, clean it up!" She and the waiter held eye contact for a moment, before he scurried off to the kitchen and she flew to one of the supply cupboards for a cleaning solution to help along the scourgify she'd have to cast. She could just barely hear Narcissa's mocking "it's so hard to find good help these days" as she rounded the corner.

Closing the door behind her, she fell to the ground, sobbing into her folded arms as she tucked her head in between her knees. Shaky breaths made her chest tremble and she felt faint as she struggled to get any air into her body. She allowed herself thirty seconds before she forced herself to her feet on trembling legs, fixed her hair and grabbed the bottle that she needed. Thirty seconds was the longest she could allow herself, slaves didn't get to have emotions.

She squared her shoulders as she entered the dining hall again, folding into a kneeling position as she sprayed a small amount of the potion on the carpet before using her wand to complete the job with a quick scourgify. She rose to her feet quickly, not daring to look towards the table even though she felt his eyes on her. He needed to be more subtle, though she supposed it didn't really matter, since
whatever affair they had attempted was over now. For good.

Draco

There was pit in Draco's stomach, no bigger than peach pit, but a pit all the same. It felt like a rock, and it hurt his face to continue smiling and charming Astoria, but he did it, because that's what he is supposed to do. Fake a smile and think of the family. The clang of plates and the clatter of silverware only reminded him of how little of an appetite he had.

It was easy to forget Hermione was a servant, even a slave. In his head these past few weeks, she was just an omega; his beautiful omega who took no shit, and ordered him around and made him work for her submission.

It was jolting, even painful to watch her, covered in wine, forced to kneel and scrub a carpet. No one else paid her any mind after his mother had snapped, even mocked her. Her face had burned with humiliation and he wanted nothing more than to step in, to defend her, to cast the spell quickly finish the job in the way that his magic could, and hers was prevented from. He watched out of the corner of his eye as she slipped away, shoulders hunched and head bowed. He wanted nothing more than to follow after her, but Astoria's hand in his couldn't be forgotten, so he kept smiling, kept joking, pretended everything was okay, even though everything hurt.

…

He looked for her that night, in the garden, in every nook or niche that they had ever met in; he even wandered around near the room she shared with the other maids, hoping she'd materialize.

He didn't find her until the next morning, catching her mere feet outside of the main dining room. He grabbed her arms and guided her around the corner. She didn't fight against him, but her expression was just dead. It was like she didn't care anymore, not about anything. She stared at her feet, as if he was just another asshole alpha that she had to serve.

"I have work to do." She said after a moment, turning away, and that's when he noticed her hair, it was up and off her neck in some sort of twisty bun thing. Seeing the bare back of her neck felt like a punch to the face.

"You took it off," He whispered, hastily reaching for her hand to pull him back to him. He didn't understand why this was happening, forget honor, he was prepared to beg, prepared to plead, to make this not be his reality. She shook his hand off, but stayed in place, finally understanding that she couldn't just slip away in silence.

"It wasn't proper. None of this was ever proper." She shook her head, crossing her arms. Her tone was cold, and she was looking at him in a way that she had never done before. Even when she loathed him she had never seen her look at him with just nothing, no compassion, no emotion, nothing.

"What does propriety have to do with anything? It's never bothered you before." He argued, tilting her chin up to look at him. He flashed a smile, hoping to charm with the memories of all the improper things they had done together. He was not amused and he really had to work on the whole "avoiding his problems with humor" thing.

"This shouldn't have happened." She deadpanned, as if she was just reading off of a script that someone else had written for her.

"But it did." He reminded her, trying to break her out of this stupor. "It did and I have feelings for
you Hermione, and I know you have feelings for me too." He let his desperation slip into his tone, laying down his pride for her. He couldn't believe that they were in this situation, that after all of this time, they were having this conversation.

"That doesn't matter, not anymore." She looked back down at her feet, turning as if to leave again. He wouldn't let her, not like this.

"What else could matter?" He demanded, pointedly ignoring her disapproving look at his increase in volume.

"Your Astoria's!" She snapped, and he felt himself go cold in the face of her finally erupting into her anger. "You are going to marry your pretty pure blood beta wife and it's going to make sense and you'll make a happy little family and all will be right in the world." She hissed, tears building in the corner of her eyes as she finished.

"Hermione," He murmured softly, slowly wrapping his arms around her. He could feel her shaking as she continued. "What happened to you yesterday?" She shook him off, stepping away, and when he tried to follow, in a practiced, comfortable move she slapped his hands away.

"No. Don't. Don't touch me Draco." Tears were streaming down her face now, her words resembling sobs. He reached for her again. "Draco I mean it! Don't touch me." She snarled, and it hurt to see the disgust in her eyes. She hated him, just for the position he was born into.

"Hermione, just look at me. Tell me what's wrong so I can fix this!" He pleaded refusing to believe that there was no catalyst, that she could just cast him aside for no reason. He reached for her hands, trying to pull them close to him.

"In twenty seconds, I am going to shout rape." She stated, her voice quivering even as she feigned strength. "and no one will care because they will all think that you are just taking what you are entitled to and I am just an uppity slave." It hurt to watch like this and it hurt to know that she would do it if he pushed, she would accuse him of such a terrible thing. "but Astoria… Astoria will never forgive you because she is like my sister and she will make your life miserable until you die. You have five seconds left to walk away. Five, Four, Three, Two…"

He didn't stick around to know if she ever said one.

…

Everything smelled like cherries, dark and syrupy sweet and he just couldn't get rid of it. He had taken five baths, had scrubbed every inch of his skin clean so many times that he was pretty sure that he missing multiple layers of skin. Nothing around him should smell like her, but it all did. It had been three days and he couldn't stop dwelling on it, on what could've possibly gone wrong. Every time he stopped for even a moment he could hear her counting down, readying to accuse him of doing something so terrible and heinous that he couldn't even fathom it. He barely left his room anymore, didn't bother looking for her. He knew it was over, even if he couldn't quite accept it yet. Blaise had found out. He didn't know how. The other man had simply showed up with bottle of scotch and sat down. They drank in silence,, Blaise not saying a word, even when he finished the bottle and left. He let his rooms fall into disarray, refused to let anyone in.

When he had to leave, he cast a couple charms, faking competency, pretending that he wasn't still reeling from shock and stinging from the rejection. Everything reminded him of her. Every corner, every cupboard, every inch of his home reminded him of her. Everytime he picked up his wand, he saw her looking up at him with those big brown eyes. It hurt. His body ached. His skin stung.
It was surreal, just how literal a broken heart was. He didn't think, hadn't let himself think too hard about the depths of his feelings for Hermione and he still wasn't ready to face that, but his chest hurt. His stomach was tossing, his head was pounding, and his energy was gone. He groaned, rising off of his couch with aching joints. He hadn't slept in his bed since she had been in it. He had a lesson with Severus, which he would inevitably fail because he couldn't think about anything except what he so desperately didn't want to be thinking about. He cast a quick charm, fixing his hair and scourging his skin. It was the cleanest he was going to get.

The hallways were bustling as always because even though his life had pivoted drastically, for everyone else, it was just a normal day. He wandered towards Severus's room, not paying too much attention. He didn't notice when he went to the wrong wing. He found himself standing in the wing that he had finally recognized her in, all of those weeks ago. It hurt, it hurt so profoundly that he didn't wish that he could go back and undo it all. Even though this sucked, those weeks had been perfect. He didn't want to undo them.

He rounded the corner, warily looking for the spot where they had spoken that day. There was someone in the hallway, staring at the tapestry on the wall. As he got closer, Draco realized that it was Hermione's friend, that stable boy, she had mentioned his name once, Harvey? There were books at his feet and piles and piles of notes.

"That thing's defunct, you know, inaccurate?" Draco called out. The stableboy jumped and gave a weak little half bow before turning back to the tapestry.

"So you say sir." He muttered rebelliously. Draco didn't have the energy to fight about the insubordination and turned away, trudging to the lesson he was already late for.
Hermione

Everything felt wrong. Her skin itched. Her body hurt, things that had given her pleasure before did nothing for her now. Nothing was right because everything was the way that it should have been. It was normal but everything felt wrong. She stared at the floor everywhere that she walked, not out of fear or submission but because she was afraid of who she might see if she looked up. She stayed in Astoria's room more often, spending more time with her charge than ever before. She hung out with Gin and Harry constantly. She was very careful to never be alone. She read constantly, finding it far easier to disappear into texts than to face her reality. She had been faking illness lately to insure that she wouldn't have to chaperone anything. Astoria hadn't said anything about it so far, but she knew it was coming.

Her charge was attending her lessons when Hermione slipped into Daphne's room.

"Hey, can I borrow a book?" She called. An affirmative sounding grumble came from the other room. Hermione took it as permission.

She had already read most of Daphne's books so she sighed and bent down, looking at the lowest shelf and helping for the best. She got lucky, towards the end was a book she had never seen before. She pulled it out happily. The title was too faded to read but she wasn't fazed she had been reading some strange things lately. She took the heavy volume back to Astoria's rooming, curling up in a chair as Astoria had assured she was welcome to do. She cracked open the book happily but froze. Right inside the front cover was a carefully written inscription.

"My lovely Minnie,

this is my favorite novel, I hope you'll enjoy it. You must tell me your thoughts when we meet again.

Your dutiful lover, Ira."

This book must have been mistakenly lumped in with Daphne's things but that wasn't the important thing here. Hermione blinked dizzily. Ira, as in Ira Greengrass? Lord Greengrass? Minnie as in Minerva? It couldn't be. It didn't make any sense.

But yet, it did. Minerva had never been connected to anyone romantically. She had always served the Greengrass household devoutly. That confrontation had felt off, McGonagle had seemed to take it far too personally and now Hermione thought she knew why. She had always hinted that Hermione reminded her of herself but this was too far. Minerva's life hadn't ended up how she wanted it to but that didn't mean Hermione was the same. It was bizarre to think of Minerva and Greengrass together but history didn't have to repeat itself. Minerva was just a hypocrite who was pushing her own experiences on to her mentee. Hermione didn't have to listen to her. She could take her chances. There was no guarantee that she and Draco would end in heartbreak, that is unless, she didn't do something. She had to fix this and she had to fix it right now.

…

Draco

He was wandering around the gardens. He knew he looked ridiculous. He was like some sort of painting, "Morose Rejected Lover" but he couldn't help it. He felt morose and rejected. He was pathetic, the kind of guy he and Blaise would have mocked endlessly a few months ago. He had
always known that the affair would come to the end eventually but he had always imagined that he
would be the one to end it. When he did think about it, he figured that they would last at least until
the engagement was finalized.

He didn't hear her. Not until she crashed into him did he even realize that she was there. He wrapped
his arms around her reflexively but felt like someone had hit him on the head as she rambled at him,
already mid-sentence by the time he understood what was going on.

"so into my head and I let her get to me and it was so stupid because she was no better. I just… I
panicked and I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that I threatened you and I'm so sorry that I ran away and"
She ranted, the words falling all over each other. She was a mess, her hair falling over her eyes as her
eyes watered.

"Hey, slow down, okay? Just talk to me." He entreated. She stopped as he cupped her face. Her eyes
were big and wide and they had that soft, fond look on her face. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to
sleep her into his arms and celebrate but he knew better. He knew that the adult thing to do was to talk this out, even it was the last thing that I wanted.

"Okay, I just. I want you to know that I didn't mean it. I didn't mean any of it." She promised,
clutching his arm. He pulled her close and kissed her forehead.

"You're okay. We're okay. I just need to know what happened. It's been very confusing on my end
Granger." He reminded her gently. He wasn't mad, not really, okay a little mad, but more so
deserving of an explanation.

"I'm so sorry." She repeated dizzily.

"I got that part. I just want to know why you felt the need to do it." He insisted. She nodded
agreeably.

"Minerva knows. She knows and she confronted me about it and she told me that I was a disgrace
and yeah, she knows." Hermione trailed off uneasily, still looking at him with those stunned, soft
puppy eyes.

"Should we be worried?" Draco asked uneasily. He didn't know exactly what would happen if this
came out but he knew it wouldn't be pretty. She's get fired and kicked out, he may get disowned. It
wouldn't be pretty.

"No, I don't think that she's going to say anything to anyone. It was like she thought that she was
protecting me." She explained uneasily. He couldn't imagine the stress that she was under.

"I'm sorry." He told her gently.

"Yeah I got that part." She teased, grinning.

"Cute. So what? You just panicked, listened to her and couldn't come to me?" He asked, a little
insulted.

"No. She had just gotten into my head and I saw you at that lunch with Tori and your hand was on
her wrist…" She trailed off as her eyes watered, clearly upset by the memory. He had no idea that
this was weighing on her so heavily.

"You know that I don't have any feelings for her, I didn't and don't want anything to do with her." He reminded her firmly.
"I know that. Intellectually. It's just the wine and… I just know that I'm not worthy." She said sadly, her mouth twisting into a resigned little smile. He wanted to shake her.

"You are better than them. You are just as beautiful, three times as smart, and mind-blowingly kind." He reminded her. She blushed.

"I'm not sure if I believe that." She admitted.

"Well, you should." He insisted. She shook her head but he let it drop for now. "Are we doing this again? Do you want to try again?" He asked gently.

"If you do." She answered hopefully, blushing and smiling.

"I do, but we need to make some changes." He suggested gently.

"Agreed." She nodded fervently in agreement and what looked like relief. Shit, they had to get better at this whole communicating thing.

"What would help you?" He started. Everything felt better. They had fucked up, she had fucked up, sure but they could fix it, they wanted to fix it, and they had hope. And wasn't that the most important thing?

"I can't chaperone your dates anymore. I can't sit there and watch, even when you hold my hand under the table, I still can't watch." She admitted, the words sounding like they hurt.

"Okay. I can do that. I can arrange it. I'll say that I'm not comfortable with you chaperoning." He suggested. She grinned.

"That'll work." She announced happily.

"Anything else you can think of?" He asked. She took a moment, her head tilting as she thought before twisting her mouth and shaking her head.

"Honestly, no. I just need to not freak out." She admitted, rolling her eyes at herself as if emotions were something to be ashamed of. Jesus, wasn't that supposed to be his role?

"How about this, if you need or want to freak out, you come to me. Whenever you need to." He suggested.

"How?" She asked thoughtfully.

"Three taps. Three taps to your wrist and I'll extract myself from whatever I'm doing and come to you." He suggested, grinning at his own ingenuity. It was subtle enough to get away with but clear enough to not mistake it for something.

"Okay, but there's one more thing." She reminded him slowly, smiling softly.

"Yeah?" he questioned slowly.

"We need to go to your room first." She told him, grinning as she took his hand and led him through the gardens.

…

"What are you doing?" Draco asked, his tone measured as she slipped off his jacket with mediwitch focus.
"Things are going to be different this time." She promised, unbuttoning his shirt and very deliberately not touching his skin. "No one sees your shoulder do they?" She asked casually, and he still couldn't quite figure out where this was going.

"What?" He asked again, surprised when she spun him around, even more surprised when he felt the edge of a quill on his skin. She drew two connected swirls on each side and then a simple line that he'd bet connected them. He felt the tingle of magic as she whispered the sticking charm. He turned back to her quickly, studying her carefully. He expected to see some flicker of shyness after the uncharacteristic display, but there wasn't even a hint of it.

"It can't be one way." She breathed, stepping closer; he fell into her orbit, pulling her into his arms as easy as he pulled in a breath. "I want to be yours, but I also want you to be mine."

"Are you sure?" He asked carefully, brushing a strand of hair out of her face. She smiled, nodding.

"We'll find a way around this contract. Some way for you to break it and keep your title. " She promised, and he wanted to believe her; knew he should, but he felt the inevitability ticking away just like she did, he was just better at hiding it. Instead of answering, he pressed his mouth over hers, effectively distracting her for at least a little while.

"It's going to take us a while to fix all those seals." He whispered to her suggestively. She blushed.

"I only got rid of the one on my neck." Granger admitted, smirking.

"Really?" He felt like a little kid finding out that Christmas wasn't cancelled after all.

"Yeah, and behind my ear, I couldn't bear with washing away the others." She confessed.

"That's... that's really great to hear." He admitted, grinning giddily. She laughed at his expression as he kissed her again. The touches stayed sweet, gentle, not overtly sexual.

"Can you draw it now?" She asked eagerly, already turning. "I missed it, so much." He grabbed his quill quickly, already drawing his seal onto her neck.

"I missed you." He told her genuinely. She grinned.

"I missed you too." She assured him as he finished the final loop. His wand was in his hand in a moment, the sticking charm cast seconds later. He kissed over the seal happily. She reached for her ear, gently pulling it forward as he drew the tiny seal. The charm was placed moments later. She covered her mouth coyly to cover her smile.

"So" She started but trailed off.

"So." He repeated, grinning.

"What should we do now?" She asked, smirking up at him.

"I have a few ideas." He announced.

"Oh, you do now?" She teased.

"Yes, I do." He reminded her.

"Are you going to inform me of those plans?" She asked smirking as he ran his thumb over her
lower lip.

"I'd hate to ruin the surprise." He told her teasingly.

"You know that I don't like surprises." She lied, looking up at him from underneath her eyelashes.

"I know that you claim that you don't like surprises." He argued.

"I don't!" She protested, all huffy even around her smile. It was infectious.

"You've liked the last few surprises that I've given you." He teased. She blushed.

"You're not wrong." She admitted coyly. He didn't move his thumb so she just talked around it, her soft lips brushing across his thumb repeatedly.

"See?" He pushed grinny.

"But, I think I would've liked them better if I knew what I was in for." She suggested firmly.

"Really?" He asked, not quite buying it.

"No." She shook her head and laughed at herself. He grinned, moving his thumb away and cupping her face gently.

"Then, just trust me." He suggested, kissing her gently. She fell into him, sliding into his kisses and gently touches like it was a drug.

...

Hermione

She left his room with a smile on her face that night, anxiously peeking down the hallway before slipping out. They hadn't done anymore than kiss that night, taking the time to adjust to their reinstatement. It was all a little surreal. It made the past few weeks feel like a terrible nightmare, one that was happily fading back into her subconscious. There was a ribbon in her pocket, for tomorrow after her breakfast with the girls. It's purpose was a surprise and no matter what she said, she was definitely looking forward to this surprise.

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The sun was hot and the grass was damp but at the moment, everything felt light and airy. Astoria, Daphne, and Pansy were lounging on chaises above them as Katie and she sat in the grass by their sides. They all talked passionately as they munched on fruits and cheeses, a light meal perfect for the occasion. Astoria played with the soft pink lace on her gown as she called over to her and Hermione jumped.

"Hey Mione," She trilled. Hermione turned, smiling up at her charge. "I got the strangest letter today." She told her slowly.

"Oh?" Hermione murmured, her face a perfect mask of innocence if she did say so herself.

"It was from Draco. He requested that he provide the chaperone from now on." Astoria told her slowly.

"That's strange." Hermione agreed neutrally, resisting the urge to smile.
"Not really." Pansy announced from the farthest chaise. Astoria turned slowly, distaste obvious in her expression as she did so.

"How so?" She demanded, not liking the other girl's all knowing tone. Hermione could admit that she wasn't a fan of it either, but she was good friends with Daphne and Draco, so Hermione could deal with her.

"It means he wants to get into your knickers Tori and he knows our lovely, straightlaced, Mione would never let it happen." Pansy explained. Hermione wanted to laugh at the lunacy of it all. Her boyfriend was the last person who would call her straightlaced but none of these girls would ever no that.

"Really?" Astoria asked, blushing profusely, and looking back at the waiters, seemingly embarrassed at the suggestion of impropriety in front of the support staff.

"Yeah." Pansy assured her nodding sagely before leaning back to bask in the sun. Daphne and Tori stayed under umbrellas, protecting their porcelain complexions but Pansy had always stubbornly sported a tan out of spite. She was the only one among them who got to spend her time in the light.

Hermione knew that she should feel jealous and a part of her did but she had his ribbon in her pocket and a smile on her face and for now, it was enough.
Ribbons and Declarations

Hermione

He warned her that this charm was going to feel different and that the whole point of it would be that he wouldn't be there, that that was part of the appeal. She fidgeted with the necklace briefly, a simple satin ribbon tied about her throat. She was aware of it each time that she breathed. If it got to be too much she was instructed to take it off. With that warning he had sent her off from the cupboard, told her to go about her life as if everything was normal. Normal was becoming a distant memory. She wasn't sure she minded.

She had barely gotten down the hallway before she felt somebody grab her ass, squeezing it firmly. She jumped and spun, looking for the culprit, but the corridor was empty. She stared blankly ahead in confusion before she felt a soft mouth kiss the hollow of her throat. She gasped, the movement making the ribbon around her throat all the more apparent. God she was dumb. Draco was doing this. Somehow he was doing it.

The next thing she felt was the sharp sensation of his teeth toying with the tip of her breast. She groaned and her knees buckled. She stumbled to the wall, leaning against it blearily. She felt

She heard the footsteps pattering around the corner in just enough time to straighten. The phantom mouth didn't stop but moved, kissing to her sternum, lingering on the skin before mouthing at the skin as if trying to make a hicky. She whimpered slightly just before the messenger rounded the corner.

"Ah Hermione! Just who I was looking for" The friendly face chimed. She couldn't recall most of the messengers names on a good day, let alone when being groped by imaginary forces. He handed her a black envelope, not white. Their signal that the message was for her and not Astoria. She opened it the moment his back turned. The scrawl was clearly Draco's and her heart began a double time as she read his words.

"What you're feeling right now is what I'm thinking about doing to you. They're my fantasies that plague me all day long and now you can enjoy them too." As if on cue her clit throbbed and she felt as clear as day Draco's tongue flicking it pointedly. She glanced at the clock and cringed, knowing that she was going to be late if she didn't start moving, now. She forced her shaking legs to step forward and set off, trying desperately to ignore Draco's thoughts.

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There was a brief respite when she was making Astoria's bed, she didn't quite know what was on Draco's schedule for today, but for the past few weeks he had had brunch with his parents at about that time which was understandably not conducive to erotic thoughts. It was when she was chaperoning Blaise and Daphne that Draco seemed to have time. It started slow, soft caresses on her shoulders, a chaste kiss to the back of her neck, as if he was building to something. She felt his fingers on her chin before she felt his mouth on hers. It was the strangest thing, to be in public, desperately trying to stay still and especially keep her mouth still while she felt his tongue caressing hers. She squirmed in her seat, not totally able to stay frozen. She bumped the table, and a heavy volume thumped on to the ground. Blaise shot her a dirty look and she blushed, color rushing to her cheeks. She motioned vaguely to the book and then the stacks behind her. Blaise rolled his eyes. As she picked up the dusty novel, her vision swam as she felt Draco's hands settle on her hips. His thumbs traced her hip bones as she stumbled, hurriedly retreating into the shelves. She could feel Blaise's disdain but it was hard to focus on it as Draco's fantasies got more vivid. His mouth was
sucking and nipping at her collar bone. And she felt the phantom breeze of her legs being exposed to the air. Draco's mouth disappeared for a brief moment before she felt his tongue between her legs, quickly parting her folds and flicking her clit. She was soaking wet and sure that she reeked of apricot at that point. She panted, leaning back against the shelf as her knees got weak. Draco's ministrations got more frantic, alternating between flicking at her clit and entering her with his tongue. She groaned softly as she felt his finger slide inside of her, first just one but then quickly followed by a second. His mouth sucked on her clit even as his fingers curled inside of her, hitting blissful, wonderful, enchanting spot. Her labored breathing made the ribbon feel tighter on her throat and she felt dizzy with the sensation of being claimed. Of being his. She whimpered, shattering and coming together and falling apart all at the same time. She slowly peeled herself off of the floor, standing on shaking legs. Blaise glared at her, bored distaste clearly in his eyes. She blushed, focusing her eyes on the floor. Oh lord.

She was in the kitchen when the next fantasy hit her. She felt his mouth on the back of her neck and resisted the urge to groan. She murmured out an excuse to a concerned looking Ginny and slipped out into the hallway. She hurried to a cupboard, tucking herself away before the sensations could get stronger.

She felt a firm pressure on the front of her thighs, not like hands. It felt like a bar but softer, more distributed. It was almost like it was rounded. It kind of felt like...Hermione flushed furiously as she realized exactly what it felt like. It felt like she was being bent over the arm of a chair. Her suspicions were confirmed as she felt a phantom breeze on her bottom. Fuck. She had only been spanked once in her life, after getting caught in Draco's library all of those years ago. It had never crossed her mind since then, even though she had read that some people partook in it. She slipped into a cupboard as she felt his hand gently caress her bottom and then there was a pause as he seemed to wait, to give her an out. She didn't even reach for the ribbon. The first slap was a surprise and she jumped. It didn't hurt really, it was just a surprise. A mirror smack hit the other cheek, though this one stung slightly. She gasped and she felt his hand smack down again and that one she felt. It tingled, heat spreading out from the phantom strike. She wiggled, unsure how to cope with the strange feeling. He hit the other cheek with equal force. She jumped and the pain dispersed, stinging and tingly sweetly. She groaned and then gasped as she suddenly felt him pierce her core. He curled his fingers, brushing that spot inside of her. She found herself rocking back into his touch, even though she knew her that it was useless. Her alpha didn't need to be in the room to drive her mad with lust. The next smack was a surprise. The dam seemed to have burst, Draco raining down strikes. They stung, her bottom aching but she knew it was because he wanted it to. That thought was a heady and dizzying. The phantom feeling of his fingers didn't let up and she groaned, the dual sensations overwhelmed her. The smacks continued and she realized dizzily that she wished there was a sound. She squirmed, panting, just as she started to her, just as it began to get too much, he stopped, the intensity decreasing slowly as his fingers curled inside of her. She groaned. Her stomach clenched, her knees buckling as she came. The sensations stopped, though she wasn't sure how he knew. She realized a little sadly that the stinging feeling was gone and she missed it and wondered for a beat what that said about her. She groaned as she straightened, feeling oversensitive and done for the moment. She felt a kiss on the back of her neck again and smiled softly. The day was almost done, only an hour left before she could go to him. She couldn't wait.

…

Draco

He opened the door grinning to a very flustered and ruffled Granger. Her hair was a mess and her skin was flushed. Considering he had been thinking about eating her out for the last fifteen minutes
he was surprised that she didn't look worse.

"You're going to kill me." She informed him, pushing her way in immediately. She kissed him, frantically reaching for the laces on his trousers. He smirked, lifting her skirts. She groaned as kissed the side of the ribbon on her neck. He thought idly about flicking her nipples and she gasped. His hands reached for her knickers as he continued imagining playing with her tits. It was like having an extra set of hands, he thought idly. It was a good thing that he was an excellent multitasker. He pulled aside the cotton material easily, flicking her clit. She jumped, even though he knew that the overstimulation was purely in her head. He kissed her neck again, nipping at her ear as her eager hands finally found his cock. He groaned. He had been hard all day, an unfortunate side effect of thinking about screwing his omega all day. He circled her clit with his thumb as she whimpered. He pleasantly remembered his fantasy of spanking her and she jumped, flinching away from the sensation. He paused, giving her a moment but she groaned, arching her back as she slid her hand down his cock.

"Did you like that, taking a spanking?" He asked, she groaned. He was a little upset that he didn't get to see her reaction but if he was lucky, he could talk her into doing it again for real. He felt his cock twitch and she ran her hand around his tip. He groaned, well aware that he was getting ridiculous close to coming right now. He needed to wait for her to finish first though. He curled his fingers against her g spot. She groaned, her head falling back, but she wasn't quite there. Her hand was still moving on his cock and he was getting desperate.

"Come." He ordered. She shattered, soaking his fingers as she clenched around him, her soft, silky insides deliciously warm. She panted, but continued gripping him. He groaned as she twisted her grip, just the way he liked. He came hard, his stomach clenching painfully. Everything went white for a second before she let go. She pulled her hand out, and it was covered with his cum. He groaned as she looked right at him and licked her fingers clean. He gently set down her skirts, smoothing down the fabric. He thought for a moment about spanking her again. She jumped and glared at him. He laughed, kissing her forehead and pulling the ribbon loose from her neck. She sighed, biting her lip as he tucked it into his pocket.

"Can we do that again?" She asked eagerly. He chuckled, reaching for his wand and cleaning both of them up.

"Which part?" He asked curiously. She shrugged, stepping into the room for the first time. He realized for the first time that they hadn't even made it off the door. He smirked with pride.

"All of it?" She suggested, slowly walking towards his bed room. She paused at the door, her hand on the knob as she cocked an eyebrow and waited for him.

"You tired?" He asked, as if he didn't know exactly how she must be feeling right now.

"Draco Malfoy, will you do me the great favor of laying down with me for a few minutes after making me orgasm no less than three times today?" She asked, faux formally. He laughed.

"Far be it from me to leave a lady of your stature waiting." He teased. She laughed, eagerly lying down on his bed. It gave him a ridiculous little rush, seeing her so comfortable after not expecting to have it every again. He sat down beside her, laying facing her. It all felt a little surreal as she smiled at him.

"Where did you learn that charm?" She asked inquisitively.

"Do you really want to know?" He asked her warily. It wasn't a story most people wanted to hear.
"I know you have a past. I knew that going in. It would be ridiculous for me to judge you because of it now." She reminded him firmly. He was very aware of how much of a lucky bastard he was.

"I was seeing an older woman for a while and she had some more diverse tastes." He started carefully, vividly remembering the woman's claws.

"Uh huh." She nodded encouragingly.

"The ribbon doesn't have to be tied around a neck per say." He explained slowly, watching as she put it together. Her eyes went wide and she blushed. He laughed a little, no matter what they did she still acting shy talking about it. It was kind of impressive.

"Wow. I have a hard time picturing you on the receiving end, you're just too devious." She admitted.

"I didn't always like being an alpha." He confessed gently.

"Oh?" She asked gently, her expression softening in an instance.

"When I was just a kid I loved it of course but after I presented, I think it threatened my father, made him see me as a usurper rather than an heir. I just wanted to please him so I guess you could say I got a little more docile in my early teens, tried being more submissive, everywhere." He told her, a little ashamed of how much of an idiot he was.

"Including in bed?" She asked for clarity.

"Including in bed." He agreed, feeling himself blush a little bit but her expression was still neutral and nonjudgmental.

"What made you stop?" She asked gently.

"Do you really wanna know?" He repeated, this was a far worse story.

"Yes." She assured him confidently.

"Pans. She saw um, rope marks on my wrists and called me out on my shit." He explained, his face coloring at the memory. Pansy hadn't been very gentle with breaking him out of his stupor.

"Pansy Parkinson's kink shames?" Granger asked, her surprise apparent. That was a little strange but he would let her have that one.

"No. Of course not. We had already been together at this point and we had experimented a little with switching roles but we both knew I really didn't like being submissive." He explained casually.

"What did she say?" Granger asked, seeming genuinely curious.

"That I shouldn't being my daddy issues into the bedroom." He cringed at the memory. Pansy wasn't exactly known for subtlety.

"Direct quote?" She asked, cringing with him.

"Of course." He chuckled. Hermione tilted her head thoughtfully, her eyes crinkling.

"Do you regret it?" She asked gently.

"No, actually, I think it prepared me better." He admitted. It was a fucked up time but it had definitely helped to make him less of a piece of shit.
"For what?" She asked, her expression still gently pensive.

"Being a dominant. I'm better at it than before because I have a better understanding of a submissive's perspective." He admitted, shrugging. He knew there were some fucked up doms out there who dove in without doing any research or tests, he knew he would have been one of them if he hadn't learned how to submit first.

"Huh." Hermione said to herself thoughtfully.

"What?" He asked, intrigued as to what was going on her mind.

"Nothing, it's just you're so mature." She observed, giving him an impressed once over. He raised an eyebrow.

"Did you think I was immature?" He asked, not sure if he should be offended or not.

"No, but you continue to impress me." She declared, smiling at him fondly.

"I guess that's a compliment." He conceded.

"Of course it is. I'm very hard to impress." She reminded him seriously, a soft smile on her lips. He kissed her, unable to stop himself. She giggled and kissed him back, tangling her hands in his hair.

They stayed like that, kissing softly until they fell asleep, tangled together in his sheets.

... When he woke up, Hermione was already awake beside of him. She was looking at him, which should have been creepy but she had that look in her eyes, the kind she got when she had to look up from a book to process everything going on. She saw that he was awake but it didn't seem to phase her. She took a deep breath, closing her eyes for a moment before opening them and looking at him meaningfully.

"Draco Malfoy. I think that I'm in love with you." She declared firmly. He blinked dizzily with no idea what just happened.

"Excuse me?" He asked, genuinely confused as to what the hell was happening.

"You heard and for the love of God, don't say anything because that's not what's happening here. This is me, telling you a stupid story of that time I did a stupid thing and this time that stupid thing was falling in love with you." She blurted, her eye wide and panicked. He still wasn't quite sure what was happening here but he could go with it. He had never been in this situation before. All of his previous relationships had just been about having fun. He had never gotten to this point with someone before. He wasn't sure what the procedure was here, especially with her rules there.

"How would you like me to react?" He asked slowly. She blinked and her eyes went blank as if she hadn't planned for that question and didn't know what she was supposed to do with it now.

"Say nothing. Do nothing." She instructed firmly. He nodded slowly. There was an awkward moment of silence as the both had no idea what to say. She rolled over, turning away from him, seemingly to go back to sleep.

"Hey Granger?" He whispered to her.

"Yeah?" She answered softly.
"I'm in love with you too."
“Letters and Plans”

Draco

The rapping on the window surprised them both. Hermione groaned into his pillow, her curls a small pile of madness obscuring her whole face and most of his pillow. He laughed, reaching for his wand and quickly charming the window open. The owl flew in, his feathers rumpled, looking thorough harassed. He dropped the letter in between them, making Hermione jump in surprise as the bird landed on his headboard. He stilled as he saw the seal of the plain white envelope, The Nott Family Emblem.

"Who's it from?" Hermione asked curiously, still not taking her face out of the pillow.

"Theo." He told her quietly. She sprung up sitting up with impressive speed.

"What does it say?" She asked eagerly.

"Haven't opened it yet." He reminded her, holding up the envelope uneasily.

"What are you waiting for?" She asked, not unkindly.

"I'm not sure. It's just strange. Me, Theo, and Blaise used to be friends and now… it's just very different." He admitted, the words not feeling significant enough for the unease in his stomach.

"You've outgrown him. There's nothing wrong with that." She reminded him gently.

"I know, I just kind of feel bad for him. He's a bastard but he didn't choose to grow up in that house." Draco explained. Theo never really had a chance.

"Is Lord Nott really as bad as the rumors say?" She asked uneasily. "So much worse. The things he does…” Draco shuddered at the memories. He had once stumbled upon a room in the Nott Manor, there was torture equipment hanging from the walls and blood stains on the floor. He still had nightmares about it sometimes.

"You don't have to open it." She reminded him. He looked up at eagle owl that was still perched above him.

"I don't think our friend here will leave until I do." He pointed out. She shrugged as he broke the seal. The parchment inside was crumpled, as if it had been crunched into a ball before being salvaged and sent off after all. Draco squinted at the smeared ink, having difficulty even just making out the words in Theo's scrawl.

"Read it to me." Hermione suggested softly. Draco cleared his throat and started reading.

"'You bastard.' He started dryly, looking up at her wondering if she really wanted to hear this. She nodded encouragingly. "'I can't believe you would actually throw me out for something so foolish. I thought we were friends. But the jokes on you I was only there to find…’ He crossed out the next word, I can't make it out." He trailed off. This was feeling more and more like a fool's errand.

"Keep going." Granger prodded. He rolled his eyes but kept reading.

"'But you'll regret it, because I think I found the problem. I was only trying to protect us. Now I see that I have to do everything myself.’ And that's the end." He finished uneasily. Hermione paused.
"Do you know what he claimed to be looking for?" She asked cautiously. He shook his head. "No, haven't the faintest idea." He admitted. She pursed her mouth, thinking hard.

"It wouldn't be anything of traditional value, the Nott's are just as wealthy as you are, no need to steal." She pointed out. "So it would have to be something significant in other ways, especially if Theo thought having it would protect the both of you."

"Or Theo's just finally snapped. Did that sound like the letter of someone with all his wits about him?" He pointed out skeptically.

"True, just promise me you'll be careful." She insisted.

"I will." He assured her gently, grabbing a piece of parchment and scrawling a brief note.

*Go Away.*

...

*Hermione*

She had just run her fingers through her hair and cast a cleansing charm on her teeth when the door to Astoria's flew open before she could even knock. Daphne was frazzled.

"Good you're here, she's in a mood." She announced breezily, crossing their shared sitting room to disappear back into her bedroom with Pansy. Hermione straightened her shoulders, uneasily heading to Astoria's open door. Astoria had closed the canopy over her bed, but Hermione could see through the silky fabric. Astoria was sitting ramrod straight.

"Tori?" She called uneasily, heading to the dresser out the products she'd need.

"Do you love me Mione?" The younger girl asked, a tint of desperation in her voice. Hermione wondered, as she did at least once a day lately, if she had been found out.

"Of course I do Tori." She assured the younger girl, moving to grab a dress from her closet.

"I mean, really love me, not because you serve me, or because we grew up together or because of something I did as a toddler." Astoria pushed, still not having moved from bed.

"What's brought this on?" Hermione asked lightly, not liking the direction of this conversation one bit.

"Do you say that you love me out of debt or obligation?" Astoria demanded.

"Of course not! Obviously I'm grateful for everything you and your family have done for me but" Hermione tried to explain but Astoria quickly cut her off.

"My family! My family bought you, like we buy a horse." She scoffed harshly. Hermione flinched.

"Your family has ever been anything but wonderful towards me." She defended quickly. She was lucky and she knew it. "Except when they chain you up and make you sleep in a freezing room with twenty other girls." Astoria pointed out, waving to Hermione's wrist pointedly.

"Astoria! What are you trying to say?" Hermione demand.

"I don't know! I don't know anything!" Astoria broke, crumpling. Hermione pushed aside the canopy quickly, taking the younger in her arms gently.
"Astoria, I love you because you're my family, like my sister, and that's all that has ever mattered to me." She murmured to her, kissing the top of her hair gently. Astoria sobbed lowly.

"What if no one actually loves me for me?" She whispered into Hermione's shoulder.

"I love you. I love the sweet, kind hearted person that you are." Hermione insisted, tearing up herself.

"But would you say that if you were free?" Astoria asked wisely.

"Absolutely." Hermione told her with certainty that she didn't feel.

...

It had been hours before Astoria had finally calmed down and agreed to get dressed. She had been late for her lessons and as a result the tutor was holding her until evening to make up for lost time. Hermione was resolving an issue with the tailor, who had wanted to get started on Astoria's wedding dress early so it would be ready by the time the contract was signed instead of waiting until, you know, the wedding, when Ginny came flying into the room. "You'll have to excuse me sir, my apologies." Hermione cut off the man quickly, following her friend as she went whirling out of the room.

"What?" She hissed.

"Harry's missing." The redhead gasped.

"Where's Ron?" Hermione demanded.

"Three towns over with my father." Ginny explained frantically.

"Shit. Any word on where he may have went?" She demanded.

"Knockturn is open." Ginny answered slowly.

"Why would he go…Right. Why did we choose to be friends with that self-sacrificing moron again?" She sighed.

"Beats me. I'll cover for you, just go before he gets himself in more trouble." Ginny urged. Hermione nodded, already running to her rooms to change.

...

Knockturn wasn't Harry's bar of choice when they were home, but it was sleazy, the kind of place where no noble or self-respecting person would go. Harry had spent days on end in drinking in these places after he presented. He was a fool for it then and he was still a fool for it now.

Hermione let the hood of her cloak fall back, taking in the grimy building, whose windows showed only darkness despite the afternoon sun. This was the kind of place you came if you wanted to disappear, problem was Harry was not getting away with it that easily. She straightened her shoulders, pushing open the door and desperately trying to ignore the cloud of smoke that hit her in the face. A few eyes flicked towards her but she ignored them. There was only one reason for a woman to enter a place like this and she just had to hope that no one was looking for that or else she'd really be in trouble.

Hands trailed over her, reaching for her in the darkness. They slid along her hips, over her arse,
across her breasts, she pretended not to notice though it made her skin crawl. No hands ever tightened, became more aggressive and bruising. She had never felt more grateful for the pins digging into her scalp. His inked mark wasn't enough to keep them away entirely but it was enough to make them cautious. She pressed forward, weaving her way through the crowd of alphas until she found the telltale mop of black hair. She slid up beside him, ignoring the curious looks from the barmaid and the alpha beside her.

"What on earth are you doing here?" She snapped brusquely.

Harry's whole body jerked into attention, his eyes going wide in disbelief.

"Mione?" He asked cautiously. Which wasn't a good sign.

"Had so much you're seeing things already?" She asked, casually finishing his drink for him. Harry gaped, too slow in reaching for the glass to stop her. "Whatever you're dealing with, this is not helping." She told him firmly, gesturing around at the shitty bar.

"What if I'm not who you think I am? Who I think I am?" Harry trailed off, staring at the bar top as if it held the secrets of the universe.

"Hey! Look at me, alright, and get this through your thick skull. You are Harry, just Harry, and you are my best friend and the best guy that I have ever met and nothing will ever change that." She reminded him firmly, idly wondering what had set him off this time.

"What if I'm not though? Not just Harry."

"Harry, you're drunk and you need to go home." She reminded him tossing some more coins onto the counter, grateful that she hadn't spent her birthday money yet. She put his arm around her, walking him out of the bar clumsily. He grumbled something incoherent in her ear but she ignored him, simply hoping that he wouldn't look back at her neck.

…

_Draco_

Hermione stumbled back onto the grounds, dragging a positively smashed stable boy beside her. Draco groaned and rolled his eyes.

"What are you doing?" He hissed, glancing along the main road. "Are you trying to get fired?"

"Mione, why is he yelling at us?" Harry asked, and then belched.

"Do you want to reprimand me or help me?" Hermione demanded testily. He rolled his eyes and cast the levitating charm. The stable boy groaned as he tilted back until he was floating beside them.

"What the fuck happened to him?" Draco demanded as they started slowly walking back towards the manor.

"What does it look like?" Granger snapped, he raised an eyebrow and she sighed. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to snap at you, it's just been a long day."

"Is he going to remember any of this?" He asked warily. She shook her head.

"No, he's famous for blacking out." She admitted.

"Jesus, why?" Draco asked, appraising the floating man with more respect. You had to really fuck
up to be famous for not remembering the night, or in this case, afternoon before.

"He only has shitty coping mechanisms? I don't know." Hermione shrugged, wiping sweat off of her brow. "He spent the whole time talking about how he doesn't know who he is."

"Where was he?" Draco asked curiously, he didn't even realized that pubs were open this early and that late.

"Knockturn." She shrugged. He stopped immediately. She turned back and sighed at his expression

"You went to Knockturn by yourself." He gaped at her, wondering how she could possibly be that reckless.

"Yes, but I took precautions." She told him confidently as if that made it better.

"What precautions could you possibly think would be sufficient to go to Knockturn by yourself?" He demanded, she gestured to her hair lazily and he blinked dumbly as he realized what she meant.

"You went to Knockturn with only an improvised mark to protect you!" He accused, stunned.

"Yes, alright, but I can defend myself." She declared proudly.

"How?" He snapped. She couldn't perform most defensive or battle based spells. "I bite." She announced as if that was a valid argument.

"Goddamn it Granger, just promise me you won't do that again?" He asked, because if they kept talking about it he was going to explode. "What did you want me to do? Leave him there?" She snapped, gesturing at her prone friend. He groaned, not quite believing that they were even having this argument.

"No! Just let me or Blaise or even fucking Weasel get him." He hissed.

"You weren't around." She shrugged as if that made it even a little bit okay.

"Do you understand how much danger you were in?" He demanded. Fucked up things happen to women in Knockturn, let alone unclaimed, enslaved, omegas on their own. "Yes, I do, because I'm in that danger every goddamn day, whether you're around or not, so I'd appreciate if you'd drop it." She told him forcefully.

"Just promise me you won't put yourself at risk again." He pushed, unable to help it.

"Why?" She demanded.

"Because I love you and I don't know what I'd do if something happened to you." He confessed, gently lifting her chin. Her eyes went wide and the corner of her mouth tilted into the tiniest smile before she stepped back, out of his reach.

"You're a sap." She pointed out coolly. He laughed.

"I mean every word." He insisted. She stilled.

"Okay, I... I'll be more careful." She assured him.

"Good." He smiled, taking her hand as they walked back towards the manor, the snoring stable boy floating behind them.
They stopped at the entrance to the servant quarters. He went to kiss her but recoiled quickly.

"You smell awful." He told her seriously.

"Thanks." She answered in a deadpan voice.

"I mean it, like apples and vomit." He clarified, his nose wrinkling at the memory.

"I get it. I'll take a bath." She rolled her eyes, even as she blushed.

"I can draw you one." He suggested, suggestively looking her over.

"Oh no, we both know that if I went with you we'd end up doing far more than bathing." She teased.

"And would that be a bad thing?" He asked, laughing.

"I have to get Astoria in an hour." She pointed out. Damn that Astoria, always getting in the way.

"Fine, but will you come by after?" He asked hopefully.

"If you help me get him inside." She cocked an eyebrow as if he wasn't already going to.

"Deal." He agreed. She grinned.

It took a little maneuvering to get the drunk inside and a little more creativity to get him into bed but they managed.

"Hey Granger?" He whispered as they slipped back out to the garden.

"Yes?" She called back in the same tone.

"What's his name?" He asked warily, gesturing behind. She froze in place as he closed the door behind him.

"You don't know his name." She realized.

"No... Harvey?" He guessed.

"Harry." She corrected, looking at him like he had two heads.

"I was close." He pointed out.

"You're an idiot." She told him fondly. He laughed.

"I'm hurt." He protested.

"You'll get over it." She assured him, mirth in her eyes.

"So, later?" He confirmed.

"Later." She agreed eagerly.

He started to walk away, heading for the pond to read for a little while when she cleared her throat. He looked over his shoulder at her, where she was shifting back and forth wringing her hands. He waited a beat, sensing that she had something to say.

"Hey Draco?" She started softly.
"Yeah?" He answered, trying to make his voice sound encouraging.

"What would you say if I said that I was ready?" She asked nervously.

"Ready?" He repeated, unsure what she meant. She blushed violently.

"To... you know." She said meaningfully.

"Oh! Ready, um, I'd ask if you were sure." He started hesitantly.

"And if I said that I was?" She continued.

"Okay, then I'd remind you that you didn't have to and you could always change your mind." He suggested.

"If I didn't want to... change my mind that is." She admitted.

"Then, I'd tell you to just relax and ask you to come to my room tonight." He concluded. She nodded thoughtfully and took a deep breath.

"Okay. Draco, I'm saying all of that." She confessed.

"I guessed." He answered grinning as he pulled her close and kissed her firmly. They had barely started when she pulled away.

"I thought I smelled?" She reminded him.

"I can handle it for the moment." He assured her, laughing.

"I'm gonna wash up." She reminded him.

"Good." He agreed. "Just, just don't stress okay, this is supposed to be fun." He reminded her firmly.

"I know, and... I trust you." She assured him before stepping out of his embrace and walking back to the manor. He stayed frozen there after she went inside, hardly able to believe his luck. It was going to be one hell of a night if he had anything to say about it.

Hermione

She was still a little dazed as she went to retrieve Astoria. Her skin was pink from scrubbing and she knew for a fact the only thing she smelled like now was the harsh soap reserved for the slaves. It was hard to think about anything other than their plans for that night but if she let herself think about it she was either going to panic or work herself up so badly she'd end up jumping him immediately. Neither of those were strictly desirable for the moment.

She arrived just as Astoria was leaving. The blonde was holding a book, clearly deep in thought.

"How was your lesson?" Hermione asked jovially.

"Interesting." Astoria answered slowly, pausing when Hermione waited for her to elaborate.

"Did you know that scholars think that Alpha's evolved first?" Astoria asked suddenly.

"Oh?" she did, but it wouldn't kill her to let Astoria have this one.

"Yeah, they developed superior eyesight, strength, etc, but there was so much fighting that it was
harder to survive even though Alphas were better at fighting the world when they weren't fighting
each other." She continued, almost frantic as she explained.

"Okay." Hermione nodded, encouraging her to get to her point.

"So, Omegas evolved for balance, they started as the weaker betas but slowly evolved to be more
welcoming, less of threat, until they were able to pacify the Alphas, keep them calm." She had never
realized how true that was but she could see it with her own eyes. She and Draco calmed each other,
they brought balance.

"Makes sense." She agreed quickly, realizing that she may have taken too long. Astoria didn't
comment.

"There used to be laws about it. Alphas could only marry omegas, omegas could only marry alphas,
and betas had to choose from amongst the rest." Astoria told her.

"Huh." That, she hadn't known. Minerva had rarely made her read upon ABO law; she knew it
would only stress her out.

"Do you think it would have been better that way?" Astoria asked suddenly.

"I don't..." Hermione stammered, not sure what the younger girl wanted to hear.

"If Draco had been a beta, or... I had been an omega." She explained, a little panic leaching into her
voice.

"People are far more than their presentation Tori, a good marriage is about who you are, not what
you are." Hermione pointed out, though they both knew that compatible presentations helped.

"Do you like being an omega?" Astoria asked, studying her carefully. She shrugged.

"I... It's just who I am. Not really any different from my hair." She admitted.

"You didn't use to think that." Astoria pointed out. Hermione paused.

"No, I guess I didn't. I've just accepted it recently, I guess." She explained. There were positives and
negative to being O, she could see that now, It didn't bother her like it used to. It didn't make her feel
any lesser.

"I'm really, genuinely happy for you Mione." Astoria confessed, her eyes watering.

"Thank you, it's really nothing." Hermione assured the other girl, a little unsure.

"Of course, c'mon, let's go, I think I want to turn in early. I didn't sleep well last night." Astoria
admitted, taking the other girl's arm and heading towards her rooms. Hermione felt a rush of
adrenaline as she remembered her plans for the night. She could do this; she wanted to do this. She
wanted to be with him and nothing was going to stop her.
Two Days and One Night

_Hermione_

Hermione nervously slipped away, leaving Astoria in her room as she went to the lavatory. Her hands shook as she stared at her reflection. The waxy glass mirror stared back at her with a face she didn't recognize. She was lost; nothing on her face had changed, the same simple features. But her eyes. The look in them just wasn't the same. She wasn't the same. She couldn't tell if it was for better or worse. Her skin had lost a tightness that she hadn't know was there until it was gone and her mouth didn't have the usual turned down edge to it all the time, instead it ticked up, she found herself smiling at nothing in her reflection. She didn't use to do that. She forced her mouth back into a serious line and straightened her back, pushing her shoulders down and back. She still looked different. She flicked some water on the surface spitefully and hurriedly left the lavatory. She was going insane. Oh well.

_Draco_

Draco wasn't sure what to do. The past few nights had been... well, amazing, and the thought of what they were going to do that night, well, he hadn't been this nervous since before he had lost his virginity. He knew logically that this wasn't the end all be all, that they had already been more intimate than most partners were their entire lives, but he was still nervous. This meant something to Granger, and he hadn't been with someone who it would meaning something to in years, if ever. He was always the casual fuck, the no fuss good time, and this was different from all of that, it always had been but now it just felt all the more real. He kept finding himself touching his shoulder. No one had ever cared enough to mark him or even want to mark him. He wouldn't admit how good that made him feel.

He walked uneasily by his father's office. The man had been tucked away in his office for the past few days, not even coming out for meals. He had been tempted to ask his mother where he was sleeping but he was a little scared of the answer. Whatever was going on, tensions seemed to be rising throughout the manor. Messengers were running faster, servants were whispering more, his attendant wouldn't meet his eye (though that wasn't quite new).

He just couldn't shake the sensation that everything was coming to a head, no matter how unready he felt.

_Hermione_

Harry appeared as a frazzled mess as she turned a corner. She sighed; it seemed that Astoria would have to wait a little while longer.

"There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you." He hissed angrily, pulling her out of the flow of traffic.

"Sorry.. I was working?" She reminded him, unaware of why he would be this angry with her. She did just save his ass, after all.

"Are you having an affair with Draco Malfoy?" He demanded furiously.

"Jesus, shout that a little louder why don't you." She hissed, dragging him into a little used sitting room. He gaped at her.

"When Ron told me what he suspected, I thought he was nuts, I defended you Mione" Harry started
"Why do you think *that* is going on?" She tried diplomatically. Harry raised an unimpressed eyebrow.

"Despite the fact that you haven't denied it? I remember parts of last night, including the fact that Draco Malfoy showed up to help you bring me inside as if that was normal!" He snapped furiously. Damn it, that would be the last time that she overestimated his drinking. Usually she was underestimating it.

"Okay, point taken." She conceded breezily; maybe if she pretended it wasn't a big deal he'd drop it.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Harry demanded, proving that little hypothesis wrong immediately.

"Because you would have reacted like this!" She snapped back, sitting on the back of the dusty loveseat because if she was going to be interrogated she damn sure was going to be comfortable for the process.

"You shouldn't keep things from your friends." Harry insisted. She rolled her eyes at that hypocrisy.

"Why are you getting smashed at Knockturn?" She fired back. He stiffened and looked away defensively.

"That's different." He explained lazily.

"Sure." She scoffed.

"It's shitty that you're doing this to Ron." He pointed out; she gaped at him in shock.

"To Ron? What does Ron have to do with any of this?" She sputtered. She wasn't doing anything to Ron.

"He's in love with you Mione." Harry insisted earnestly.

"No, he's not. Not even close." She snapped.

"He's been in love with you for years." The alpha pushed. "Ron just wanted what he couldn't have. He never loved me." Hermione told him firmly. She and Ron kissed *once*; they were friends but they were never meant to be more than that.

"You don't really believe that." Harry shook his head stubbornly, refusing to pivot his world view for something so ridiculous as facts.

"I get to make my own choices Harry." She reminded him, straightening her spine stubbornly.

"Of course you do. It's just..." he started.

"Just nothing. I've chosen Draco for however long it lasts, whether that's a day for a week or a year I don't care. " she cut him off firmly, not willing to put up with this bullshit anymore.

"You're really serious about this" Harry realized, looking at her with fresh eyes. He was right to. She was different; she wasn't willing to back down from this and she wasn't willing to drop it either. She had a right to be happy.

"I am." She confirmed.
"Is he?" Harry asked, cocking an eyebrow skeptically.

"Absolutely." Hermione confirmed stubbornly. She had no doubt. Not anymore.

"What are you going to do?" Harry asked sadly, looking at her like she was some tragic heroine in a romance novel. She hated it.

"For now, just appreciate what we have." She answered solemnly, shrugging.

"You have days." Harry told her, eyes wide in surprise.

"What?" Hermione asked, the air suddenly rested on her skin like weights.

"You haven't heard?" Harry gasped, staring at her like she had three heads.

"What?" Hermione snapped.

"The discussions are almost done. The contract's getting signed in two days." Harry told her gently. She didn't like that look in his eyes.

"Then I guess we have two days." She shrugged as if it didn't hurt, as if it wasn't terrifying, but it did and it was. But it wasn't going to happen, she wouldn't let it.

"Are you going to be okay Mione?" Harry murmured, "After?" He checked.

"No" she laughed even though it was the last thing she felt like doing.

"You expect me to be around to pick up the pieces?" Harry asked, a hint of anger in his voice.

"No." She told him honestly.

"Well too bad because you won't be able to get rid of me." Harry insisted. She smiled but hurried to change the subject.

"Speaking of...you wanna tell me why you felt the need to get smashed last night?" Hermione suggested.

"No, not particularly. "Harry admitted, chuckling.

"How about this, in two days you tell me." She instructed.

"Works for me" Harry agreed laughing, and then paused. She could feel his mood change. "Does Ginny know?" Harry asked nervously.

"Not who he is. She knows I'm seeing someone." Hermione conceded.

"You two should stop keeping so many secrets." Harry reprimanded her.

"Okay Mr. Open Book." Hermione mocked him.

"That's…" He started to protest, then deflated, "you're right" he conceded, but quickly added, "But so am I."

... 

"Hey Tori!" Hermione called warmly, nudging open the door. The blonde was sitting at her dresser, staring pensively in the mirror. Hermione pretended that she didn't see the parallels. Astoria closed
her eyes and rolled her neck before fluffing her hair gently.

"Hey Mione," She answered pleasantly, adjusting the silk pink robe that sat lazily on the edge of her shoulders.

"I heard a rumor about your contract today, word is there's only two days left to wait." Hermione forced herself to sound cheery, forced herself to pretend that this wasn't killing her.

"I know, mother told me." Astoria answered with a soft smile.

"Well, how do you feel about it?" Hermione asked gently, moving to plait the young girl's hair.

"Well, Pansy's been giving me lots of advice on how to keep Draco's attention, at least until after the wedding." Astoria shrugged. Hermione pretended to not notice the lack of a real answer.

"That's good." Hermione suggested. Astoria shrugged again.

"I still don't like her, but she knows what she's talking about." The younger girl shrugged as if that made up for it.

"I expect she does yeah." Hermione agreed, focusing intensely to keep up her poker face. She wondered briefly if Draco would ever forgive Pansy for trading insider secrets. She felt bad for the girl, she and Draco had been good friends it's just that this whole courtship felt more like a battle, and no one was sure what side to be on.

"Don't worry, I know that it was unreasonable of my mother to expect you to teach me about seduction, I mean, it's not like you'd know anything." Astoria shrugged and Hermione had the distinct sensation that she was being questioned again.

"Yup." She answer passively.

"Well, you did snog Ron." Astoria pointed out thoughtfully.

"Astoria!" Hermione cringed, why did people insist on bringing that up? It was one time!

"And Krum." The younger girl continued, unfettered.

"Pansy still has me beat by quite a lot." That, at least, wasn't a lie.

"True," Astoria shrugged, seemingly content to let it go for now, "Well, anyways, you should take the day tomorrow, I'm just going to spend it in here talking to Pansy about 'strategies.'" Astoria said the word as if it tasted like soap.

"Only if you're sure..." Hermione trailed off. She wanted nothing more to spend the day with Draco but she couldn't seem too eager. She was trying to do her job well after all.

"Absolutely." Astoria assured her, smiling. "And since I'm just spending the day inside anyways there's no real reason why I have to do more than wash my face tonight so feel free to beg off early."

"Really?" Hermione asked uncertainly, her eyebrows flying to the top of her head. Astoria loved being pampered and more than occasionally, would debrief Hermione on every aspect of her day during their evening process.

"Yeah, I'm just really tired." She said, stretching lazily and walking towards her bed. "You're excused." She called over her shoulder, and Hermione jumped at the tiniest shard of ice in her tone.
"Thank you," She curtsied demurely, moving for the door when Astoria's voice called her back.

"I'm almost married you know? You should really start addressing me properly, it's what Narcissa would expect." She explain and no, Hermione hadn't imagined that tone.

"Of course, Thank you Mistress." Hermione murmured uncomfortably, the word feeling strange in her mouth. Astoria nodded and Hermione slipped out the door, determine to shake the strange feeling settling in her chest away. She was okay. Everything was going to be okay. Actually, it was going to be more than okay because in just a few minutes she would get to see Draco and that didn't make her nervous at all. Nope, not even a little bit.

Draco

She was shaking like a leaf when he opened the door. He couldn't help the laugh that immediately burst from him. She pouted, pushing into the room, looking quite a bit like a disgruntled kitten.

"Don't laugh at me!" She huffed in protest. He forced himself to adopt a serious expression but she had her arms crossed and her chin lifted and the return of his prideful, feisty little lioness made him smile.

"Sorry, sorry," He apologized, pulling her into his arms, "but you looked like you were coming face to face with an executioner."

"Okay, so I'm a little nervous." She admitted uneasily.

"This was your idea, remember." He prodded gently.

"Of course." She nodded, straightening to her full (read: measly) height.

"You can always back out, I'd never hold it against you." He reminded her firmly.

"I know that." She assured him.

"We don't have to do this." He stressed, cupping her face in hand and running his thumb along her bottom lift.

"I know." She agreed easily.

"We don't have to do anything." He clarified.

"Did you know about the contract?" She demanded suddenly; he literally was taken back.

"What?" He asked, totally in the dark.

"Negotiations are almost done, two days, max." She rattled off calmly, as if the facts had no significance.

"No one told me." He admitted, rubbing the back of his neck unhappily.

"I just heard today." She sighed, tension dropping from her shoulders as she released the shared weight between them.

"Is that why…" He trailed off meaningfully. He wasn't sure how he felt about her deciding this with that dangling over her head.

"No, I found out after." She assured him, gently with a little smile.
"We still don't have to do anything. Don't do something just because of some stupid contract." He shook his head in disgust at the idea. The contract that would destroy everything that got him out of bed in the morning.

"I'm not. I want to do this. Nothing's changed for me." She promised with a smile.

"Me either." He agreed. It felt like a curtain had been pushed back, like with that out of the way they could see each other again.

"I'm just… nervous." Granger admitted, biting her lip. He gently pulled it away. He heard her breath catch headily.

"Me too." He confessed, realizing with a strange rush that he had never told anyone that before.

"Really?" Hermione asked, appraising him carefully as if looking for a lie.

"Yeah, I don't want to fuck this up for you." He explained bluntly. She laughed.

"I don't think you could." She told him. He smiled and then smirked as he came up with a plan.

"Let's take a walk." He suggest eagerly.

"Where?" She asked, her mouth pursing into a displeased pout.

"You'll see." He grinned encouragingly and lead the way out the door.

…

"Aren't these just the winter rooms?" Hermione asked uneasily as he lead her down the hallway of the upper half of his wing.

"Yup, we move downstairs to limit the heat but the upstairs rooms are better defended so we spend the rest of the year here." He explained quickly.

"Okay…" She trailed off, clearly unsure. He smiled.

He led her into his room, directly above where they had spent most of their time. The servants had just finished preparing his rooms for his inevitable September transition but for now, no one would come looking for them here.

"I still don't understand why we're here instead of in your normal rooms." She prodded gently as he lead her inside, ignoring the sitting room and bed in favor of the French doors at the other end of the room.

"I wanted to show you something." He shrugged, playing off his nervous excitement.

"What?" She asked, clearly a little uncertain, but trusting and that was good enough for him.

"This." He answered calmly, pushing open the door to reveal the balcony in front of them.

…

_Hermione_

She gasped. With all of Draco's dramatics, or perhaps, in spite of them, the scene before them was simply awe inspiring. The garden was stretched out below them, the ornate hedges and beautiful
flowers a sprawling field but perhaps more beautiful was the lights, fireflies danced among the bushes, charmed fountains glowed; simply put, it was extraordinary.

"It wonderful." She gasped.

"I tend to think so." He admitted. She found herself being drawn towards the railing, looking out at the twinkling beauty with soft wonder. He came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and hooking his chin over her shoulder. It felt like the most natural thing in the word to lean back into him. He kissed the back of her neck gently, right over his seal. She smiled.

"I don't want to go under tonight." She told him firmly. Oh no, she wanted to be fully present and aware for this.

"Okay." He agreed easily, kissing her earlobe gently. His warm breath on her neck was nice and his hands moved to her hips.

"I trust you." She told him honestly, meaning the words more than he could know.

"Thank you." He murmured, his tone humble and earnest. Something told her that he did know, he knew quite well. "You're beautiful." He told her and something told her that it wasn't a line. She felt alight, like a spark, just waiting to be touched and explode into flame. His lips trailed down the back of her neck, leaving warm trails of tingling pleasure in his wake. She breathed in shallow little pants, arching into him.

"Don't close your eyes." He ordered, gripping her hips firmly, she moaned, low in the back of her throat as his words registered. It was so hard to keep her eyes open and not just give into it, to the heat of his body pressed against her, to the way his thumb traced her hip bone, over and over again, sending rippling shock waves to her center. Her veins pumped pure pleasure through her system.

He carefully, oh so carefully, and slowly enough that she could say no, put her hands against the chilled wooden railing. There was a light and soft voices in the garden below her, and her heart beat frantically with the knowledge that they could be discovered at any moment.

"What would you do if someone found you like this?" Draco murmured against her neck, slowly running his hands along her ribs, skimming the underside of her breasts. "So hungry for my touch, Would you be embarrassed?"

"No." She answered immediately, her instincts screaming at her to assure her alpha, to tell him that he could conduct her body like a symphony orchestra and she'd tell the world.

"Mmmm… Good girl." He praised, lips brushing her ear. His hands slowly moved to the ties on her corset, he toyed with the ribbons for a moment, asking silently. She nodded, and she felt her hands shake as he started to unwind the laces, it loosened slowly, the pressure easing on her lungs felt almost as good as his hands trailing in between her breasts. He traced the sensitive skin just underneath before slowly exploring her curves, the sensation sending the best kind of goosebumps spreading across her skin. She leaned further into him, her back arching and her neck tilted to rest on his shoulder. He pressed soft kisses on her neck, sucking love marks along the tendon. Tracing gently with his thumbs, he finally made it to the center of each mound of flesh, the first little shocks of pleasure careened together, colliding in the center of her back. She moaned, her breath coming heavier as he rolled her nipples between his fingers. It felt like the best kind of little shocks were traveling directly to her center, and she felt herself get so much wetter. Fuck, that felt amazing.

"Yes," She hissed, surprised as he mixed it up, sharply pinching the sensitive buds. She looked down
at the hands playing with her body, working it like a guitar player plucking at strings. For a brief moment, she felt a flicker of insecurity, noticing her stomach, which looked a little hollow, evidence of too many skipped meals, her smallish breasts, and her imperfect skin, dotted with the occasional freckle and bruise and scar. Her hands twitched on the railing and a part of her desperately wanted to cover up. He seemed to notice her slipping out of the moment, because he paused his ministrations for a beat before trailing down her ribs. She tensed in a different way, because he stopped just beneath her ribs, tracing patterns there, that was unexpectedly nice. God, Draco was good at this.

"You're so beautiful, perfect for me." The flattery was hard to believe but he seemed genuinely sincere. "I mean it." He repeated, even if he couldn't see her face, he always seemed able to read her mind. "Everything about you makes me want you; I can't keep my hands off of you." He pressed forward, grinding his hardening member into her backside, seemingly for emphasis. She pushed back against him, rocking into him as he doled out kisses to the sweet spot beneath her ear. He nipped and sucked, leaving marks with his mouth where'd he'd usually use his quill. She decided she definitely liked this just as much, if not more.

She whimpered as his hands slid down and pushed down to play with the top of her skirt, the gesture a silent question.

"I'm ready." She breathed nervously, her stomach alight with butterflies.

"Are you sure?" He asked carefully, his mouth brushing her ear. She shivered in pleasure.

"Yes." She assured him. He nodded against her shoulder and stepped back into the room. He took her hand as he did and pulled her back inside. She followed easily as he caught her up in his arms. He kissed her, and it was filthy as his tongue mapped out every inch of her mouth. She moaned, low back in her throat as his ministrations on her nipples refused to let up. She was practically dripping at this point and she was pretty sure that her knickers were absolutely ruined.

"Good girl." He murmured, she whimpered, practically collapsing into him. She reached for his shirt, hurriedly undoing the buttons. She ran her hands along his chest, exploring his body even as he took hers apart. He shucked it off, rolling it off his shoulders and then immediately went back to the top of her skirt, pushing it down quickly. She stepped out of it easily. He grinned, taking in her black lace knickers, stocking and garters. She blushed.

"You prepared." He guessed, smirking.

"Maybe I was hopeful or maybe I just wear things like this all of the time." She evaded, a blush heating her face. She crossed her arms over her chest, suddenly remembering she was mostly nude and she should probably have some sense of propriety.

"You forget that I stole your knickers for a week." He teased, gently pulling her arms back to her sides.

"Those were my good knickers." She admitted, the heat spreading down her chest, which he could see, very clearly. She squirmed but he just ran his hands along her back soothingly.

"Perfect, we finally found something nice that I can buy you." He grinned and this was not the time for this argument but she also definitely could not concede.

"You will not be buying me knickers." She asserted.

"We can discuss this later." He reminded her, laughing a little.

"True." Hermione agreed eagerly. He deliberately traced the M on her neck and all traces of humor
disappeared. She could feel O Space licking at her again and she felt herself clench, desperately wanting to clench on something. She whimpered.

"Let's take care of you then." He suggested, smirking as he started kissing down her neck. His hands returned to her breast, cupping the mounds of flesh before rolling her already hypersensitive peaks.

"Please" She begged, tears coming to her eyes.

"What?" He asked innocently and then nipped her ear as if he didn't already know what she needed.

"Touch me." She asked desperately. "Please." She begged again.

"I am touching you." He pointed out, pinching her poor abused buds for emphasis. She moaned again and her knees buckled. He caught her easily, leading her to the bed. He laid her down first, oh so gently and carefully. Every nerve in her body hummed, just waiting to alight. "But maybe that's not where you want me to touch. Hmmm?" He teased. He crawled over her, lithe muscles held taut as he held himself above her. She was panting with desperation.

"Please." She begged, trying to agree but she couldn't seem to get her mouth to form any other words.

"Where do you want me to touch you?" He asked, his voice dark. "Maybe here?" He suggested, kissing between her breasts.

"No." She gasped as he took her nipple into his mouth, sucking firmly. "Not there." She squeaked.

"Where do you want me to touch you?" He asked again, his eyes lit up as he smirked deviously.

"You know." She hissed angrily. He just smirked some more and gave her a pointed look. "Down there."

"Here?" He asked, smirking as he peppered her inner thighs with soft, moist kisses. She sighed, settling in and then nothing because he wasn't fucking moving, he was just staying at her thighs, utterly refusing to go anywhere near where she wanted him.

"Please." She whimpered again as the pressure increased almost so much that it hurt. She just needed some relief goddamn it and if he wasn't going to do it… She reached her hand down, and she just barely brushed the spot that was guaranteed to make her see stars when his hands flew out, pinning her wrists down. He sat up, kneeling in between her legs now and smirked at her, his eyes dark.

"I'll use a sticking charm if I have to, but you'll keep your hands there." He instructed, very very deliberately not making it an order. She knew she could get out of it. She knew that she could just say her word and it would all stop… but she didn't want to. God she wanted to do what he asked but it was also more than that, she wanted to please him. She wanted to submit, not her omega side, not her nature, not her hormones. She, Hermione Granger, wanted to submit to him. Fuck, that was something that she had to examine just not, not right now.

"Okay." She conceded softly. He grinned like a shark.

"Now, where do you want me to touch you? I want you to say it." He insisted. She felt herself blush violently. It was ridiculous. She was splayed out naked in front of him, he was looking at every nook and cranny on her body, totally exposed, but she couldn't say one little word.

"My clit. I want you touch my clit." She finally admitted. Her smirked and parted her legs farther. She moaned and his breath ghosted over her. He still wasn't touching her.
"Just your clit?" He asked, flicking his tongue over the swollen bud. She gasped, her head falling back with a thump. She couldn't... she couldn't. "Or the rest of your lovely pussy too."

She groaned as he leaned back and ran his finger over her lower lips pointedly.

"Please." She repeated, utterly incoherent, her eyes were starting to water as she squirmed.

"Good girl." He praised, leaning down to eat her out with glee. He took her clit into his mouth and sucked firmly before nipping the tiny nerve. Shock waves radiated up her body. She gasped but he had already let up, tracing pointed circles around her entrance with his tongue. She squirmed, pleasflowing out of her mouth without her permission now. She needed it, desperately.

His right hand cupped her butt, lifting up her hips so he could reach easier. He circled her clit slowly with his finger at the same moment he plunged his tongue inside of her. She moaned, loudly with zero control of it. He pulled back gently, peppering kisses along her folds again. She felt like screaming as he forced her to pull away from that edge. Suddenly, just when her breathing settled down, he went back to her clit, tracing patterns over her poor little bud. Fuck if she didn't know what that pattern was, the possessive asshole. She knew what his seal felt like on every part of her body. Except he wasn't that much of an asshole because god that felt good. As if that wasn't enough, he started tracing around her entrance with his finger. Her hips bucked uncontrollably but he still avoided entering her, the tease. She moaned, she whined, she pleaded, but all she got was the tiniest hint of sensation. She was about to lose it, start shouting at him to hurry it up all ready when he suddenly pierced her, sliding in up to the knuckle. All of the air rushed out of her lungs in a woosh. He curled his finger, hitting spots inside of her that made sparks explode behind her eyes. She moaned, squirming. He slid a second finger inside of her suddenly and her back arched. She squirmed some more as he scissored his fingers, stretching her gently. Fuck. She moaned as he pressed upwards again, pulsing into the spot, that perfect, heavenly spot that she could never quite reach just right. All she needed was his long, nimble fingers after all. He alternated that way, stretching her or pulsing into her. She was soaking wet, his hand was making obscene noises and then he started sucking on her clit, she could feel herself dripping onto her thighs. Fuck.

She could feel herself peaking, racing towards that perfect edge and just as she was about to go hurtling over it, he stopped. He didn't just ease off, he stopped, fully backing off.

"Draco!" She screamed, tears finally slipping down her face as all of the frustration overwhelmed her. "Please, please, please, please..." She begged, the pleas teetering off into incomprehensible whimpers.

"Shhhh" He assured, crawling up her body, muscles bunching. He kissed her firmly, distracting her with his lips and tongue as his hands disappeared. He shifted his weight strangely and she peeked and yeah, that was his pants that were being kicked off towards the floor, and wow that was his very large cock. It had looked smaller when she hadn't been faced with the very real possibility of it being inside of her. "I've got you," He whispered as he pulled away, kissing down her neck.

"How should we... I mean, what position should we...?" She trailed off, the words clumsy and awkward and wrong.

"Shhh" He whispered fondly. She blushed. "I know you researched, and planned and all of that, but that's not what this is about, trust me?" He requested.

"Of course." She agreed. He lifted her legs first and she crossed them at the base of his spine easily because even though she wasn't over thinking this, she wasn't going to let all of that research go to waste. He laughed, clearly knowing exactly what she was thinking. It was her turn to grin. He pointedly rolled his hips onto her, his hardened member rocked between her folds, onto her clit. She moaned unabashedly.
"Are you ready?" He asked gently; she nodded. "I'll go slow." He promised, pushing a strand of hair out of her face.

He reached down briefly and then she felt him enter her. The stretch hurt and she gritted her teeth painfully. He moved painstakingly slowly, entering her with deliberate care. He slowly met resistance and then there was a tiny, sharp flare of pain. She gasped and he stroked her hair again as he froze, giving her a moment to recover. The pain eased, fading to moderate discomfort and she nodded. He slid in farther until he finally bottomed out. She sighed as they both paused, panting. He kissed just below her ear, nipping at the lobe.

"Ready?" He asked quietly, strain apparent in the husk of his voice.

"Yes." She agreed. He pulled back until just the head was inside and then rocked back in, slowly but with power. It was starting to feel good. The stretch stopped aching and then it was replaced with slow, molten pleasure. She squirmed and he brushed against that amazing, amazing spot. She moaned as he rolled his hip again. He groaned, the first sign that he was affected and then his pace slowly increased. She squeezed her legs around him, spurring him on as he slammed into her. He dipped his head, taking her nipple into his mouth again. He nipped hard and she moaned as her hips twitched. He stopped as her legs fell back onto the mattress, planting her feet. He rocked into her again, grinding against her clit. She moaned. He started thrusting in earnest and she lost herself to the rhythm of their bodies colliding and pulling apart over and over again.

Finally, his cock hit that spot and his pubic bone rocked against her clit. She went flying over the edge, her body went taut, her back arching and her inner muscles clenching around him. She made a noise even as everything exploded into white and her ears roared as blood rushed to them. Wave after wave of pleasure hit her as he kept thrusting inside of her until he finally pushed in once more and stilled. She had just enough conscious of mind to open her eyes. He groaned, biting his lip as his head fell back, face contorted in ecstasy. She felt him twitch inside of her once more and then still entirely. He collapsed on her for the shortest breadth of a second before rolling off and pulling out, flat on his back.

There was a moment when the only noise was their heavy breathing as they struggled to recover. Hermione stared at the ceiling, not quite believing that that had just happened.

"So, good?" Draco asked breathily as he sat up. She laughed, a shocked sound that she hadn't been anticipating.

"Yeah, good." She chuckled, Draco released a pleased sigh and dropped back with a heavy thump.
Hermione

Summer was turning into fall, and winter's icy fingers were making their first careful passes into the world during these quiet mornings. The sun was golden as it just began to peek over the horizon and everything was painted a beautiful, hazy red.

The cool air begged for sleeping in and Hermione sunk into the warmth around her. Draco hadn't woken yet, beside her his face was relaxed, his dark feathery lashes kissing his sharp cheekbones. He was peaceful in sleep. She watched him happily feeling decidedly at peace herself. There was a fur over her that hadn't been there when she had fallen asleep and it felt luxuriously soft against her skin. No one was looking for them and no one would find them if they tried. It felt like freedom.

She squirming happily, feeling boneless and a quiet voice in her mind hissed "not yours" but her foolish, treacherous heart disagreed. There were bruises on her hips, she could tell from the ache she felt as she shifted. She didn't mind. She was sore between her legs but that was okay too. She couldn't quite believe that the night before had really happened. She wasn't a virgin any more. It felt weird, a little wrong, but giddy and wonderful too. She was happy it had happened. She was glad it was with Draco. She closed her eyes, deciding what she really needed was just a little more sleep. She'd deal with it all in an hour or two.

…

Hermione woke for the second time to cold sheets under her cheek. She cringed, sitting up slowly. Draco wasn't in the bed but as she looked a little harder she saw him in the corner, kneeling over his massive tub. She blinked, trying to process what was going on. She heard the soft sound of water before she realized. She sat up, pulling the sheets up with her. The cold air licked uncomfortably along her spine.

"Are you drawing a bath?" She asked, surprised, but fond. Draco's head snapped up and he turned towards her, a sheepish expression on his face. It was endearing.

"Yes?" He answered uncertainly.

"I didn't think you knew how." She admitting, grinning.

"It may have taken me a few tries to work out how strong of an aguamenti to cast but I'm not incompetent." He bristled.

"Never said you were, I'm just surprised you didn't wait till you could have a chamber maid do it." She reassured him. He chuckled.

"I made the bath for you Granger." He told her as if it was obvious.

"Me?" She straightened in surprise, pulling the warmed furs closer around her.

"You." He repeated, smiling.

"Why?" She questioned, squirming slightly at his intense gaze. The night before had been wonderful but it felt weird being nude now. She knew she shouldn't feel that way after all they had done but she couldn't help it.
"Because you deserve to be taken care of." He told her gently. There was something sad in his eyes, as if he pitied her for not believing it.

"You know you don't have to like pay me back for sex, right? I wanted to do that last night, you don't owe me." She told him slowly.

"Trust me, that's not what's happening. I just want to pamper my lovely omega." He told her gently, closing the distance between the quickly and pressing a kiss to her forehead. She smiled as he moved back towards the tub.

"Okay then, thank you." He sat back on his haunches and looked up at her expectantly. "Now?" She checked.

"Wouldn't want the warming charm to wear off." He reminded her gently. "You don't have to." He added.

"No it's not… I'm just not used to being the one in the tub." She admitted nervously, slowly sliding to the edge of the bed.

"It's a role reversal for both of us." He shrugged and a bitter pang of jealousy flared within her.

"You don't…" She trailed off, eyeing him angrily. The thought of someone else soaping up her alpha was infuriating.

"The chambermaid just fills the tub and leaves." He informed her, smirking, clearly seeing her jealous streak as if it was written on her forehead.

"Okay." She got out of the bed slowly, reluctantly leaving the sheet behind. He had seen her naked before, just last night he had done more than look; it was just, it felt different in the light of day. It was a little less easy. She walked towards him all the same and very deliberately lowered herself into the bath. The water was warm and he must have added oils because it felt like silk on her skin. He lifted her hair gently and pressed a kiss to the back of her neck. She leaned forward, reaching for the shampoo out of habit. He tsked, taking it out of her hand.

"Just let me take care of you, you don't have to do anything." He grabbed a cup and poured some water on her hair. She tilted her head back as he soaked the long locks. He worked in the soap, not his, it smelled like…

"Apricot? Really?" She asked, surprised that she could still be amazed by his antics after all this time.

"I like it when you smell like apricot." She could hear the smirk in his voice even though she couldn't see him.

"I wonder why." She laughed. He massaged the soap into her scalp, scratching gently. She sighed. "That feels good."

"Glad to hear it." He chuckled.

She felt the rinse water next, it took three pours for the suds to all be gone. Draco was clumsy, she heard the very distinct clatter of him fumbling with the shampoo bottle. She laughed again. He huffed, but it was a fond sound.

He picked up the conditioner next and worked it into the ends of her hair. That was a privilege that she had never been entitled to before. He rinsed again before tucking her hair in front of her. She
leaned forward, anticipating his next move as she felt a damp wash cloth soap up her back. He ran it along the curve of her spine, massaging the knots in her back the way she had done for him weeks ago. It all felt surreal and her heart hurt a little as he lavished attention on her. This couldn't possibly be her life, but yet, it was. She turned quickly, his hand sliding along her ribs as he was too slow to pull it away.

"Get in." She ordered easily.

"Hmmm?" He murmured, his smile amused.

"Get in with me." She repeated, turning to kneel on the hard metal. "It's big enough." She reminded him, waving her hands through the warm water. Frankly, three or four people could fit comfortably, though she wasn't eager to try that anytime soon.

"You're an odd bird Hermione Granger." He told her, smiling as he undid the laces on his shirt before pulling it over his head. He stood, dropping his sleep trousers and shucking his pants. His cock was just starting to stir and she eyed it hopefully, he laughed and lifted her chin. "No one will be getting clean if you keep that look up."

"Maybe that's the goal." She smirked, licking her lips pointedly. He groaned.

"Clean first, then filthy." He suggested earnestly.

"I'm very capable of multitasking." She reminded him.

"That you are." He conceded.

"May I?" She moved farther forward, leaning over the edge of the tub and taking his straining member in her hand.

He grunted, "yes please." She smiled, and took him into her mouth, determined to swallow this time. Years of chewing on quills had taught her that she had a bit of an oral fixation and well, it had never served her better than now. She sucked gently, feeling him stiffen further in her mouth. She swirled her tongue around his head, paying special attention to the spot just below which always succeeded in drawing out gasps and twitching hips from him. She bobbed her head slowly, carefully curling her lips around her teeth. She felt her jaw start to ache as she stretched her mouth around him but it wasn't long before he was shuddering to a finish, spilling into her mouth. She focused on breathing through her nose and swallowing quickly, but a drop of cum still slipped out of the corner of her mouth and onto her chin. He pulled out of her mouth after the last twitch, a dopey smile on his face. He collected the drop on his thumb before sliding it into her mouth. She sucked eagerly, taking the last of his taste for herself. It was heady, not the taste itself but the idea of it.

He pulled his thumb out with a pop before stepping into the bath beside her. He turned, her back to him as he stretched his legs out on either side of her. She leaned back onto his chest, her head relaxing on his shoulder. There were drips as he lifted the washing cloth, gently lathering her chest, paying predictable attention to her breasts. She moaned as the coarse fabric brushed across the straining peaks.

"Good girl," He murmured. "You're such a good girl for me, my perfect omega." He praised as the cloth slid between her legs, brushing across her mound. He huffed in displeasure before quickly disregarding the cloth and sliding his fingers in between her folds. He rubbed circles around her clit with ease. She moaned, tilting her hips up to give him better access. He entered her easily, sliding inside and curling the digit to press on that spot in her inner wall. Pleasure coursed through her, shock waves affecting her whole body as the sensation pooled at the base of her spine. He was
giving her just enough to drive her nuts and she whimpered as it started to become too much.

"Please," She whimpered.

"Come." He ordered easily, flicking her clit with his thumb. She gasped, as the petite morte echoed through her. She melted into him sleepily and reached up to run her fingers through his hair.

"Thank you, Alpha." She breathed and then froze.

"That's new." Draco observed and kissed her temple. She relaxed slowly into him.

"Sorry?" She apologized hesitantly.

"I don't have a problem with it. I call you my omega all the time. It would be a little hypocritical of me, huh?" He suggested, skimming his hand down her thigh.

"I love you." She reminded him sincerely.

"I love you too." He repeated, kissing her wet hair.

They stayed like that until the water got cold and then helped each other out. He wrapped her in fluffy towels, rubbing her down, laughing as she returned the favor. They traded sweet, gentle kisses and she had never felt happier.

…

*Draco*

Granger tucked herself into a little ball in his arm chair and settled in with a book. He smiled, watching her for a moment before grabbing a book himself and settling in. It Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, the marked up edition he had read countless times. Granger was reading *The Lady of the Lake* and from the look of it was already on the third canto. He smiled. She was beautiful and wonderful and he was so so in love with her. He breathed deeply, relishing the scent of syrupy cherries. It had been such a constant the last few weeks that he had stopped noticing it when it was just cherry. That was idiotic. Cherries were wonderful. She looked up suddenly, sensing his eyes on her. She smiled softly and went back to her book.

"When do you have to leave?" He asked gently. It was nearing nine now and she had never, ever stayed this late.

"I don't" She announced eagerly as the realization flared on her face.

"You don't have to leave?" He checked with surprise, appraising her carefully.

"No, Astoria gave me the day off, apparently she's spending it with Pansy." She laughed as if the image was comical instead of blood curdling. Her hair bounced around her as her shoulders moved.

"That's…. Terrifying. Not… like you staying, I mean…” He stuttered, awkwardly putting his foot in his mouth due to his horror.

"I know what you mean." She assured him, chuckling. "Do you want me to stay?" She asked carefully, raising an eyebrow.

"I would love it if you stayed." He admitted. She smiled coyly and went back to her book. He realized with a dazed sort of surprise that this was the happiest he had ever felt, and not those rushes of adrenalin or post orgasm bliss that he had felt before but genuine contentment.
It struck her again almost an hour later. She looked up, suddenly straightening. He raised a curious eyebrow as he heard her robe slide against the couch. She stalked towards him, all feline grace. He set his book aside as she knelt in front of him, skimming her hands up his pant legs as she rose. She touched the laces of his trousers, didn't pull them, just rolled them in between her thumb and forefingers happily. She stared at him, her eyes hooded with lust. She abandoned the laces, skimming her hands up his bare chest greedily. He groaned as she curiously flicked his nipples. No one had ever tried that before. He wasn't sure how he felt about it. They weren't particularly sensitive but it was still a heady feeling to have her touching him with such obvious lust. She shifted, kneeling astride him as her fingers went into his hair.

"I want to ride you." She announced decisively. He groaned, his head tipping back as his dick hardened faster than he ever thought it could.

"Jesus Granger." He groaned; she pulled his hair again, tugging his head back up. She was staring him down, confidence in her expression.

"And then I want to submit." She continued. He smirked even his cock legitimately hurt from the strain of being trapped inside of his trousers.

"Yeah?" He confirmed. She didn't blush as she nodded slowly and clarified. "I want to ride you until we're both entirely sated" She repeated, he felt his cock twitched again, "so then I can submit and you can control me for as long as you want with no rush."

"Do you have a plan for that?" He asked curiously, since she obviously had everything else figured out.

"Whatever you want." She offered as if it wasn't an amazing, an unbelievable, a wonderful offer; he lunged forward, yanking off her robe. She chuckled and easily went with it, shrugging the garment off of her shoulders. She reached hurriedly for the laces but he brushed her hands aside, charming the garment away with his wand. She laughed and set the instrument aside and as she inched forward, hovering over him. He was worried for a moment at her hesitant expression but he was hit with a wave of apricot. She was so very turned on. She reached below herself, holding him firmly as she guided him into her. They both sighed as she slowly lowered herself onto him. Inch by blissful inch, she sunk onto him. It took every ounce of his self-restraint not to thrust into her, but he managed. She felt like silk, except so warm, so wet, as she took him. She moaned as she settled down, seated fully on him.

She took a moment, breathing heavily as she adjusted to the stretch. He bit his lip, desperately trying to balance out the immense pleasure that was pumping through his veins. Slowly, ever so slowly, she rocked into him, groaning as he moved within her. She paused, trying to take in the mechanics of it and he moved his hands to her hips, guiding her up and up until he was almost out of her, and then let her fall. She moaned as he met her, thrusting into her. She found her rhythm, helping her to lift up and bounce in his lap. She groaned, clenching warmly around him as she gripped his shoulders.

Her breasts bounced hypnotically in front of his face and if he looked down at the right moment he could just see his cock stretching her open as she dropped onto him. She whimpered, her head falling back, exposing her throat. He could see all of his marks on her, in the morning light they stood out boldly, the black ink a demanding contrast against her cream colored skin. He felt the heat pooling in his stomach and he knew he was getting close. He groaned, kissing her firmly as his finger gently tapped her clit twice and she clenched like a vice around him. Her hands gripped his shoulders and her eyes fell closed, her face slack with pleasure. He followed her after, her rhythmic grip sending him right after her. He buried his face in her neck as he pulsed inside
of her, groaning.

Hermione

They were panting and slick with sweat as they caught her breath. Draco groaned sinfully into her neck. He was still inside of her, half hard. The smack on her ass was unexpected but not painful.

"What?" She gasped; he smirked, leaning back.

"My turn." He reminded her confidently. She blushed. That half of her proposal had been entirely forgotten, not that she found it any less desirable, to say least. "Remember your word?" He asked carefully. She nodded. "We're going to add something else today?" He phrased it as a question. She nodded.

"Alright?" He stressed, apparently he needed verbal confirmation.

"Yes." She confirmed; he nodded, all serious.

"I'm going to ask you for a color in addition to your word. If you are okay, I want you to answer green. If you are unsure but want to continue with less intensity, I want you to answer yellow. If you want to stop what we are doing specifically, I want you to say red. If you want to stop everything, I want you to say 'Astoria.'" He cringed at the girl's name. She touched his arm soothingly to assure him that she was still good.

"Do you understand?" He asked seriously.

"Yes." She assured him confidently. It made perfect sense. Parsing out what she felt in the moment might be a little more difficult but she could do it. She was probably ninety percent sure.

"Will you remember it?" He checked. She raised a skeptical eyebrow but he just raised one back.

"Yes, I will remember it." She promised, a little insulted if she was being honest, even though she knew he was just being thorough.

"Do you want to go down?" He asked, those silver eyes appraising her carefully. She smiled softly as he looked at her.

"I'd be open to it." She decided. Even just the thought of that wonderful bliss made her skin tingle with want. She had just orgasmed but she was already so turned on at the thought of submitting for him so completely. Not rushing, not going through it half heartedly because it was late, or squeezing it in between appointments and announcements and everything else. She was his, well and truly his, at least for the day.

"What would you consent to while down?" He continued. They hadn't ever done anything when she went down before, nothing more than his fingers combing through her hair. She didn't like the idea of sex while she was in O Space, she was just too vulnerable. She didn't like the idea of not remembering what he did to her. Not that he would ever do something she didn't okay, but it was still a nonstarter.

"Not much, it's not that I don't trust you it's just..." She started to explain but her cut her off, kissing her nose gently.

"You don't have to defend your limits. Not ever." He assured her. She blushed at the sincerity in his face. She never would have suspected that he would be this protective, this good. It made her want to be better.
"Kissing's fine, I don't need to immediately be untied if I go under, anything with pain should stop as soon as you know." She itemized; he nodded sagely in agreement.

"Okay." He confirmed.

"Okay." She agreed easily.

"You ready?" He checked.

"Yes." She answered, straightening her shoulders and lifting her chin. She was ready.
"From this point forward you will address me as 'Alpha,' do you understand?" He instructed firmly, quickly slipping into Alpha Mode

"Yes, Alpha." She agreed easily.

"Now, we neglected something Omega, do you know what that may be?" He asked, circling her. She lowered her eyes to her feet as she thought about it.

"No, Alpha." She admitted.

"How's this for a reminder, my seed is running down your legs right now." He pointed out. She blushed, imagining the depraved image she must make, standing in the middle of his room nude as cum dripped down her thighs.

"Contraceptive charms!" She gasped, the realization coming far too late.

"What was that?" Draco asked coolly. She jumped.

"Contraceptive charms, Alpha." She corrected quickly.

"Did you remember them earlier and just not bother to mention it?" He demanded.

"No, Alpha." She assured him quickly. She had no desire to be pregnant. Not any time soon at least.

"Good girl." He praised; she relaxed as he continued. "I'll admit, it slipped my mind as well but I have a potion you will take that will handle it." He assured her. She knew the kind of potion he was referring to. It would prevent pregnancy from any sex acts during the past twenty four hours.

"Thank you, Alpha." She answered gratefully.

"Now, I've taken good care of you, haven't I?" He reminded her. She nodded.

"Yes, Alpha." She agreed.

"And forgetting to protect yourself, that was foolish of us wasn't it?" He asked.

"Yes, Alpha." She agreed.

"We won't make the same mistake again, will we?" He asked.

"No, Alpha." She assured him.

"Good girl." He praised, gently lifting her chin so she'd look at him.

"So, how do you suggest you show your gratitude for my caution?" He asked, his silver eyes shone with mischief. She smiled, liking where this was going.

"I could suck your cock, Alpha." She suggested.

"Such a filthy mouth, but no, I don't believe you've earned that, what would really bring me pleasure would be to make this wonderful ass bright red under my hand. Color?" She was blushing and she
felt a new rush of wetness to her core.

"Green, Alpha." She assured him. He ran his hand between his thighs, dragging one finger through the slick sensation of his own seed and her moisture.

"Look, you made a mess, clean it up." He offered her his finger which she eagerly took into her mouth, sucking firmly. Her eyes were hooded as she met his gaze. "I want you to go to the bed and get on it, forearms and knees with your ass up in the air." She blushed at how filthy the pose he was suggesting would be, at how much she wanted it.

"Yes, Alpha." She agreed.

"And you will not do a thing about my cum dripping down your thighs, that was a gift and you will thank me for it." He pressed, his expression dark. Her breath caught in her throat.

"Thank you, Alpha." She answered eagerly. He stood behind her, his hands tracing over her curves easily, skimming her breasts.

"Good Omega." He praised. He stomach dropped as years of patronization and humiliation hit her like a bucket of cold water.

"Yellow." She blurted. His hands stilled.

"What is it?" He asked gently, the alpha steel gone from his voice. "'Good girl' and 'My Omega' don't bother me but 'Good omega'… it feels different." She admitted uneasily. He nodded.

"I won't use it again. Do you want to continue?" He asked her gently.

"Yes." She agreed eagerly.

"Yes what?" He asked firmly. "Yes, Alpha." She corrected quickly. He smiled.

"Good girl."

…

Draco

Granger was a sight to behold. She was braced comfortably on his bed, hips tilted up. The combination of their essences shown on her thighs. She was trembling from anticipation. He went to his drawer first, setting out the cooling potion for later. He eyed the clamps at the back of his drawer for a moment but shook his head and decided against it, not for right now. Maybe later. Today he just wanted to spank her. A proper one this time, where the sting would last good and long. He knew Granger wasn't even positive about how she felt about pain and how much so they'd take it slow, and he'd enjoy every second of it.

"Color?" He checked.

"Green, Alpha." She answered quickly, eagerly.

"I'm just going to use my hand, no paddles. I will give you fifteen hits. After each one you will count and thank me, if you forget will we start over, do you understand? "He outlined quickly. He figured structure would help her relax into it, not think about when it was going to stop if she knew ahead of time. It would also hopefully keep her out of O Space until he was ready.

"Yes, Alpha." She assured him.
"Good Girl." He praised.

"Color?" He checked gently.

"Green, Alpha." She answered eagerly. He reached forward and grabbed her ass, kneading the flesh gently. She moaned as he warmed her up, rubbing and massaging the two perfect globes. She sighed, arching into his ministrations eagerly. She gasped as his thumbs smoothed near her cleft, not enough to even near that sensitive rosette but enough to suggest it. He retreated quickly, that taboo was certainly off the table for now. She relaxed as he retreated.

He started gentle, more for the sound than anything else but the first slap surprised her and she jumped. He tutted and she stilled, breathing heavily already. He waited patiently but no count came.

"Oh my sweet, lovely Omega, forgetting something?" He asked sternly. She tensed as she realized that she had already forgotten.

"Oh! One, thank you Alpha." She scrambled to spit out.

"Good effort but you're still too late, forget again and we'll add five more as well as starting over, understand?" He asked firmly.

"Yes, Alpha." He started over, the same gentle swing to her other cheek.

"One, thank you Alpha!" She gasped, arching her back towards him. He went again, carefully harder, right in the middle. "Two, thank you Alpha!" She gasped and he watched, his cock beginning to take interests in the proceedings as her flesh giggled slightly. He hit the left side again, smacking firmly. She groaned and thanked him immediately. Curiously, he reached between her legs and cupped her mound. She moaned and he felt as her essence dampened his palm. She was far wetter than he'd have expected and his cum was still pleasantly adorning her thighs. Granger was very, very interested in the proceedings. He smirked.

"What a filthy girl you are, getting wet just from me spanking you." He taunted. She whimpered and the flush spread down her chest. The next smack was harder on her right cheek and it was starting to redden nicely.

"Four, thank you, Alpha!" She gasped breathily. She thanked him with each hit and he kept going, carefully increasing the intensity as he did. He alternated through smacking each side and then hitting right over her crack. His hand had started to sting by the time he hit thirteen and she was crying. Yet she was still arching towards every hit and soaking wet and he was achingly hard.

"Color?" He asked gently.

"Green," She whimpered with a slight hesitation. The next slap made her groan and he could tell that she was nearing the point where pain would overwhelm pleasured. He'd have to be careful to moderate this.

"You should see yourself, begging to be spanked. You know the sting's not going to go away. Every time you sit, every time you move tomorrow, all you'll be able to feel, all you'll be able to think about is me." He reminded her.

"Please Alpha!" She cried out, tears sliding freely down her face now. He'd be worried if she wasn't also smiling in bliss.

"Fourteen, thank you, Alpha." She gasped. He landed the last smack over her bright red skin.
"Fifteen, thank you, Alpha." She sobbed gratefully, her arms buckling as she dropped onto the bed.

"Good girl, my beautiful, wonderful Omega, you were so good for me, took it so well." He praised gently. She whimpered and he gently rubbed her reddened skin. She groaned helplessly.

"Commulceo." He whispered, pointing his wand towards her clit. She jumped, moaning breathily as the buzzing sensation hit her.

"Yes!" She gasped. He smack her firmly on her ass and she whimpered.

"Yes what?" He reminded her.

"Yes, Alpha! Thank you Alpha!" She corrected. He smirked nipping gently at the mark on her neck. It only took a few moments before she was tensing, muscles tight as a bow string as she came. He straddled her legs by her knees watching as she came down. Just as she had stilled, her breath evening out, he canceled the charm.

"Finite." He murmured gently.

"Thank you Alpha." She panted desperately. He licked gently at her spine, tasting the sweat the had pooled there. She moaned deeply. "Alpha." She murmured.

"Come." He ordered quickly. She gasped, back bowing, tears starting again as she hid her face in the pillow. It was too soon to be comfortable, which he knew quite well. He waited just long enough for her to catch her breath before barking out another order. "Come." He knew this one would hurt from overstimulation but he had a hunch that that was exactly what she needed.

"Please! Alpha! Please!" She gasped, begging for him to stop or keep going he wasn't sure. He paused.

"Color?" He asked gently.

"Green!" She shouted with joy. He grinned.

"Come." He ordered again, not even waiting for her to come down before repeating himself.

"Come." He saw the moment she slid into O Space, boneless as she collapsed into the mattress. He stood up and flipped her gently. There was a blissed out expression on her face and her eyes were happily dazed.

"Good girl." He praised gently as he turned her onto her side. He uncapped the potion and it set to work applying itself to her skin. She moaned softly as the cooling crème went to work. He scratched her neck gently as a counter point, sending her a little deeper. His cock twitched painfully and he realized dizzily that he had forgotten he wasn't wearing pants. His prick was standing straight up but he still couldn't do anything. Granger didn't want anything to do with sex while under and it felt far too skeevy to jack off beside her, and there was no way in hell he was leaving and risking her dropping. Granger may have been the masochist but he was definitely in pain.

…

Hermione

She was floating, utterly untethered. It felt like the bath, but softer, totally submerged in a warm cloud. It felt a little like that moment before drifting to sleep or just as an orgasm started but so much better. Everything just felt wonderful. Her body was there but only distantly and they only thing she felt was soft, easy pleasure. It was wonderful, utterly perfect. She could stay here, wanted to more
than anything but she already felt reality tugging at her. Coming down felt being in a room as the fire dwindled in the middle of winter. At first it was just cool, then cold, then freezing. Her eyes slowly slid open and she groaned, rolling into Draco.

"Hey there, you okay?" He asked gently. All she was capable of managing was a grunt. He chuckled and pulled a blanket over the both of them. "You were so good for me, perfect, so beautiful." He praised softly, murmuring in her ear. She turned, snuggling into him farther. She realized slowly that he was still hard. She fumbled for his cock, reaching between them, but he flinched pulling back.

"You don't have to do that." He told her firmly.

"Want to." She murmured. He chuckled.

"Granger, you're barely keeping your eyes open." He reminded her.

"You should come, wanted you to come." She struggled to communicate. He chuckled again. She didn't appreciate that.

"Can I?" He asked, a nervous note to his voice.

"Are you asking my permission to masturbate?" She asked slowly, her voice coming back to her.

"Not exactly." He admitted, tucking his arm around her waist.

"Then what?" She asked, instead of answer, her rolled his hips against her, grinding against her ass. "Oh? Yeah, yeah you can do that." She told him, blushing profusely. The potion and his precum eased the way as his hard member rutted against her ass and lower back. He shifted and his cock slid between her cheeks. She blushed at strange sensation but it felt good, it really, really did.

"Still good?" He asked, grunting.

"Yeah." She assured him. He groaned, breathing heavily against her neck as he chased his relief. It was only a few thrusts later that his hands were gripping her hips and he was cumming. He groaned lowly, his cum splattering across her back. She sighed, the warm sticky feeling not intrinsically pleasant but she liked this, liked being claimed by him in such a primal, physical way. She was sure that she reeked of him now.

"Hmmm" He murmured pleasantly against her neck. His hand left her waist as he reached for his wand.

"Leave it." She told him quickly. He stilled.

"You sure?" He asked gently.

"Yeah." She confirmed. He smiled against the back of her neck.

"You should eat something." He told her gently, pulling the sheets up around them. "Dobby!" He called quickly. She tucked her face into the pillow as Draco gave the house elf his orders. She didn't like the idea of house elves. Most of the time they were treated even worse than slaves. It scared her. Thankfully, she had never seen or even heard rumors of Draco treating house elves in any way but humanely. Lucius on the other hand was a different story.

She shivered, casting the thought out of her mind, thinking of that terrifying and quickly ruining what remained of her buzz.
"I need you to sit up for a moment." He instructed gently.

"Why?" She groaned. She was so tired, she felt it in every inch of her body. It was good tired, but still.

"You need to drink the potion, remember?" He prodded, holding out a glass vial for her. She eyed it blankly.

"The…." She trailed off and then remember again, frantically grasping for the bottle.

"Yeah, the magic potion that's going to keep us safe from some terrifying consequences." He teased as she drank. The potion tasted disgusting, the burn of alcohol with the flavor of overly sweetened tea. She finished it with a grimace as Draco set the vial to the side.

"Children are terrifying?" She asked curiously.

"Yes." He confirmed, entirely serious. She snorted with laughter. The pop of Dobby apparating back into the room cut her off.

"Master Draco and Miss, I have your treats." He announced nervously, setting the tray on the bed.

"Thank you Dobby." Hermione told the elf gently. The poor thing looked incredibly nervous. He twisted his sheath in his tiny hands anxiously.

"Is Miss allowed to speak with me?" Dobby looked at Draco with panic.

"Miss is allowed to do whatever she pleases." Draco instructed, a happy lilt to his tone.

"Yes Master Draco." Dobby answered quickly before apparating away. Draco grabbed the tray of biscuits and pulled them towards them. She reached for one but he pushed her hand aside and brought a treat to her mouth.

"Mmmmmm" She moaned as the sugary sweet taste hit her tongue. Draco grinned salaciously. She rolled her eyes. "Why is your house elf afraid of you?" She asked stubbornly.

"Because my father is terrifying and I was a terrible adolescent." Draco answered nonchalantly. She could concede that point.

"Just be nice to him." She instructed firmly. He smiled.

"Was planning on it." He reminded her. She shrugged. "In about an hour I have to head out, got an appointment with my mother. You're welcome to stay here."

"I should make an appearance with Gin and Harry, it'd be strange if I didn't see them on my day off." She admitted reluctantly. As much as she wanted to wait for him in his bed, it wasn't smart.

"Come right back?" Draco asked hopefully, those silver eyes all lit up.

"Do you still have plans for me?" She asked eagerly. He smirked.

"I always have plans for you." He reminded her. She smiled hopefully.

"I'm going to hold you to that." She told him firmly. He laughed.

...
Leaving Draco's bed felt like leaving the warmest room in the estate to go outside in the middle of January, a terrible, dread worthy transition. That was probably bad. She loved her friends, mostly, she just didn't want to be with them. Not right now. Time just felt too precious.

She felt time ticking by acutely as hurried to the barn. Gin and Harry were already there when she arrived, talking heatedly outside Buckbeak's stall.

"Eh hem?" She cleared her throat loudly. They both jumped and turned to her with guilt all over their faces. "What are you talking about?"

"Gin's seeing Blaise." Harry started frantically.

"Harry." Ginny hissed, tossing her hair over her shoulder furiously.

"Why are you sticking your nose in this?" Hermione demanded. Why did he always have to get involved, swooping in like some goddamn hero all of the time.

"How are you not?" Harry snapped. Hermione wheeled, not prepared for this fight.

"How is what she does your business?" She spat. Harry was already furious, getting into her space immediately.

"Ginny putting herself at risk with Blaise Zabini is dangerous. He's dangerous." Harry countered harshly.

"You both need to shut up. Like right the bloody hell now." Ginny ordered slowly and dangerously.

Hermione and Harry exchanged a confused look and froze. The younger girl's arms were crossed over her chest as she glared at both of them. Hermione got hit with the same sensation when Molly would catch her trying to sneak sweets before dinner, thorough reproach and more than a little guilt.

"I can make my own decisions here, all right?" Ginny reminded them firmly, her shoulders straight and her chin lifted.

"That's what I've been trying to tell him!" Hermione protested.

"You need to shut up too." Ginny snapped, rounding on her with her eyes narrowed.

"What?" The brunette recoiled, surprised at that tone. Her friend never spoke to her that way.

"Mione, I was terrified to be an omega, because you told me how terrible it is." Ginny confessed desperately.

"It is terrible!" Hermione sighed, exasperated with her naivete.

"Is it? Sure, Draco fucked you up as a little kid, but you can't tell me that you don't get it now. I've seen the way you look at him, and I've seen the way he looks at you." Ginny asserted earnestly. Hermione blushed.

"How long did you know?" She asked, wondering how she could have possibly been caught.

"Long enough." Ginny shrugged.

"I told you that you shouldn't keep secrets from her." Harry intervened smarmily. Ginny rolled her eyes and rounded on him.
"Shut up Harry, fun fact, you're not my older brother, I have enough of them thank you, I just want a friend. You were so busy scaring off the big bad wolf that you never seemed to realize that that might be just how I like them." She pointed out smugly. Harry's eyebrows almost got lost in his hair as he gaped at her.

"What?" He sputtered.

"I like being an omega. There's a power to it, pheromones go both ways. I tilt my neck and half of the alphas in the room start panting. I like being with Blaise, he acts like an asshole to stay guarded, but he's not like that with me. What we have might not be normal or picturesque but we do have feelings for each other." Ginny confessed, and shrugged like what she said wasn't incredibly important and unique. She was grown up and Blaise helped her do that. She softened her expression as she continued, "I know that you thought we'd end up together Harry, but you're not my type, I need an alpha with some oomph behind him, that's not you. You'll find yourself some cute little beta once you let yourself look, but I'm not her."

"Katie." Harry confessed nervously.

"What?" Hermione asked gently. Harry blushed, the color going all the way down his neck.

"I like Katie, have for a really long time, but I don't have the money to even consider courting her." He clarified. Ginny and Hermione glanced at each other for a beat and then shrugged.

"Huh, okay then." Ginny accepted it easily.

"Good for you." Hermione offered. Harry nodded his appreciation briefly and they lapsed into uncomfortable silence.

"So, what now?" Ginny asked, they glanced at each other for a bit, each stuck in a miserable dilemma with no way out.

"I guess we just wait." Harry offered up; Hermione shrugged. That was her plan.

Draco was in the first hallway from the stables when she left. She grinned as she saw him, only sparing a cursory glance towards the empty area before pulling him into the nearest cupboard.

He kissed her firmly, running his fingers through her hair gleefully. She smiled against his mouth, dragging his nails down his back. He groaned, flicking his tongue into her mouth. She moaned as he cupped her ass; she felt the pleasant sting from his spanking course through her. She was starting to get wet already and felt him hardening against her stomach. *Perfect.*

The door creaked open slowly and they both jumped. Hermione hid, tucking herself him, but the horrified messenger pressed on, clearing his throat as he uncomfortably delivered the message.

"Miss Hermione Greengrass? Lady Astoria is summoning you."
"If you breathe a word about this to any one, I'll make sure it's the last breath you ever take." Draco threatened, grabbing the messenger by his shirt. The poor man held up his hands by his head.

"Sir, I'm afraid it's too late for that." He sputtered. "What does that mean?" Draco hissed.

"Sir, Lady Astoria told me that I'd find the two of you together; it was part of her instructions." The messenger explained. Hermione went cold and pushed away, shoving past Draco and sprinting down the hallway. Hermione's mind spun. If the messenger had just come moments earlier, they would have been find; they never would have been caught. It was just a few minutes but now it was all going to hell.

She closed Astoria's door behind her quietly, very deliberately letting it click shut before turning to face Astoria. The younger girl was sitting at her dresser, looking at herself in the mirror as she brushed her hair. Astoria didn't turn to acknowledge the other girl, despite clearly being aware of her presence. There was a dark look in Astoria's eyes, a cold, calculated kind of cruelty Hermione had never seen marring Astoria's beauty before now.

"When were you going to tell me Mione? Before or after the wedding?" Astoria finally spoke, breaking the tense silence, with harsh, clipped words, that hinted to fury just under the surface.

"Tori..." Hermione felt her stomach sink, even as the nickname left her mouth. The anger, the dismissal. Astoria knew, and nothing she said could make this better now. Astoria interpreted the pause differently, boiling with offense.

"What? I'm too young to understand? I'm old enough to get married, I'm old enough to know that my best friend is sleeping with my fiancé." She snapped, finally turning in her chair to look at Hermione directly.

"It wasn't like that Tori, I didn't want to hurt you." She pleaded, stepping towards Astoria and reaching for her, as if a good pat on the back was all that was needed to console her.

"Well it doesn't matter very much now does it? Contract gets signed at sunset tomorrow. Then he gives up all his whores." Astoria hissed, turning back to her reflection pointedly.

"It's nice to know you think so little of me," Hermione murmured, unable to hide the hurt. Bitch she probably could've dealt with, but Astoria was treating her as if she was common trash, a filthy thing that had somehow managed to cross her path and sully her life in some small way.

"Just calling it as I see it. He fucked you didn't you? Or did he save that for people whom I don't consider family?" She snapped. Tears threatened to spill over.

"Astoria! Where is this even coming from? I know you don't have feelings for him. I messed up, I get it. I should've told you." She conceded immediately.

"Told me! You shouldn't have done it! You owe everything to me! You think you're so perfect with that fucking O. The perfect little omega that all the alphas want. You're despicable." The envy was almost more terrifying than the rage. How had Astoria missed the years of mistreatment and abuse?
How could she possibly see her O as a good thing.

"You think I'm happy being an omega! You know better than anyone that that's not true. It's just who I am, I have no choice, no control of it. God, Astoria you have no idea how easy your life is. And you yell at me for finally accepting something that I wanted. I didn't seduce him. It just happened. It wasn't anything I planned and we tried, we really tried. It just happened." She explained desperately.

"Nothing just happens in a vacuum, we all have an influence in our lives you know who said that?" Astoria hissed her own words back at her.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry I didn't tell you and I'm so sorry I hurt you. But I'm not sorry for loving him. I won't apologize for how I feel, I've been doing it for too long." Hermione answered firmly. No matter how angry Astoria was she wouldn't toss away their relationship, or herself to placate the other girl.

"Get out." Astoria ordered.

"What?" Hermione gaped.

"You're fired. Get out." Astoria snapped.

"But, you can't!" Hermione argued.

"I can. You're released from you contract and you're fired. Now leave before I have to get guards to escort you out." Astoria tossed her hair over her shoulder and sat back down at her vanity.

"You can't kick me out of the manor." Hermione pointed out. The estate was Malfoy's; Astoria had no authority.

"Sure I can, you really think Cissy wouldn't support me?" Astoria pointed out. Hermione could see Narcissa's cruel sneer easily, and her blood ran cold.

"Where I am supposed to go?" Hermione asked as she began to tremble.

"A brothel for all I care, just get out." She flinched as if she had been slapped.

"Can I at least wait till morning? Tori, I've given my whole life to you." She reminded her.

"No, you haven't. You really haven't. But sure, you have till sunrise and not a moment later." Astoria shrugged as if Hermione was merely a floating piece of dust, totally irrelevant to Astoria.

She was banging on Draco's door what felt like mere heartbeats later. It swung open slowly, revealing a sleep stupid Malfoy. His hair was messy, his eyes were droopy, and his shirt was missing. Any other day, it would've made her smile. Today was not any day.

"She knows. Astoria knows." She gasped with no preamble. Draco said nothing, snapping awake instantly. He wrapped an arm around her and pulled her inside his room. She registered the soft click of the door closing at the same time she realized she was sobbing. Tears poured down her face and normally she'd be embarrassed but she couldn't help the overwhelming flood of grief. Air caught in the back of her throat and her voice broke in in the middle of a desperate sob. All the while, Draco said nothing, simply stroking her hair and holding her tightly. It only made it worse. Her knees started to buckle and he took her weight easily before guiding her to the bed. He sat but she collapsed into him. Her head in his lap as she cried hysterically. He made a gentle shushing noise before shifting so he was lying beside her, not saying anything. He seemed to sense that words
wouldn't help and she had never been so grateful for his intuition.

It seemed like hours before she had finally calmed enough to speak.

"She fired me." She started with the most pressing news first. It hurt too much to think about the other things Astoria had said. Draco stiffened, and though she couldn't see him in the dark, she could feel his concerned appraisal.

"That's okay, we can work around it. I'll hire you. You can work wherever you want." He told her sincerely, lifting her chin.

"She's going to tell your mother, make sure I never set foot anywhere near the manor again. Probably have me blacklisted too." Hermione corrected despondently, taking no pleasure in being right this time.

"I won't let her. She can't do that." Draco protested, pulling at his hair as if tearing it out would make this all better.

"She can. And she'll do it easily. I'm nothing to them Draco. Not even human. Not anymore." She sobbed desperately.

"You're wrong. You're everything to me. The most important thing. I'll leave Mione, I'll go with you." He vowed wildly.

"You can't. You're going to stay here, with your family, and you're going to get married to Astoria. I will be fine."

"You don't believe that."

Then, it got worse.

...  

_Draco_

The scream shattered through the still night. Draco and Hermione looked at each other in horror for the smallest fraction of a moment before they too of running. Draco had just flung open his door when the sound of glass shattering and then rolling echoed down the hallway. They froze and Draco realized with cold certainty what would cause that noise. The ballroom windows shattering. He ran as fast as he could, Hermione running just as fast beside him. He froze rounding on her. She skidded to a stop.

"What are you doing!" She shouted, her hair a wild mess.

"You need to stay here." He insisted. "Let me handle it." He couldn't let her put herself at risk.

"If you think I'm letting you or anyone else run head first into danger without help you're delusional." She snapped, turning to walk away. He pulled her back.

"I mean it Granger, I won't be able to deal with anything if you're in danger." He pointed out. It was hard enough to keep hi head straight on a good day.

"This is ridiculous, you're wasting time." He panicked, unable to see anything past that gold band. Her magic just wasn't strong enough to protect her and he couldn't protect the both of them.

"Stay." The order was sharp and Hermione froze in place, her eyes narrowing and her fists
"You bastard." She hissed. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at him with fury.

"I'm sorry. Hide." He ordered, she walked away slowly, clearly fighting it at every step and he could only hope that the order was strong enough to hold until he could handle this.

... 

_Hermione_

She was going to kill him.

...

_Draco_

The doors of the ballroom were already wide open. Draco could barely process the scene in front of him as his guards fought for their lives, falling as green flashes ricocheted around the room. Draco stuck to the edge, knowing better than to dive into the middle. He would only get in the way at this point. The intruders were all masked, and in maroon robes. There was one person behind the rest of the front line, shouting incoherently over the noise of fighting. He threw his head back and bellowed, his hood falling back.

"I want the royal blood." Theo Nott howled, "or every one of you will die."

_Hermione_

She fought it from behind the tapestry, closing her eyes and gritting her teeth in concentration. This wasn't a throw away mistake. He had wanted her to comply and she had but she wouldn't be side lined. Not when it matter. She heard feet coming down the hallway and with very particle of her energy she opened her mouth and cried out.

"I'm here." She called out, and just like that, the spell was broken. She threw aside the tapestry to crash into Harry. His eyes were wide, his hair mussed, and his clothes rumpled.

"They're here for me." He gasped.

_Draco_

His guards were failing. He wanted to run, to flee, but he knew that if the search extended beyond the ballroom the chances were high that they'd find Hermione and who knew what they would do to her.

"THEODORE NOTT!" He shouted over the din, miraculously, the intruding line stepped back, their wands leveled at the remaining Malfoy fighters. "Need all of these bastards to fix some petty feud?"

"Oh Draco, you fool. You have no idea." Theo laughed, leveling his wand at the blond as Draco stepped into the room, gliding into the circle that surrounded Theo with ease. The hilt of his wand dug into his hand as he clenched it in his palm. He had never been the perfect dueler but his trainer had always just said that he didn't have the proper motivation. He'd guess that that wouldn't be his issue today.

"This wasn't about you but I've been waiting to break your pompous face for seventeen years, and far be it from me to pass up the chance." Theo hissed, launching an angry curse. Draco blocked it,
and the next, the curse flying at a deadly pace. He knew himself well and he knew that he wouldn't last. Not very long at least.

**Hermione**

"What the hell are you talking about?" Hermione hissed. They didn't have time for this. They had to go help.

"They gave me the last name 'Potter' right, that's easy it said on the note in the basket." Harry reminded her. What the hell did him getting dropped on his aunt's doorstep have to do with any of this?

"Yeah your father probably traded ceramics. Why?" Hermione snapped.

"What if we were thinking too literally? What if that's my real surname?" Harry explained, his eyes wild as if he was discovering something more important than the fact that they were literally under attack.

"What then?" She hissed, not getting this at all.

"That tapestry, the sacred twenty eight. I'm a part of them Mione. Potter. I'm a lord, or maybe even…" Harry trailed off, his eyes getting even wider.

"What? You're not making any sense." He couldn't possibly be suggesting that…

"Mione! Listen to me!" A crash echoed down the hallway, closer this time. "I have to go." Harry sprinted away, and the tight feeling in Hermione's chest multiple tenfold. Something was wrong, really wrong and she was going to find out what.

**Draco**

The doors flew off the hinges as his father entered. Draco didn't have time to breathe a sigh of relief in between the curses Theo was still sending at him.

"Lower your wand Theodore." The older man hissed, never taking his eyes or his wand off of him.

"Why would I do that Lucius?" Theo asked, practically cackling.

"You ungrateful bastard. You owe me everything." Lucius snapped as he moved closer.

"I don't owe you shit! You're harboring the heir!" Theo accused and Draco really wished that he knew what the fuck was going on.

"Without me you'd be a pathetically little brat of a lord with nothing more than a pittance of lands." His father accused lowly.

"Without you, my title would never have been in danger!" Theo protested indignantly. "Just give us the heir and this will all be over." He hissed.

"He's just a stable boy! Utterly unremarkable, he never would have known if it weren't for you and your idiot father's insistence that I investigate the birth records." Lucius accused. From behind him, a man in maroon lowered his mask. Nott senior was a cruel man, whose features had twisted into a permanent scowl which smirk cruelly as he hissed at Draco's father.

"Funny what you say when you believe I'm not around Lucius." The other lord whirled, quickly directing his wand at the elder.
"You bastard, how dare you invade my home." His father snarled. Draco spotted a black head of hair slipping into the ballroom. *Stableboy.* Well, that would explain a lot to say the least.

Lucius fired off the first curse and suddenly the bedlam erupted again. Out of the corners of his eyes, Draco watched as Theo's accompaniment sprang into action again, fighting back the reinforcements that had arrived during the duel. Draco was struggling, focused or not, Theo was a madman and was firing curses like it. A spell ricocheted off a chandelier and he just managed to shield himself against it when Theo fired again, just as his shield fell, his wand flew across the room and Draco had just a moment to process that he was going to die before Theo was smirking with triumph, directing his wand at the other lord with glee.

"AVIS OPPUNGO!" The shout was unexpected and Draco whirled as a series of birds materialized, heading straight for Theo. Hermione Granger was standing in the middle of the fray, her wand directed at Theo with malice. The birds were a measly distraction but it gave Hermione just enough time. "Accio wand!" She hissed and caught Draco's wand easily before tossing it to him. He grinned, catching it easily. Theo's next volleys surprised them both, the spells raining down quickly, even with her help he was still barely managing to hold him off. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her hit the ground, gritting her teeth. He didn't even have time to shout before the curse hit him from the side, pain slicing through him as he crumpled. He watched in horror as his wand rolled away, entirely unable to move as he twitched from the pain.

Theo howled with glee.

"Protego!" Hermione screamed, dragging herself up, and light burst from beside him, a brilliant gold. The charm shimmered in front of him, but he barely noticed as he caught sight of the fractured gold band on the floor beside him. The pain slowly eased, the curse cut off by Hermione's shield on steroids and he rose, ignoring the lingering ache as he snagged his wand. He cast quickly, hoping to catch Theo off guard. He had no such luck.

A coarse voice yelled from above, "TENEBRIS IGNI" was all he had time to say before he went toppling over the railing and crashing onto the ground in a heap, but it was enough to make Draco tremble in fear. That had been the beginning to the incantation for fiendfyre. Draco gaped at the redhead man standing on the balcony. Ronald Fucking Weasley had just saved all of their arses. He shook off that thought quickly, turning back to Theo, only to see that he was already on the ground, stupefied when he hadn't been paying attention. His father cast the final curse and the elder Nott fell heavily to the ground. They looked around, dazed to realize that there were no intruders left standing. They were alone and now they just had to figure out what the fuck happened.

*Hermione*

There was soot on her wrist. It was all she could think about. Magic crackled around her fingertips. She felt all powerful, as if she could do anything. Her magic was triumphant, gleeful at finally being unleashed. She had no idea what to do with it.

It felt like losing an arm as Lucius cast a charm to repair the bracelet. It flew back on her, and she screamed, crumpling.

"What the fuck!" Draco shouted in the silent ballroom as he crouch protectively over her.

"We have many things to discuss, and it's best if the slave is controlled as we do." Lucius announced coolly. With a heavy thud, the doors flew open once again as Blaise entered.
"I sent an owl to the Crown, Royal Guards will be arriving to take care or these bastards shortly." He announced, kicking Theo's fallen form as he passed.

"Where were you?" Draco demanded, Blaise cocked an arrogant eyebrow.

"Oh you know, just sealing the wards so the dozens of wizards waiting on the outside couldn't get in." He spat, rolling his eyes.

"Ah, good job." Draco conceded. Blaise laughed dryly.

Hermione looked around uneasily as Astoria and Daphne came into the ballroom, Daphne's arm was wrapped protectively around the shaking blonde. Their parents walked uneasily behind them.

"A man grabbed us from our room, dragged us with him into the balcony." Daphne explained as Astoria shook uncontrollably. "He was planning to take us with him after casting the fiendfyre. I tried to fight him off but he had Tori. We would've been taken if Ronald hadn't arrived to help." She announced, just as Ron came over, having finished binding the intruders who would wake up.

"We were ambushed as well but the man simply apparated away a few moments ago." Ira Greengrass spoke for the him and his wife.

"Something must have told him that it was over." Daphne suggested uneasily. Lucius cleared his throat.

"Guards, I want you to conduct a thorough sweep of the manor as well as strengthen the wards. Ensure that no one else has been taken prisoner." He order coolly. The guards snapped to attention, scurrying out of the room.

"I'd like to thank you for what you did. If you hadn't stopped that man before he finished the spell…" Lady Greengrass addressed Ron, who nodded humbly.

"I will of course, write to the Crown about your bravery, saving two noble household seems deserving of a knighthood in my opinion." Ira offered warmly. "Of course, if there is anything I can give you in return for saving my daughters, it is yours." Something lit up in Ron's eyes and Hermione knew with calm certainty exactly what he was going to say.
"Your daughter." Weasley suggested proudly, his shoulders straightening. Astoria froze, her entire body stilling as she slowly looked up at him with doe eyes.

"What?" Lady Greengrass snapped, that shrill voice echoing through the room. Hermione was tense beside him and a part of Draco thought that Astoria would be glaring at him, but she couldn't take her eyes off of the redhead.

"Your daughter's hand in marriage." Ron clarified, looking at Astoria, who immediately focused her gaze on the floor, even as color climbed up her cheeks.

"That ridiculous. She's spoken for." Lord Greengrass scoffed abrasively, folding her arms across her chest. Lord Greengrass rested his hand on her shoulder even as he fumed.

"Not Mione?" Stableboy asked, focusing on his friend. He so wanted to snarl at the redhead but Hermione gently touched his wrist, warning him against it.

"Not Mione." Ron repeated. He smiled as he made eye contact with the omega and she nodded in understanding.

"Huh" Daphne contributed helpfully, studying them all like a particularly interesting charm.

"How dare you step in on my son's claim?" Lucius snarled, outraged that no one else was really outraged. To be honest, Draco really didn't care, in fact this could be a good thing, in fact.

"I rescind my offer. He can marry her." He blurted, stepping in with little grace. Hermione glared at him. Then he cleared his throat and added, "with Astoria's consent." Hermione nodded again, a tentative smile slipping on to her face as her best friend beamed.

"I give it." Astoria said simply, and the a massive smile spread across the Weasel's face. He caught the eye of his omega from across the room as he cleared his throat.

"On one condition" Draco stipulated. "Hermione is released from slavery, with full references and your assistance in getting her a paying job elsewhere if she desires it."

"Are you sure that's the condition you really want Drake?" Daphne snapped, the room turned to gawk at her for her candor as she continued. "Because without a legal guardian, Hermione can't wed, not until she receives a new position and then receives their permission." He had never allowed himself to consider marriage before but now...

"Wed?" Narcissa squeaked, eyeing Daphne distrustfully. His poor mother was in for quite the shock.

"Well, Daph, " He said with equally parts bite and fondness. "I haven't exactly asked yet, and this doesn't seem to be the right forum.

"I'd say yes." Hermione spoke finally, looking at him with wide eyes as she stepped closer. "I don't care about forums." She bit her lip, blushing at her own impropriety despite herself, he smiled.
"Good, will you marry me?" He asked quietly, oblivious to the rest of the room. His mother squeaked, his father gasped.

"Yes." She answered. He felt like whooping or something equally undignified and he may have, if the real world hadn't still been there.

"She doesn't have my consent." Lord Greengrass snapped. "I will not accept this disgrace."

"Astoria's marrying a knighted merchant." Hermione snapped in disbelief. The Lord glared at her, astounded by the insubordination. Hermione didn't seem to give a shit. Draco was proud.

"I give it." Harry announced, stepping forward. "I give my consent to the engagement."

"Congrats," Blaise snarled with spite. "you're a stableboy."


"What?" Lucius hissed.

"You're a part of the peerage?" Draco gasped in disbelief. Hermione whacked his arm.

"Yes, my titles actually higher than yours, I'm ten from the throne as of right now." Harry clarified smugly, a little too pleased with himself in Draco's opinion.

"Do you have any proof or do you just expect us to start referring to you as 'your grace'?" Lord Greengrass snapped sarcastically.

"I have a letter, signed and sealed with the signatures of James and Lilly Potter, which was preserved by Petunia, her sister, which explains and guarantees my origins. The intent was for me to be raised under your safekeeping Lord until I could be moved to see the king, my aunt and you're intervention prevented that Lucius."

"Excuse me?" Lucius howled, approaching Harry with his wand outstretched.

"Theo was here to kill both of us, because we were the only ones who knew of my birthright. Unless you intend to kill everyone in this room and intercept my messenger to the King's guard, the secret is out. I will be reclaiming my lands, and if you block this engagement I will ensure that the King knows exactly who pointed the rebels towards Lily and James Potter." Harry spoke slowly and coolly, his shoulders straight with that undeniable pride that had never made sense before.

"You still can't give consent for the omega, you don't own her." Lord Greengrass reminded Harry.

"I give it." Lady Greengrass announced quietly, in the silence of the next few beats everyone leaned towards her. "I still technically own the girl, my daughter didn't have the authority to release her, and I give consent for her to be promised to the Malfoy boy, be released from her contract, and go free, in that order."

"So, Everybody's happy?" Draco tried, pulling Hermione into his arms. She laughed softly, leaning into him with her eyes closed and a tentative smile on her face.

"Ah hem?" Blaise cleared his throat bitterly.

"Well, if everyone else is doing it, I might as well," Daphne shrugged. "I won't marry Zabini. If you try to make me, I will stand on that altar in front of God and Country and announce that I slept with
anyone and everyone that I could." The gasps that rocketed around the room could be heard in space. "I forfeit my title, and my inheritance rights. Astoria can have it all, I don't mind; I'm going into a trading business with some Bulgarians."

"Zabini?" Hermione called across the room, gaining reproachful glares from her former supervisors before they remembered that they had no right any more. "Ginny's like a sister. Don't you dare mess up again or I'm coming for you alright?" He nodded, and Draco ran his finger under the gold band on her wrist.

"I'll get this off of you the moment we rip up that contract, okay?" He whispered in his ear, she nodded. "And then I want to see you make good on that threat."

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Hermione  

"Mione?" Astoria called quietly. Hermione glanced back at Draco, her fiancé, god she loved that.

"Go," He murmured quietly, kissing the top of her hair. She walked back, reluctantly stepping away from him.

"Hey Tori." She smiled softly.

"He really loved you." Astoria told her, close to tears. Hermione nodded.

"And Ron really loved you." Hermione added, a brief flicker of guilt hit her when she remembered all of the time that she had threatened Ron to try to get him to stay away. Guess it hadn't worked after. Astoria nodded.

"Will you ever be able to forgive me for those terrible things I said?" Astoria asked, looking like she already knew the answer and didn't like it.

"Tori, we all almost died today, it's already done." Hermione promised tearily, rocketing into the other girl's arms. Astoria returned the hug with equal enthusiasm, her face buried in her neck. Hermione would deny till her last day that the wet spot on Astoria's silk robe was tears, and she was sure Astoria would say the same about Hermione's black cotton.

She knew it wasn't perfect, it would take time to heal all of that pain, to figure out how to be friends again now that Hermione wasn't obligated to like her. Maybe they wouldn't be friends and that would be sad, but Hermione had hope and for now, that was all that mattered

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A part of her thought that room would screech to a halt when she walked in. A part of her thought there would be gasps, or murmurs, or cries of outrage. She was wrong.

She stepped seamlessly into the crowd, like she had always done, and it was only after the third batch of compliments that she realized what felt so different. She wasn't blending in, but she was belonging. In a room of people bred for beauty, in a room where everyone was rich and pompous, people didn't question for a minute that she belonged, that she was good enough. It made her walk a little prouder, smile a little bigger, and gave her the courage to cross the room to the person that she was really here to see.

"Fancy seeing you here" Hermione grinned, sidling up to the young lord. Draco grinned right back, intentionally letting her see his eyes appraising her figure, only 'hmmmm'ing in response. "Harry's
"settling in nicely." Hermione observed.

"He's floundering." Draco laughed, sipping his drink.

"Really?" She asked, it looked to her like Harry was doing well, schmoozing all of the right people, and looking comfortable.

"Lady Wellsley has a very distinct laugh, it's incredibly obnoxious. Trust me, we'd know if Harry was really making her laugh." Draco explained easily.

"Should we bail him out?" She asked, "we" meaning him of course. She wasn't that accepted yet. But she was working on it.

"The things I do for you." He kissed the top of her head before slipping across the room. He appeared right beside Harry who jumped. Within moments a horrifyingly loud laugh was echoing in the ball room. Draco smiled and winked in her direction. She laughed.

"Have you chosen a handmaiden yet?" Astoria asked as she slid up beside her. It was Hermione's turn to jump.

"Any suggestions?" Hermione asked breezily.

"All the good ones are taken. Or retired." Astoria sighed dramatically, smirking.

"Funny." Hermione responded dryly.

"Harry got his lands." Astoria announced.

"Yes, as long as he takes himself out of succession." Hermione explained. She rolled her eyes. Harry never actually wanted the power, just what he was entitled to.

"And you'll be titled after the wedding." Astoria stated. It wasn't a question.

"Honorary, but yeah." Hermione smiled. Narcissa had arranged that bit. She was still a tough one to crack but Hermione was managing, mostly.

"And you'll write?" Astoria asked like it was no different from the rest of her questions.

"Of course." She smiled before turning to the blonde, studying her carefully. "Are you happy?"

"So happy. I wasn't planning on getting the title or the guy I wanted but I got both." Astoria laughed and blushed, amazed at her own luck.

"'Everything did work out neatly huh?" Hermione laughed, it was pretty surreal.

"Almost like magic." Astoria teased.

"That was terrible." Hermione refused to laugh. She wasn't going to laugh, and she was laughing.

"Yeah it was pretty bad." Astoria admitted.

"Is Daph okay?" Hermione asked seriously.

"Daph is, well Daph is good, but Daph is Daph." Astoria shrugged easily.

"She hasn't said a word to you about any of it has she?" Hermione checked.
"No, not a word." Astoria shook her head.

"I heard a rumor." Hermione announced slowly.

"Really?" Astoria turned towards her, eyebrows raised.

"Well Draco heard a rumor." Hermione clarified.

"As I expected." Astoria smirked.

"Somebody else disappeared right as Daphne did." Hermione started.

"Really?" Astoria said slowly, smiling slightly.

"I'll give you ten guesses." Hermione offered. There was no way that Astoria could guess.

"Pansy Parkinson." Astoria answered with certainty.

"How?" Hermione asked, eyeing the other girl curiously.

"I am her sister after all. I noticed more than either of you thought I did." Astoria said a little coolly. The resentment was still there but they were working on it. Eventually they'd get there.

"I guess you beat me on that one, I did not see that couple coming." Hermione conceded.

"Well I didn't see Ginny and Blaise coming." Astoria offered.

"They're not together yet." Hermione corrected.

"Bullshit, they can't stop looking at each other." Astoria scoffed.

"All they're doing is looking, that's how I know they're not together." Hermione smirked. Even when they were just in the same room together, Blaise and Ginny radiated so much sexual tension that you could cut it with a knife. She and Draco had to work overtime just picking up their slack. She blushed at her own thoughts.

"Blaise didn't deny it that night." Astoria said significantly.

"No, he did not. They're taking it slow." Hermione assured.

"They're taking it slow." Astoria repeated skeptically.

"They started too fast the first time, they're taking it slow." Hermione repeated with more certainty than she actually had.

"How are you?" Astoria asked gently and something told Hermione that she wouldn't take just a simple fine.

"I'm really good. Draco's perfect and this" She gestured meaningfully around the ballroom. "has been a tricky transition but I honestly couldn't be happier."

"Good. You deserve this Mione, all of it." Astoria insisted, her eyes shining with unshed tears.

"I'm glad you think so." Hermione murmured uneasily. It didn't always feel that way.

"I'm sorry I didn't… do more for you, help you, make it easier…" Astoria fumbled for words.
"Astoria you saved me." Hermione reminded her firmly.

"When I was two, I didn't exactly make your life easier these last couple months." Astoria ducked her head with shame.

"I wouldn't have had it any other way." Hermione admitted. All of the drama, all of the trouble, it got them where they were now.

"I shouldn't have said what I did." Astoria asserted.

"I shouldn't have had an affair with your fiancee." Hermione shrugged. In her mind they were pretty much even.

"Do you regret it?" Astoria asked slowly.

"I don't regret falling in love with Draco. I'm sorry that I broke your trust in the process." Hermione explained. Astoria nodded slowly, thinking hard.

"I guess that's all I can ask for" Astoria shrugged and then paused heavily. "It never really was about Draco."

"I know" Hermione assured her and then smiled, "And I'm guessing Ron knows too."

"He does." Astoria blushed.

"He's a very lucky man." Hermione told her sincerely. Astoria's smile turned a little smug.

"Yes, yes he is." Astoria agreed happily.

"Whose very lucky?" Blaise asked, shipping his champagne as he appeared behind them.

"The tailor who makes my lingerie." Hermione answered snappily. Blaise cringed. When she was a maid she had felt some obligation to be cordial to Blaise, when it wasn't five o'clock in the morning, but now, now she had free reign and Blaise would have to deal with all of her sass, not just the small portion he had been exposed to. He wasn't faring well as of late. He cringed, did a half pass over her figure before catching himself, started to say something, shook his head and then left befuddled. Astoria giggled.

Arms easily wrapped around her waist from behind her and Draco hooked his chin over her shoulder.

"You're mean." He told her, only teasing. He liked her lack of fear lately and she liked who she was becoming in this new role. She felt free. Free and honest.

"Only occasionally." She shrugged as he kissed her temple.

"He's only uncomfortable because he knows I'd kill him, is that really what you want to exploit?" He asked.

"I'll exploit his other weaknesses once I find them." She vowed. He groaned.

"Oh lord, this is going to be very interesting for me." He observed. She laughed.

"You wouldn't have it any other way." She reminded him. He just grinned in response.

"You two are sickeningly sweet." Okay, she had kind of forgotten Astoria was there.
"You and Weasel, ahem, Weasley are no better." Draco reminded her. They got along better now that they weren't both pretending, even if they were still feeling each other out.

"He told me you apologized." Astoria announced.

"Why?" Hermione looked over her shoulder in surprise, never having heard about that. Draco's ears were turning red, a trait he and Ron shared actually.

"For the time your fiance threatened mine." Astoria explained easily, smirking.

"You threatened him?" Hermione gasped, whirling on her fiance in a beat.

"You don't even like him." Draco reminded her.

"I have no problem with Ron. I didn't like when he hit on me every five minutes but I have no problem with Ron specifically. We were friends for a very long time." She clarified. Draco rolled his eyes, clearly not quite buying it.

"It was an image thing, and I apologized." Draco repeated, clearing his throat.

"Good for you, you're not done yet." She reminded him with a pointed look and a raised eyebrow.

"Trust me I'm aware. Astoria?" He turned formally to the blonde, taking his arm away. Hermione pretended the sudden cold didn't bother her.

"Yes?" The younger girl straightened and lifted her chin.

"I'm sorry for the way our, um courtship went. I didn't treat you with the respect you deserved." Draco apologized clumsily. Astoria smiled sadly.

"Hard to when you're in love with Mione." She replied flippantly, there was a beat of uncomfortable tension between them. "It's okay Draco, I understand." Astoria conceded kindly.

"Thank you." Draco nodded politely.

"We're not gonna be friends any time soon, but I forgive you." Astoria admitted.

"Good." Draco agreed, nodding in acceptance.

"Take care of her." Astoria ordered before floating away, across the ballroom.

"Something tells me that will be the other way around." Draco laughed, looking at her in that painfully sincere way he insisted on when he was being sappy. She blushed. Astoria floated away and Draco took her hand, kissing the inside of her wrist again. The scars were fading, had been since the bracelet had been officially removed. She had cried. The O on her wrist was as prominent as ever but she didn't mind that one so much.

He ran his fingers along his mark on her neck. That had happened after, in a rare private moment in his room. She wasn't allowed too many of those any more. Now that she was free and marrying a noble suddenly everyone was concerned about her chastity. They had both agreed that that was a secret better left kept to themselves. The mark hadn't burned the way she had imagined during her childhood but had felt like he was tracing his seal with his finger, the way that he had done for months. The sensation had been intense as he sealed the charm and they had definitely needed that privacy in the aftermath.

Nasty rumors had circulated immediately after they went public but the combination of Minerva's
firm hand and Narcissa's immense powers of blackmail had put an end to that. Now, all was well.

"I love you." She told him simply. He smiled.

"I love you too." He kissed her forehead and then her wrist before gently pressing his lips to the delicate ring on her finger. That had been a compromise too. He had wanted her to have a massive stone but she didn't want anything to get in her way, especially after finally getting to sink her teeth into advanced spell work. The ring was on the smaller end, but had a decently sized emerald in the middle, surrounded by delicate petals, giving it the appearance of a rose as it sat on her finger. Two leaves framed the flower and then the silver band thinned out. Narcissa was horrified that it lack all of the so called "impact" of the ring that they had chosen for Astoria but Hermione was quick to point out, unnatural as it felt, that it was likely she'd be making enough of an impact when she walked into most rooms. She didn't need a ring to attract stares, her history did that just fine on its own. Narcissa eventually caved.

"Everything okay with Astoria?" He asked gently.

"Not yet, but we'll get there." She nodded to herself, feeling the certainty in that statement for the first time.

"I'm sure you will." He promised, "Now would you do me the honor of a dance?"

"I'm afraid dancing wasn't a part of my etiquette lessons." She cringed; she could see the calamity now.

"I'll teach you." He offered, grinning as he led her closer to the chaotic dance floor.

"I'm not..." She hesitated.

"You trust me, don't you?" He teased grinning.

"Absolutely." She answered seriously, taking his outstretched hand and merging with the crowd. Sure, she'd probably step on a few toes along the way to learning all the steps but she had a good teacher and an even better partner. That was all that really mattered.

Chapter End Notes

This story is complete. I reposted it here just in case anything were to happen to it on Fanfiction, but I will be posted the upcoming one shots here as well. Hope you enjoyed!
Ginny

Ginny was exhausted. She was stressed out and drained and she wasn't sure that she could do it any longer. Her mother was breathing down her neck. Nothing Ginny did was good enough, if she washed a plate, it didn't glimmer enough, spices weren't chopped finely enough, the pasta was undercooked. She could kill her.

"Ginevra! What's wrong with you?" Her mother berated. Ginny sighed, paused heavily and then yanked her apron off, tossing it onto the counter; she wished it was heavy enough to make a noise as she whirled out of the room. The kitchen was always crazy, had always felt like home but now all she wanted was some quiet. She made it to Malfoy's quidditch pitch quickly. The arrogant bloke had a full pitch and never even freaking used it. She grumbled to herself, pausing for a moment beneath the nearest goal. She'd be fired if she was seen. Her mother would kill her. She wasn't sure if she cared.

She stormed to the storage shed; Malfoy was so arrogant that he didn't even lock it. Right in the middle of the shed, on a pretty hook was the most beautiful broom that Ginny had ever seen. Each bristle was neatly trimmed, the sleek black wood gleamed, and Ginny's mouth watered. When she was younger, she used to sneak off with her brothers and play before her mother had deemed that far too unladylike. These days, she hadn't flown in months. Her hands twitched with want. She yanked her wand out of her robe quickly, transfiguring her skirts into trousers carefully. She smiled, her newfound freedom emboldening her as she pulled the broom carefully off the wall. Her hands skimmed the smooth wood with a genuine reverence. It twitched in greeting, almost like an excited horse. She grinned.

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The wind was strong against her face and the sun was pouring down on her, and Ginny was euphoric. The broom beneath her was so fast, so powerful, and so responsive. She climbed higher and higher and higher, so high that the manor below looked like just a spec. She dove, plummeting, streaking towards the ground. The grass came at her quickly and it was close, close, closer, way too close, she jerked up, pulling up at the last possible moment as she climbed back up to the normal height. She whooped with glee, circling merrily around the goal posts, dodging imaginary defenders. She rolled, avoiding the bludger in her mind and spun back to the goals, miming the perfect shot to the left hoop. She cheered, her hands above her head as she imagined the jubilant crowds below her.

Clap. Clap.

Ginny almost fell off the broom.

She descended slowly, carefully dismounting and keeping her eyes on the ground. He kept clapping and Ginny peeked up and stilled as she caught sight of Blaise Zabini.

"That was fantastic." He praised. Ginny jumped, looking at him with embarrassingly wide eyes. That was not the opener she was expecting.

"Thank you." No one had ever accused her of being falsely modest. He laughed, his head falling back. The sun glittered off his sharp cheekbones. Blaise Zabini was a beautiful man. He was inherently regal, with a strong jaw, flawless skin the color of chocolate, and his shoulders... damn, Blaise Zabini could give a girl ideas.
"You know, you could be in serious trouble for that." He told her seriously, but he was still smirking with amusement.

"I'm aware." She answered coolly, resting her hand on the broom.

"Really, I happen to know for a fact that Malfoy's very possessive of that broom." Blaise warned her, stepping closer as his smirk turned into a full-blown grin.

"Men do tend to overcompensate with their toys, don't they?" Ginny challenged, stepping closer so they were toe to toe.

"Someone had to have taught you to mind your tongue." He chuckled to himself. His natural voice was slow, and of so deep. She felt like she could feel it reverberating in her chest.

"I've found I can put it to much better use when I'm not biting it." She challenged, slowly licking her lips for emphasis. His eyes followed her every move.

"I don't doubt that for a second." Blaise laughed and somehow, they seemed to get even closer, until barely a breath's distance stood between them. "Now what are we going to do about this broom theft?"

"I'm not a thief," She argued stubbornly. He was still smiling.

"No? Merely borrowing?" He asked, smirking. She faked an affront expression.

"Of course," She assured him, blinking her eyes innocently.

"Well then, I don't necessarily have to report borrowing to my dear friend, now do I?" Blaise asked.

"Oh no," She shook her head slowly, smirking.

"But I could. I should." Blaise told himself.

"Should you?" She asked, challenging him.

"Yes, but I don't have to," He clarified, smirking.

"No, you don't." She confirmed, shaking her head and struggling to keep a straight face.

"How about this? One Seeker's game." He suggested, grinning.

"I'm not sure that would be fair." She hesitated, looking up at him from under her eyelashes. Ginny preferred chaser but she was an excellent seeker. She had never met a snitch she didn't lie.

"I just saw you fly, I know for a fact that your sex doesn't hurt your flying ability." He reminded her firmly, seemingly not buy it. Hmm, she liked that response. Challenges were fun.

"The O might." She clarified, pushing her bracelet aside to expose the "O" on her wrist.

"Might?" He asked, cocking an eyebrow curiously.

"That's a solid reaction to that." She observed, nodding to herself.

"Might?" He repeated. She considered his dark brown eyes, looking for something that she wasn't quite sure of yet.
"It's new. Not sure how presentation's going to affect my competitive drive." She clarified. It felt good to talk about it blithely, openly, as if it was mostly inconsequential.

"Fine, first to five, you get a two-catch handicap," He suggested, utterly unfazed by her. She liked it.

"Works for me." She agreed.

"I'll go grab a broom and the snitch." He suggested. She watched him go for a moment, watching that perfect arse move under his fine trousers. She shook herself for a moment, focused on the task at hand. She mounted the broom quickly and kicked off, the air whooshing around her. She was going to take Blaise Zabini down.

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Ginny was panting and there was a light sheen of sweat on her forehead. Her hands gripped the broom tightly and she leaned forward, plummeting low. Blaise came in from the side, trying to cut her off. She felt more than saw Blaise come up alongside her. He couldn't win. She felt grass skim her toes as she stretched towards that infuriating orb, her fingers brushed the wings and then it flicked up. She lunged upwards, and it was as she felt her fingers close around the perfect little ball that she left the broom and came tumbling down.

Blaise grunted as they collided and they both hit the ground, rolling. She groaned as she sat up, spitting out an irritating lock of hair. Her hip hurt from where it hit the ground and she was sure she had scraped her arms but as she slowly uncurled her fist and looked at the wondrous snitch within she was sure it was worth it.

Blaise groaned and she remembered that she was still on top of him. She shrugged and rolled off casually. He shot her an unamused look but she displayed the snitch in her hand proudly. He groaned and flopped backwards.

…

They laughed. Zabini had a good laugh, deep and carefree. The sun glinted off his teeth when he smiled. He had magicked some glasses and water and they were both drinking happily. The sun was warm above them and Ginny leaned back, resting on her arms. She was well aware of how great the pose made her tits look. Blaise most definitely peeked. She smirked.

"You're nuts you know." He told her, looking like he didn't quite mind it.

"Oh, I am" She agreed easily. You didn't grow up with six older brothers and not become a little insane.

"That was a crazy dive." He said, a little bit of awe in his voice. She smirked.

"I like winning." She shrugged. She'd made crazier dives before, broken her arm more than once as a kid.

"Why doesn't that surprise me?" He asked, smirking back at her.

"I don't know, you look pretty smart to me." She pointed out, raising an eyebrow.

"I do, do I?" He asked, clearly fishing for compliments.

"Sometimes." She teased, biting her lip to stop herself from smiling.
"Oh?" He asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"You did give me a two-catch handicap." She reminded him, grinning. He laughed, a wonderful, full bellied laugh that made her feel kind of great.

"So how long have you actually had that O?" He asked skeptically, eyeing her with suspicion. She sat up, bristling with suspicion and looked at him directly.

"About two weeks" She confessed. He sat up immediately, staring at her with a slightly gaping mouth. It took her a moment to realize what she was missing here. She breathed deeply and noticed the rich scent of amber and a walk in the woods. Blaise was turned on.

"Jesus Christ, so it is new?" He demanded, looking her up and down carefully.

"Yup." She told him, popping the "p." She looked up at him from under her eyelashes.

"Taken it out for a test drive yet?" He asked, leaning closer towards her.

"You offering?" She asked, leaning into him as well.

"Absolutely."

...

She laughed as he kicked in the door, pulling her along behind him. She pulled it shut behind them and he immediately pushed her up against him. He kissed her firmly, stealing her breath as he pulled her hair. She groaned, her knees buckling. Her shoes were missing and she felt a little fuzzy, but oh so good. Blaise knew how to kiss. He huffed, pulling away from her reluctantly and leading her to the couch. He sat down first and then yanked her into his lap. She hurried to lift her skirts out of the way. She moaned as his tongue flicked into her mouth. He gripped her hips firmly, his fingers digging into her bum. This was new, no one had ever treated her like this. She had kissed guys before and they had always been courteous and careful. Fuck that.

His hands skimmed up her back, reaching for the laces on her corset as his mouth skimmed down her throat and over her collar bones. She rolled her hips against him, grinding against his hard member. She moaned, low and dark and happy, throwing back red hair and stretching her neck. Blaise groaned, thrusting against her.

"Oh yes.

"Excuse me?" A voice behind her cleared his throat. She froze and Blaise sat up straight. He looked over his shoulder and a flicker of recognition crossed his face. Unceremoniously, he lifted her up off his lap and dropped her beside him. She squeaked in protest, promptly adjusting her blouse and pulling her skirt down as heat exploded across her face.

She looked up at Draco Malfoy, who was looking at her like she was a dog who had wandered in during a rainstorm. He looked at Draco, clearly pissed. She was lost for a moment until she looked around a little. She hadn't bothered to before but this was very clearly a well lived in room. The kind of room that was a permanent residence, definitely not Blaise's room. If the Malfoy colors were any indicator, it was Draco Malfoy's permanent residence. Oh no.

"Sorry mate, pretty sure Dragon Lady is staking out my room after the last one, you don't mind, do you?" Blaise said casually, crossing his legs as if that was the problem here.

"You could've, you know, not shagged a bird for forty-eight hours?" Draco suggested. Ginny wanted to die. She wanted to crawl into a ball and die. She felt like she could throw up. There was bile in the back of her throat. Her eyes were watering.
"No way! Plus, this one just got her O, couldn't miss that." Blaise shrugged, still not looking at her. It was like she wasn't even in the room.

"Excuse me!" She protested, standing up with a huff. She looked down at her feet with the terrifying realization that she didn't have her shoes. Fuck.

"You know that the new ones are the best." Blaise continued as if she hadn't spoken. She had to find her shoes. She had to find her shoes and get out of there and then die.

"God you're a pig, where is my other shoe?" She demanded, peering around chairs and couch cushions. It shouldn't have been this hard. Where could they have gone? She hadn't kicked them off, had she? They were just gone?

"A broom closet wouldn't have done the trick?" Malfoy asked, his tone dripping with irritation. Yeah, she wished that this wasn't happening too.

"You're even worse." The ginger scoffed, rounding on Draco, he just shrugged as she went back to scouring the floor. She sighed and got on her hands and knees, had they fallen under the couch? She was literally almost under the couch when Draco finally addressed her.

"It's by the door." He offered. She cursed and clumsily got to her feet.

"Fuck both of you, I hope you Aveda yourselves." She snarled, yanking her shoes onto her feet before heading to the door and slamming it behind her. She stormed down the hallway, a part of her wishing that she had just stayed in the kitchen today. All she could think about was how small and pathetic she felt. Her eyes were watering but she wasn't going to cry. She wouldn't.

…

Blaise's pants looked great on a flag pole. His arse looked wonderful when it glowed hot pink when he lied. And his stupid face looked wonderful when he couldn't pull a bird to save his life. All in all, Ginny was feeling good about her life choices right about now.

…

Ginny's heart was racing, blood was pounding in her ears but her hands weren't shaking. No, she was still. Her hands were steady, her knees weren't shaking. Blaise was glaring at her, staring her down as he held his wand at her. Hers was in her pocket, too far and too late. Blaise's hand was shaking, his wand was quivering in the air, but Ginny, Ginny was steady.

"I could kill you." He announced, his words slow and dark. She shrugged.

"No, I don't think you could actually." She argued. If Blaise's could've paled, she was sure that he would've.

"You have a lot of nerve." He announced in disbelief.

"Yes, yes I do." Ginny agreed. It's why he had wanted her in the first place. He couldn't exactly blame her for it now.

"I won't be disrespected like this." Blaise muttered, mostly to himself. She smiled and rage welled up in his eyes. "Crucio!" He snapped and she waited for the pain but it never came.

"You don't mean it. It won't work if you don't mean it. You don't actually want to hurt me." She realized aloud, staring at him as he looked at him wand as if that was the problem.
"I'm livid, you humiliated me for weeks." He hissed.

"Yeah, and how did that feel? How did that taste? Like acid in your mouth? Or like you were choking down soap?" Ginny snapped, she felt like she should have been crying, but she wasn't. She was strong.

"I understand that your pissed but you knew I'm not a good guy. You knew that going into this." Blaise accused as if that changed anything.

"I didn't sign up for being humiliated in front of Draco Malfoy. I didn't sign up for crawling around to find my shoe while you talked about me as if I wasn't there. I'm not really a noble and I'm not an alpha, but I'm a person." She asserted, never moving her eyes from his.

"So, this was your plan? Get back at me with juvenile pranks?" He rubbed his brow, she could see his tension.

"Got your attention, didn't it?" She smirked.

"So, you just wanted to get me in the same room with you?" He asked, astounded that that was her final girl.

"In a way." She shrugged smiling.

"Okay, what the fuck does that mean?" He groaned.

"You being here means that I matter. It means that it worked, I'm worthy of your time. Making your life hell made you acknowledge me and the fact that I was so good at it makes you see that I'm your equal because I bested you." She insisted.

"That you did." He admitted, shaking his head.

"So, I have the power now." She smirked, feeling the victory in her veins.

"I have the wand." Blaise reminded her.

"but I have the power." She repeated.

"So, what are you going to do with it?" He asked, finally lowering his wand to his side. She shook her head.

"Nothing." She shrugged, and it was only as she left that she realized she didn't feel satisfied. Not even a little bit.

…

Ever since she had been deemed old enough to walk Ginny's job had been to deliver trays to those entitled snots who were too good to even eat with the other entitled snots. It meant that she frequently got to escape the kitchen and quickly discovered all the best shortcuts and spying spots in the Greengrass Estate. The manor had been a new challenge, the likes of which she hadn't had since she was tot and it could never be said that Ginny Weasley balked at a challenge. She had gotten good at finding the stealthiest routes, which was evidenced by the amount of secrets she was quickly becoming privileged to. She didn't necessarily want them but it was interesting bonus.

She rounded a corner and once again bumped into the most scandalous secret she had acquired. Pansy Parkinson snagging someone in a passageway wasn't exactly a new turn of events but her
partner had certainly been a shock the first-time Ginny had walked in on them.

Pansy Parkinson has her hands up Daphne Greengrass’s skirts and from the look of things Greengrass was more than amenable to her ministrations. Ginny’s eyes went wide as Daphne’s head went back with a moan. She was staring for far too long before she pivoted and went the other way.

…”

"You're a bitch, you know." The voice from behind her didn't surprise her as much as it probably should have.

"Oh, I am?" She asked skeptically, continuing walking. Why did men always label fierce women that way? He followed her but she faced forward stubbornly.

"You stopped." He announced, as if she didn't know.

"That I did." She confirmed, walking forward, bored.

"Why?" He demanded angrily.

"I got what I wanted." She reminded him confidently. His footsteps faded behind her.

…”

Blaise was thinking about her. He was looking at her. She could feel it. He followed her wherever she went. It made serving parties far more stressful. She couldn't handle it anymore. She waited until Blaise was the last one leaving the room before she jumped on him. He barely reacted, not even getting out of his chair as she stalked towards him.

"What is your problem?" She snapped, he just cocked an eyebrow.

"You wanted my attention, didn't you?" He reminded her. She was going to regret those words.

…”

He had to be using a charm. It wasn't normal to be this attuned to another person. Let alone a practical stranger. She knew where he was in every room. She could feel him always, as easily as she could feel her wand in her pocket. Every time she looked over her shoulder, he was there and his eyes were always on her.

He hadn't been with anyone in weeks. There were rumors about it. A part of her thought wistfully back to when he was just supposed to be a fun fling. Oh, how long ago that felt. She felt his eyes on her as she slipped out of the breakfast room, heading quickly towards the pitch. Malfoy, that spoiled brat, hadn't used it all summer. Before long, she sensed him behind her. That worked.

She didn't say anything as she reached the pitch and transfigured her skirts into trousers. It wasn't long at all before she had gone into the equipment shed and grabbed two brooms. Blaise didn't say anything as she passed it to him. He watched with a stoic expression as she released the snitch. They watched each other carefully as the both mounted their brooms. She nodded to him and they kicked off.

It felt different this time. She didn't feel as competitive, but she also didn't feel happy in the air. The breeze that had felt pleasant on the ground was chilling in the air. Blaise faced off against her and she leaned forward, circling the pitch idly. The snitch was out of sight for the moment but she was ready. She caught a flicker of gold behind him and deliberately shot above him. He rose to follow her, and
The air was tight with resentment, with rage, with something. Ginny didn't know what it was anymore. There was so much there. So much from such a small encounter. He made the first catch minutes later, the snitch practically flying into his hand.

She shook herself, reaching for focus, for drive, for excitement but there was just nothing there. She just felt blank. She descended slowly, feeling strange. Her skin itched; she felt twitches. Her feet the ground with a solid thump, echoed by Blaise touching down behind her.

"What the fuck are we doing?" She asked, her exhaustion seeping into her voice.

"I have no idea." He admitted, rubbing his temples and smoothing over his brows from the stress.

"I don't hate you." She realized aloud. After months of tormenting him, of cursing his name, it was far too easy to realize that she simply didn't hate him, didn't really have anything against him at all.

"I don't hate you either." Blaise told her, the same dazed look crossing his face as he seemed to realize it. It looked wrong there. Blaise should be lounging on chaises by warm seas. He shouldn't be standing in the middle of a Quidditch pitch, looking confused.

"So, we should just move on." She suggested. She should walk away but her feet were planted to the ground; her eyes were locked on his. She felt like she was caught, secured in gravity as a part of her want to run to him and a part of her wanted him no where near her.

"I don't want to do that." Blaise admitted, stepping closer to her. There was true sincerity on his features.

"Neither do I." She confessed, meeting him half way.

"So, what do we do now?" He asked, genuine curiosity in his voice.

"What do you want to do?" She asked softly.

"I don't know."

"Have you ever even had to want for something before?" She asked seriously. Blaise seemed unamused.

"I've wanted a lot of things." He shrugged.

"Like what?" She demanded.

"You first." He insisted.

"I want…" She paused, thinking seriously, "'Omega' to not mean shit."

"Why?" He questioned like it wasn't self explanatory.

"Labels piss me off." She snapped; he cocked his head, appraising her carefully.

"You realize that 'O' makes you nearly indestructible, right?" He asked.

"What?" She sputtered because that was crazy. He whole life, all she had ever been told was that omegas were weak, they were a liability, they were a problem. Poor Hermione had always been
looked at as limited.

"You have control that nobody else gets." He clarified, a little enviously.

"Control? The whole point is that other people can control me." She argued. She had to follow every command.

"Not when you grow into it. You get to choose who you trust enough to listen to. You pick the alpha. Alphas just follow you vying to be chosen. Not to mention you get the best high in the world that no one else can even fathom." He explained firmly.

"Are you talking about O Space? That thing that Omegas fall into while being beaten so that they're complacent!" She shouted.

"There's a big difference between pain play and a beating, Weasley," He snapped, exasperated.

"Ginny." She spat back.

"What?" He asked, not catching on.

"You can damn well call me Ginny." She clarified. After all, they knew quite a bit about each other now.

"See?" He pointed out, smirking. "Now, if you don't believe me, I could show you."

"Show me what?" She asked slowly.

"What O Space is really like." He said the words like they were a promise, eyes dark with lust. He smelt like the woods again. She wanted him.

"What is O Space really like?" She asked cautiously. She hadn't ever even bothered to research it. She never thought it would apply to her.

"Well, I've been told it's like floating, or flying." He offered.

"Told?" She asked, raising an eyebrow.

"It's a beautiful thing to watch." He admitted, unashamed. She looked at him carefully.

"Have you watched often?" She asked. She didn't really need to but it was still fun to confirm sometimes.

"Often enough to know what I'm doing." He smirked confidently. Fuck him.

"I want to try it" She admitted. She could use a good high. She never really had gotten a chance to take her O for a real test drive.

"We should go somewhere more private." He suggested, smirking.

"Your actual room this time?" She asked, unable to resist. He dipped his head and rubbed his neck. She had the feeling he'd be blushing if he could.

"Yeah, I'm not making that mistake again." He admitted, chuckling to himself.

"Good to know."
Blaise's bedroom was pretty much exactly what she expected it to be. Heavy drapes blocked out the windows and it wasn't unclean, just untidy. There were jackets strewn over chairs and shoes in random places. Could be worse.

"You're not a natural submissive." Blaise stated obviously as he closed the door behind him.

"I don't think so, no." She agreed, shaking her head.

"That's okay. It's not a given, it just means that it's going to be harder to reach O Space." He explained, shrugging.

"Okay." She nodded as he unbuttoned his jacket, tossing it over the back of the couch. He rolled up the sleeves of his white button up, exposing strong arms that she hadn't known were a thing for her until now.

"I want you to choose a safe word." He instructed quickly.

"Why?" She asked, laughing a little at the idea. He cast her a serious, unamused look.

"So, I'll know if you want to stop or you just don't want to continue. "He explained.

"How about stop?" She said slowly.

"Since you've never done this before, I will check in with you if you say that, but that can most definitely leave room for confusion. The point of a safety word is to have my reaction be immediate." He clarified remarkably patiently, as if he had been expecting that question. It was a good thing that Ginny wasn't the jealous type or she would've had a problem with how apparent Blaise's experience was.

"Why wouldn't your reaction to 'stop' be immediate?" She asked seriously.

"Because I want to make you beg, and stop teasing and stop everything are very different requests." He smirked as he answered her, walking out of the sitting area.

"Is that your plan?" She demanded seriously.

"Word first, then we'll talk plan, okay?" He insisted. She rolled her eyes.

"Fine, Snitch." She answered quickly. He smirked at her answer.

"How about this, you tell me what you don't consent to and we'll go from there." He suggested, sitting on the edge of the bed and looking up at her with a neutral expression. It was strange looking down at him. She wasn't short but he always seemed to tower over her anyways.

"No pain. We can do this without that, right?" She checked anxiously. He nodded patiently.

"Yes, we can, and I wouldn't want to do that anyways, I'm not in to pain." He admitted, shrugging. She realized as she resisted the urge to pace that while Blaise was lower, sitting was most still a power play.

"Is anyone really into that shit?" She huffed, a little horrified by the thought of people actively seeking out pain.

"You'd be surprised," Blaise told her meaningfully, "Anyways, anything else?"
"Bondage is a no, no fluids." She shuddered.

"None?" He smirking, clearly enjoying her discomfort.

"Nothing that isn't… normally involved." She clarified carefully. He nodded and a hint of a smile played across his mouth.

"Okay." He agreed, taking pity on her.

"No magic." She listed firmly. He raised one eyebrow and had a slightly miffed expression. Oh, no mister, she was not bending that one.

"None?" He repeated, disappointment clear.

"I don't think I trust you with a wand directed at me just yet. You did try to crucio me that one time." She reminded him pointedly, crossing her arms and blowing a strand of hair off her face.

"We've come a long way since then, but I'm not arguing, your limits, your rules." He acquiesced quickly.

"Where'd you even learn this shit?" She sighed, feeling more than slightly overwhelmed at it all.

"Draco taught me a lot." He shrugged as if that wasn't a freaking crazy revelation. She had heard a lot fo rumors about the kingdom's most devious bachelors but not that one. That one was saved for the Pansy's and Daphne's of the world.

"You and Draco…" She started slowly. His eyes bugged out of his head.

"Oh no, I am strictly a bird kind of guy, and even I wasn't" He shuddered, "Just no.

"So, Draco, as in the one getting married to vanillaer than vanilla Astoria Greengrass is into kink." She checked. Blaise laughed like she had told a joke, though she got the feeling that he wasn't laughing at her.

"That's a conversation for another time." He suggest, myrth in his eyes.

"Who says there will be another time?" She teased, grinning.

"Well I'm pretty certain." He told her.

"We'll just have to see about that." She answered playfully. He grinned, standing up slowly and moving towards her, all predator.

"I guess I have something to prove after all." He announced, lifting her chin gently and bringing his mouth down on hers. He cuppiing the back of her neck, tangling his finger in her hair and oh, that felt good. She arched into him, feeling the omega horomones rushing through her blood stream. She kissed him back fiercely, her tongue flicking against his. He made a contemplative noise in the back of his throat that she largely ignored. The hand on her neck moved to her back and he turned them around quickly without breaking the kiss. She made a noise that she hoped communicated how impressive she found that shit. He ran his fingers through her hair and she moaned deeply. As embarassing as her ginger hair could sometimes be, she always loved when people played with it. She could feel Blaise smirk. Bastard.

"You should lie down." He suggested, very, very obviously not making it a command. She smiled and lay down cautiously. He crawled over her, moving exquisitely slowly. She watched ever muscle
move with intense fascination. Blaise was broad and strong, but his impressive height insured he never seemed bulky. Ever inch of him radiated power and Ginny was feeling the effects. He kissed her again.

Ginny had been kissed. She had been snogged. Michael Corner had even stuck his hand up her skirt. Ginny may have been a virgin, but she was not some blushing virgin. She was experienced goddamn it!

Except all of that experience seemed pathetic now because no one had ever kissed her like Blaise. Those boys had given her kisses, but Blaise was very much a man, and he didn't just kiss, he took. He kissed like it was the last thing he would ever do. Just when she thought she might faint from the intensity, he pulled away, only to kiss along the line of her jaw and down her throat. He sucked and nipped and she knew for certain that he would most definitely be leaving marks. Her breath got stuck in her throat at the thought. After cover what felt like ever inch of her neck and throat he moved down, carefully unlacing her corset and tossing it aside. She moaned as he sucked what she was sure would become a dark mark on her collarbone. Her blouse was discarded next, pulled over her head in one easy move. Next, her trousers got pulled down off of her and tossed away. Left only in her knickers, Ginny was deeply appreciative of the fact that Blaise had respected her wishes and his wand was no where to be seen.

Ginny had never been insecure about her body, but the way he was looking at her now, like she was some delicacy designed to be savored, it was like nothing she had ever felt before. He kissed down inbetween her breasts and she gasped he started rolling and pinching her nipple with his hand. Just as it start to cross over into pain, he brought his mouth to the abused bud and started sucking and laving at it with his tongue. She whimpered as his hand started the same treatment on her other nipple. He repeated the pattern, tormenting with his fingers and soothing with his mouth until Ginny was a genuine mess. Her clit ached and her drenched cunny was throbbing, begging to be filled. She'd take of herself but his large body was very much in the way. She gasped, finally resorting to begging.

"Please, please, for the love of God." She gasped. Blaise looked up, smirking.

"What?" He asked innocently, as if he wasn't completely aware of what she want.

"Please, I need more." She confessed.

"Happy to oblige." He responded quickly, immediately moving to her center. She lifted her hips, inviting him closer, but he effortless held her down with one hand. He used the other to part her folds and then maddeningly, infuriating, just looked at her. She squirmed, but her just looked up at her and winked before blowing a steady stream of air on her clit. She twitched, the strange sensation a not entirely unwelcome surprise. Almost immediately after, he opened his mouth and just breathed on her most sensitive area. She groaned, the warm air feeling oddly lovely. Her head fell back on to the pillows and almost immediately she felt his tongue flick out and brush her clt. She moaned, her mouth falling open as he tormented her, circling and caressing the bud with laser focus. She panted, feeling herself peaking and cresting and…

Her orgasm hit her hard, crashing over her and she gasped. Later he'd tell her that she had said his name, but she would swear for a long time time that she was definitely not capable of real words at the moment.

She came down to him slowly flicking her clt, she rested her hand on his head to get him to move, but he just looked up at her with an immensely satisfied expression and slid a finger inside of her. She squeaked in surprise at the sudden penetration, and then moaned dizzily as he curled and twisted the digit inside of her. Another finger quickly joined the first, twisting and stretching her as she gasped and moaned, far beyond words. Deliberately, he curled those wonderfully long fingers inside
of her, stroking that wonderful, magically spot inside of her until she literally saw stars. Her second orgasm felt like tumbling off a broom diving for a snitch, wonderful and freeing and exhilarating.

He paused then, hands stilling as she slowly came back to earth, gradually opening her eyes. His hands gently stroked her hips moving over the soft flesh. She was definitely feeling fuzzy and pleasant now but not quite high.

"Hmmm, apparently you need one more." Blaise muttered to himself before renewing his efforts. He went back to her clit, this time sucking her firmly. She nearly flew off the bed. It was still way too sensitive. Her eyes watered and he eased off. His hands dug into her hips, propping her up as his tongue slid inside of her. He alternated between licking at her entrance and firming his tongue to thrust inside of her. She groaned, already so close. She just, she couldn't…

He nipped gently at her clit and she gasped, shattering as her whole body went taught and then she just… didn't come down. Her orgasm stretched, and she felt like she was on a peak and she just stayed there. Except it changed, she could breathe, she wasn't alight, she was just, purely at peace and blissed out with pleasure. It was amazing. She melted, soft beneath him.

"Good girl."

…

She came up slowly; it felt like waking up from a light sleep on a lazy Sunday morning. Her whole body felt relaxed, pleasantly sore. She didn't hurt anywhere; it just felt like she had flown long and hard. She felt amazing.

"Hey there, how you feeling?" Blaise asked gently. She stretched and blinked her eyes open. Blaise was lying beside of her, stoking her hair.

"Really good." She admitted, grinning.

"It was good then?" He asked eagerly, and oh did he like praise. She could throw him a bone every now and then.

"Yeah, most definitely good."

…

"You know, your friend threatened me last night." Blaise told her casually, emerging from behind her. She kept walking. Everything was different now. Things were changing incredibly quickly but everything felt lighter all the same. The whole manor just felt… happier.

"Mione? Not possible." Ginny scoffed. Hermione was aggressive, and Ginny imagined, rather emboldened from her recent engagement, but she wasn't threatening.

"Very possible, because she did it. Publicly." Blaise confirmed. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and saw that he legitimately looked scandalized. She laughed.

"That's actually hilarious." She admitted. "Why'd she threaten you?" She asked curious, because Hermione never did things frivolously.

"You." He answered simply. She blinked and stopped, looking at him seriously.

"What?" She snapped.
"She threatened to, and I quote, 'come for me' if I hurt you." He explained calmly.

"Well, you planning on hurting me?" She asked, mostly joking.

"Nope." He laughed, shaking his head.

"What is your plan?" She demanded, crossing her arms and staring him down.

"Well, anything off the table?" He asked merrily.

"We're not fuck buddies Zabini." She specified immediately.

"Wasn't planning on it." He nodded in agreement.

"I'm also not getting engaged tomorrow. Mione may be out of her mind but that doesn't mean that I have to be." She wanted no part in that. She didn't want to get shipped off. It wasn't going to happen.

"So where does that leave us?" He asked slowly, with no inflection.

"Slow. We just... take things slow."

…

Slow lasted for about two weeks.
Meetings and Payments

Chapter Summary

The engagement is going well. Mostly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hermione

Narcissa was talking. She was talking about something like napkins or center pieces or something even more ridiculous. Hermione should have been paying attention. She should have been doing a lot of things, but she couldn't, because Draco was touching her. Not just touching her, he had his hand inside of her knickers. He was fingering her, curling his fingers and pressing against that spot inside of her. The worst part was that fucking ring. He was an egotistical prick which was why some days he wore a fucking massive ring. The stone was smooth and cold and felt crazy intense against her skin. She was soaking wet and she was sure she would be making filthy squelching noises if Draco hadn't cast a silencing charm. It was wrong, it was so wrong, so horrifyingly, terrifyingly wrong. It was fucking perfect.

"Hermione?" Narcissa cleared her throat and Hermione realized that she had missed the question. It was easy to do that when teetering on the edge of an orgasm.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Yes?" She squeaked out as Draco started tracing his seal on her clit. He was still a possessive prick. He was just her possessive prick. The stone had his seal etched into its surface and if she focused, she was ninety percent sure that she could make out the pattern against her skin.

"Orchids or calla lilies?" Narcissa repeated impatiently. Narcissa had been cold at the start but their mutual love of efficiency and planning had brought them together. She wondered briefly what the older woman would think about what was going on right now. Then again, she really didn't want to think about that.

"What happened to tulips?" Hermione asked anxiously, her hips twitching as his fingernail brushed the sensitive bud. That stung, and not the good kind of sting, or maybe not, maybe it was the good kind. Hermione spent a lot of time analyzing sensations lately. Draco kept bringing her new ones. Like the stone that was nudging at her entrance.

"Tulips are for new money," Narcissa scoffed dismissively. Old money talked about new money like they talked about cholera. No money didn't care. Sometimes Hermione missed the simplicity of being no money.

"I'm ninety percent sure that's what I am," Hermione pointed out, valiantly avoiding her voice squeaking. He slipped one of his wonderful, dexterous fingers inside of her again, not the one with the ring on it this time, his thumb circling her clit. This was so inappropriate.

"I think that would require money." Draco suggested. She glared at him, even as he slid another finger inside of her. The ring pressed at her entrance. She bit her lip, resisting groaning from the stretch.
"She has money." Narcissa pointed out and Draco's hand helpfully still between her legs. She sighed in relief, then blushed as Narcissa shot her a look.

"What?" Draco asked coarsely. Not upset, just surprised. Probably a little turned on. She certainly was.

"Potter is paying her dowry, that money stays in her name in case you die." Narcissa explained matter a factly. She blinked dizzily in surprise.

"How much is my dowry?" She asked slowly. A little curious, and turned on, still very turned on, but she could multitask. If seeing Draco had taught her anything, it was that she was an excellent multitasker.

"More than you've ever seen in your life," Narcissa rolled her eyes dismissively. Hermione clenched her jaw as Draco rolled that cool stone over her clit. She cleared her throat.

"So, tulips?" She suggested.

Draco

The door clicked shut behind his mother and Hermione collapsed back into her chair. The movement pushed his fingers deeper inside of her. The slick heat was intoxicating, and the way his ring was going to smell of her all day was a beautiful, wonderful thing.

"You absolute bastard!" She gasped. Her legs were shaking. He loved it.

"You love it," He accused her. Her flush darkened. They both knew that she liked pretending to be the virtuous good girl, liked resisting a little bit. It always got her a little extra wet.

"I…" She started, but then he pushed his fingers up to tap that lovely, spongy spot. "I'm gonna come."

"I'd hope so," He smirked, "I think I'd be a little insulted if you weren't."

"Bastard," She gasped again before pushing her chair back. His hand slid away as she moved out of his reach. He cocked an eyebrow as she lifted her skirts and hovered over his lap. He chuckled as she frantically unlaced his trousers. He was already half hard, but he was quickly getting there as she pulled her lace knickers to the side. She stroked him with clinical focus and a wonderfully firm grip. She had gotten good at that in the last few months. She waited until he was fully hard before lowering herself onto him. He groaned at how tightly she wrapped around him.

"How long do we have?" She hissed tightly, even as she painstakingly lifted up part of the way.

"Minutes," He grunted as she closed her eyes, focusing on taking her pleasure. He held her hips, helping her. The slow drag wasn't doing anything for him but the view sure as hell was. She pulled aside the fabric of her dress to roll her nipples. She bit her lip, clenching around him. She was far distanced from the blushing virgin who denied touching herself. He slid his hand under her skirts and firmly circled her clit. She gasped, tensing tight around him. Her spine bowed and she trembled as she came. She relaxed slowly, melting limp into his lap. His cock twitched, as if trying to remind them that there were still things that needed to be done. She sighed happily and then stood up. He slid out of her, his hips straining reflexively.

"Well, see you later" She told him breezily as she righted her dress.
"What?" He gasped. This wasn't funny. She smirked.

"Minutes, remember? Don't you have to meet with your father about those records he gave you to look over?" She reminded him pointedly. He was incredibly conflicted. On one hand, it was miraculous that his father had finally decided to rope him on the Malfoy family dealings, mainly to get his help on converting some of the shadier things into more legitimate businesses. On other, he was still fucking hard.

"And what am I supposed to do?" He asked desperately.

"I'm sure you'll figure it out," She assured him and then paused. That was her thinking face, more accurately it was her, 'I just had a brilliant idea face.' That face caused him plenty of problems. He had learned to run when he saw that face, or just listen very closely.

This time he probably should've gone for the former. She reached under her skirt and quickly shimmed out of her knickers. She grinned devilishly as she dropped the satin garment that he had bought her on his lap.

"Hope this'll help" She suggested with a smirk before flouncing to the door.

"You're going to pay for this" He threatened seriously. Oh, he was going to fuck her so hard tonight. And that cheeky little ass was going to glow red.

"Is that a promise? Because I sure hope it's a promise," She smirked, slipping out into the hallway with a spring in her step.

It was definitely a promise.

…

Hermione

She paid for it. And she loved every second of it.

Chapter End Notes

There it is, I know it's not as long as many of you would have liked, but that's all the muse provided for me right now. There most likely is another one shot coming soon. Also, would you all prefer to have me post any additional one shots here or as a separate story? Leave me a comment with your thoughts.
Trying

Chapter Notes

This chapter may be triggering to some of you. I placed a summary at the end if you are concerned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hermione

"I know you guys are wondering why you're here," Hermione started, her breath shaking.

"A little, yeah," Ginny admitted, smiling softly and laying her hand over her friend's. It had been hard enough to get away to Harry's for the day, getting the rest of them here had been nothing short of miraculous. She didn't have the luxury of putting this off.

"I'm late, as in, significantly late," She blurted. Astoria and Ginny stiffened, looking up at her with wide eyes. Harry was the only one out of the loop.

"Then go… I don't…" Harry told her, looking around in confusion.

"Not that kind of late, Harry," Ginny told him gently.

"What? Oh… Oh!" It dawned in his eyes like someone had hit him. He looked over his shoulder as if someone was going to materialize and revoke his masculinity. "Should I be here?"

"Yes, Harry. You're like my brother," She assured him. He nodded, comforted for a beat, before grimacing and glancing at her stomach. She rolled her eyes.

"Speaking of, shouldn't somebody else be here?" Ginny pointed out, raising a bright red eyebrow.

"It is Draco's, isn't it?" Astoria questioned blithely. Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Low, Astoria," Ginny snapped protectively. Ginny hadn't liked Astoria very much lately, despite Hermione's assurances that Astoria was not the villain here. There really wasn't one.

"Sorry, it was too easy. Also, that would explain him not being here, yeah?" Astoria pointed out defensively.

"If it exists, it's Draco's," Hermione assured her. She took a deep breath to steady her. Holy shit, a baby. She wasn't ready for a baby. Draco wasn't ready for a baby. Was he? Was she? Were they? They really should've talked about that.

"So, why isn't he here?" Harry asked understandably.

"I don't want to get his hopes up. Omegas are supposedly more fertile, but our pregnancies are also riskier. I don't want him worrying before it's time," She explained uneasily.

"I doubt there will be much worry involved." Astoria assured her, shooting a pointed look at Ginny as if to prove that she could be an understanding friend too.
"Okay, so what do you need?" Ginny asked with fierce determination. Hermione had no doubt that her friend would slay dragons if she needed it.

"Just a little hand holding" She admitted, "I already have the potion; just need to add a strand of hair." She pulled the vial from her pocket slowly, staring at the clear liquid.

"How will you know?" Astoria asked slowly.

"If it turns pink or blue: baby; if it turns black: barren," She explained, a little darker than necessary but it certainly felt true.

"You not being pregnant right now does not mean that you can't be," Ginny corrected with a fond eyeroll.

"I still really feel like I shouldn't be here," Harry repeated weakly.

"Get over it, Harry," Astoria demanded, rolling her eyes.

"Okay, yeah. I'm here for you, Mione," He assured her, gently placing his hand on her knee. Ginny took her hand and Astoria held the vial. Her hand shook as she reached to her head. It stung briefly as she pulled out a single strand. Astoria uncorked the bottle but Hermione tenuously lowered the curl into the liquid.

"Do we…" Harry started but fell silent as they all watched as the potion's charm took effect, inky black color spread from her hair. She closed her eyes, crumbling as Astoria set aside the bottle. Her eyes were watering. She couldn't breathe. Her chest hurt. She opened her mouth to sob, but it stuck in her throat and all she managed was a desperate whimper.

"Send a patronus to Draco," Ginny's voice cut through the haze.

"No, don't, don't," She protested weakly. She was shaking. Or maybe they were. It was kind of tricky to tell.

"Mione, we're getting him," Astoria told her firmly. She felt too shaky to argue. Something wet dripped onto her hand. She touched her face and realized she had started crying after all. It felt like hours, though she knew it couldn't have been more than a few minutes before Draco was scooping her up.

"What happened?" He snarled, his voice low and threatening. She flinched. She knew how this must look, was sure the only thing stopping his instinct to attack the closest alpha was his instinct to protect his mate, but she couldn't find the words to explain it to him, not yet.

"She's not hurt," Ginny started soothingly, "She got some bad news and got overwhelmed is all." She explained, her voice pure omega sweetness. Draco sneezed, flinching away from the unwelcome scent, and she felt his nose nuzzle into her hair. A sense of possessive pride flared in her even through the bone jarring sadness. That was her alpha. No matter what.

"We just thought you should take her home is all," Astoria offered pointedly. Draco seemed to agree because Hermione felt the whirl of apparition and shortly thereafter, breathed in the familiar smells of the Malfoy gardens. She couldn't see much with her face in Draco's shirt. She kind of preferred it that way.

She felt his gate rock her back and forth as he carried her to his room. Hushed whispers echoed through the halls but Hermione couldn't be bothered. Her head was still pounding. His hand went to her neck, gently touching his mark. Warmth spread out from the back of her neck, trickling down her
spine. She sighed, the panicky feeling starting to subside. The ache in her heart didn't relinquish its position dragging the organ into her stomach.

She didn't understand what this was. She didn't know what this was. She hadn't been hopeful; they hadn't been trying. There was no reason for this disappointment, for this grief. Her heart disagreed. She hurt.

His door thudded against the wall as he kicked it open. He shifted her as he pushed it closed again. He kissed her head as he sat down on the edge of the bed and then pulled her closer and settled her in her lap. His hand carefully stroked her hair, his thumb brushing his mark on every down stroke. The mark tingled happily at the gesture. It didn't feel like enough.

_Draco_

Hermione lifted her head slowly. There were dried tear tracks on her face and she was still pale. Way too pale. His stomach lurched, everything molecule in his body was screaming for him to do something, to help, to end whatever was hurting her in such a terrifying manner. He wanted to fight but there was nothing to hit, no evil to push away, no enemy. There was just pain. And he couldn't fight the pain in her head.

"What happened?" He asked gently. She sobbed, collapsing back into him. Good going, Malfoy.

"I was late," She confessed desperately, rubbing her face harshly. He gripped her wrists gently, pulling them away. "I used a pregnancy test potion but it came up negative." His stomach dropped. Pregnancy: as in kids, like, his kids. Was he ready for kids? He hadn't thought about it.

"Did you, did you want a baby?" He asked slowly; he swallowed uncomfortably, "Do you want a baby?" A part of him was a little horrified that they hadn't, in fact, talked about kids. They were getting married, a lifetime commitment, and he didn't know how she felt about kids.

"It's kind of part of the deal right. The Malfoy family needs an heir," She laughed hollowly; her voice was still breaking. Her hands twitched to rub her eyes again. He held them steady. She tried, tried to be steady, and confident, and perfect. He wouldn't let her lie.

"Granger, do you want a baby?" He pushed, lifting her chin gently.

"I didn't... I didn't think I did. I didn't think it was an option," she paused, and looked up at him seriously. "Do you want a baby?" She questioned anxiously. He had never thought seriously about kids. He knew he would have them, but he never even thought about what his life would be like once he did. He never really thought he'd play much of a role in it. Looking at Hermione, with her bright red eyes and tear stained face, he realized how much of an idiot he had been. What did he think, that he could just have kids and ignore them? That he'd turn into his father? He shuddered. No, that had never been a possibility. Yes, maybe he would have struggled to connect with an obligation baby with a wife he hadn't wanted, but this wouldn't be that. This would be a baby with the woman he loved. It would be a part of each of them.

"I do," He realized, grinning, "I want a dozen little, tiny, curly haired, smart mouthed brats that will never leave us alone." God, he hoped they had her temperament. Her eyes started watering again and her mouth opened slightly.

"I want that too," She admitted softly. Hopefully.

"So, should we start trying?" He asked, smirking significantly. She laughed, and it was such a dramatic change from just a half an hour earlier that he wanted to jump up and down. Or just fall into
bed with his fiancée. It was a bit of a crapshoot.

"I think your mom would kill me if I was pregnant at the wedding," She reminded him, smiling. It kind of looked like it hurt. If the grin stretching his face was comparable, he suspected that it did.

"She'll get over it."

Hermione

Hermione bit her lip as she dropped a strand of hair into the vial. There was no audience this time. She didn't want to put too much pressure on it, to have too much hope. If it didn't take this time, there would be a next time. Omegas got pregnant easily, sometimes even subverted contraception charms. It was one of the perks. It would happen. She just had to relax. Stress was bad for a baby.

She shifted the liquid so it touched her hair. Her breath got stuck in her throat as the liquid turned black. She straightened her back and took a deep breath. She was okay.

The cupboard door loudly clicked shut behind her. The handmaiden that Narcissa had insisted on looked scared, twisting her fingers anxiously. She had almost had a panic attack when Hermione had asked her to set outside.

"You're fine. I am fine. Don't worry about it. Don't mention it Narcissa," She instructed firmly. The girl nodded nervously. "Or Draco," Hermione added. It would just stress him out. She was okay. Really.

The black bottles were really starting to piss her off, all two dozen of them. They sat there, accusatory on her dresser. Being an omega had been hell her whole life, and now, just as she was starting to figure out, just as she was starting to like it. Every omega stereotype was failing her. Alpha-Omega pairs were supposed to pop out babies like bunnies. Betas had fertility problems, not omegas. That was the perk. This, this was bullshit. She groaned, tossing her sheets aside as she tugged on a dress. The handmaiden wasn't allowed in her room. Neither was Draco for that matter. That had been Narcissa's rule, which didn't exactly prevent them from trying, in every sense of the word.

Yet it didn't matter, she was still barren and useless. She hated this.

The knock snapped her out of her spiral and she simply had to straighten her shoulders and go out there. That was her job now, to be the happy, smiling fiancee.

Narcissa drank disgusting tea. Since the beginning of the engagement, she had insisted on their daily teas where Hermione gagged down the concoction with a smile. Draco was not invited, not ever. Narcissa claimed it was for bonding. Hermione was sure that it was to interrogate her.

So far, there had been minimal interrogation. Narcissa never asked about Hermione's life before the Nott attacks. She was a results focused person. She cared about the present and only the present. This was reality as Narcissa knew it, no point in trying to change anything that happened before, all she could do was adapt and survive. Hermione had the feeling that she would need some of that.

"You understand that complexities involved in becoming a Malfoy, in taking charge of the
operations of this family?" Narcissa asked suddenly, looking up from her tea. Hermione was sure it was a power move, going from silence to an impossible question to throw her off. The only solution was an entirely unexpected answer.

"I'm sure I don't," Hermione recognized, chuckling a little to herself. She knew what she had been supposed to say to Astoria, but they had both known that wouldn't be the truth. The truth would come later. It would come during meetings like this one.

"Excuse me?" Narcissa asked, affronted by Hermione's brazenness no doubt.

"I know what it looks like from the outside. I understand that the Malfoy family doesn't believe in an outside staff manager, that those duties traditionally fall with the matriarch of the family," Hermione clarified confidently.

"That's very true," Narcissa confirmed.

"I also know that there is no possible way that I understand all that is required by someone in your position," Hermione continued, laughing.

"Maybe Draco was onto something after all. I never anticipated humility being a trait I would find in my replacement," Narcissa smiled and took a sip of tea, looking at Hermione with... was that really respect?

"I'll take that as a compliment, thankfully I have plenty of time to learn," Hermione reminded the older woman with a smile.


…

When she saw Draco coming, she had ducked into a cupboard to avoid revealing the heavy black vial in her pocket. Sex had become hell. Not only was she infertile but she also quickly becoming frigid. She didn't want to be touched. Draco didn't get it but he didn't say anything. He was just calm and supportive and sweet, and she wanted to hit him. She wanted to hit something. She wanted something to hit, to blame: something other than her.

…

Draco

She thought he didn't know. The maid was incompetent. He had seen the growing pile of bottles every day. He snuck in to her rooms during those stupid teas and just stared at them. She was his omega, his fiancée, and his mate and she was keeping this from him. He wondered if it was him, if there was something terribly wrong with him. There was such profound guilt in her as she looked at him, which was insane. They had only been trying for two months. These things took time, apparently. What the hell did he know. He knew a hell of a lot about not getting someone pregnant. Apparently, he knew very little about achieving it.

The wedding was just over two months out but now he wasn't even sure if there would be a wedding. It wasn't the sex. He could deal with not having sex. He could even deal with the clinical, awful entirely empty sex. He couldn't deal with the complete and total shut out. The blank stare was going to kill him.

She still did everything she was supposed to. She showed up at meetings, she stayed by his side at parties, and she even kept going to those goddamn teas, but she just shut down. The minute there
weren't eyes on her, she was hollow. He hated it. He hated seeing her like that, but even worse, he hated that there was nothing that he could do to help her.

_Hermione_

Blaise Zabini was never supposed to be her savior. He was not her rescuer, not her knight in shining armor, not her anything. He definitely wasn't supposed to show up in her rooms in the middle of the night.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" She demanded, yanking up her sheets to cover herself. Blaise had made sure to turn the lights on so she wouldn't hex his bollocks off. She was still tempted.

"Why aren't you with Drake?" Blaise challenged abrasively.

"Because it's the middle of night?" She snapped back indignantly.

"Like that has stopped you before," Blaise scoffed, rolling his eyes.

"Go away," She ordered firmly, rubbing her eyes in her frustration. Draco was always trying to get her to stop doing that, but she couldn't help it. Possible damage be damned.

"Are you cheating on him?" Blaise accused coarsely, looking at her with such disappointment that she wanted to catapult out of a window.

"What? Of course, not!" She snapped in defense.

"Is he cheating on you?" Blaise asked, not unkindly. She was going to hex his bollocks off.

"No!" She snapped, then deflated because she knew very little about what Draco was up to lately, "Not to my knowledge."

"Not to your knowledge?" Blaise sighed, rubbing his temples unhappily, "What the fuck Granger?"

"What Blaise, what is so upsetting for you?" She demanded. This was ridiculous. This wasn't his life. It was _her_ shit show.

"You two… you two were so fucked up. You did everything wrong, had everything going against you, and you still got together because you two are so stupidly in love with each other it makes everybody a little sick," He described fiercely. Her heart hurt at the reminder. She wasn't sure that any of that was true before.

"How is this any of your business, Blaise?" She groaned. This wasn't helping.

"Because I love him too Granger, he's like my brother and he looks like he's dying. He has never looked worse and he's supposed to be happy. We're all supposed to be happy," Blaise explained sincerely. She studied him carefully, not liking what she saw.

"Are you not happy, Blaise?" She asked seriously. Blaise and Ginny weren't even engaged yet but they were together. Blaise had no reason not to be happy.

"That's not what this is about," Blaise protested.

"Because if you're not happy you should tell Ginny," She continued seriously. Her friend deserved to know.

"Do you know how hypocritical you sound right now?" He asked her seriously. She stillled.
"What is that supposed to mean?" She asked slowly.

"It means that you need to talk to your fiancé," He said simply, as if it was that easy.

"What am I even supposed to say?" She asked seriously.

"How about why you've been so out of it lately?" He demanded seriously, as if he had any right to that information. She had the strangest feeling of wanting to tell him anyways.

"We were trying to get pregnant," She finally admitted.

"What?" Blaise froze anxiously, looking at her with something like fear.

"Nothing worked. I tried everything, fertility charms, everything." She confessed, regretting it as tears pooled in the corners of her eyes.

"I have an idea that could help." Blaise suggested slowly.

"Yeah, that's a no" She told him coolly. She didn't need that kind of help from Blaise. Absolutely not. He rolled his eyes at her.

"Not that. Jeez, Granger. There's a charm, a diagnostic tool, it will tell you if there's something going on in your health." He explained quickly.

"Why do you…." She asked uneasily.

"My mother… she tried to kill my father: poison. We had to figure out what it was so that we could find the antidote." He explained uncomfortably.

"That's…" She started, not sure where she was going.

"Yeah, I know," he cut her off. "Wanna try it?" He asked, shrugging.

"Now?" She checked, startled.

"You planning on going back to sleep?" He challenged skeptically, raising an eyebrow.

"No," She admitted. She had resigned herself to the lack of sleep when he had broken in to her rooms in the middle of the night.

"Then let's do it," He suggested.

…

It was strange, sitting on the floor with Blaise Zabini as he pointed his wand at her. It was probably concerning that he knew the charm by heart, but the incantation washed over her anyways. She felt the magic seep through her skin. She didn't like the way it felt as it tingling through her. She once watched Ginny spill a bag of sugar in a jar of cookies and the small grains had slipped through the cracks. She felt like that, like Blaise's magic was intruding in her.

"Stop squirming," Blaise muttered through the incantation. She stilled uncomfortably. "Oh?" His normally deep tone jumped significantly.

"What is it?" She hissed, straining to stay still and not look up.

"The name of the problem is above your head." Blaise explained, unease in his voice.
"And?" She snapped, straining to look up as far as she could but the haze of blue stayed just out of her line of sight.

"Goddamn it Blaise, what's wrong with me?" She demanded, her eyes watering again. She couldn't take this. It was bad enough thinking you were defective, knowing it was going to be even worse.

"Nothing, Granger, you're taking contraceptives." He scoffed.

"No, I'm not," She bit back defensively. She was most definitely not. Of course, she wasn't taking contraceptives.

"Yeah, you are, the charm came up with the name of an herb for it," Blaise explained sternly.

"How do you know the name… You know what, I don't want to know." She backed off, shaking her head.

"Yeah, you don't, and I don't know how you're taking the powder but you are," He asserted. She shook her head in shock. How the hell was she on birth control without knowing about it?

"Who would give me powder?" She asked, whirling through the possibilities.

"Drink anything suspicious lately? Some weird tea?" Blaise suggested casually.

"No, of course not…" She snapped; she didn't eat strange things, didn't take food from anyone but trusted servants. She looked up slowly, a terrifying realization hitting her, "Wait, did you just say tea?"

…

Waiting till morning felt like dying and she thought she may die on the spot if the door didn't open right that moment. Blaise was a surprisingly comforting presence behind her as she banged on Draco’s door. Her fiancé flung open the door violently. She flinched back at the unfamiliar expression. He looked… haunted. The bags under his eyes were an inky blue and his normally ivory skin was cadaverous.

"Granger? Blaise?" He grunted sleepily in surprise. She loved how he sounded first thing in the morning. God, she loved him.

"We need to see your mother."

…

**Draco**

For the first time in weeks, Hermione looked like herself. There was, there was a fire in her eyes. She was alive and vibrant, like a painting of a Greek goddess. He didn't really hear what you said and he barely noticed Blaise at all, even as the other man fell back and let them go by themselves. He didn't know where she was going but he followed easily. He was a little surprised when he arrived in the dining room. His mother was sitting calmly at the table, one eyebrow raised and three place settings laid out across from her, as if she had been expecting it.

"I assume you're here about the tea?" She guessed coolly. Draco didn't get it. What could possibly be going on? His fiancé hadn't had a real conversation with him in weeks, let alone come to him first thing in the morning.
"What tea?" Draco demanded; Granger was staring at his mother with something akin to betrayal. He had a very bad feeling about that tea.

"Your mother has been slipping me an herb to make sure that I can't get pregnant." Hermione explained cautiously. When he was thirteen, Blaise had collided with him on his broom and he had fallen over a hundred meters to the ground. This felt like a farther drop.

"She's been what?" Draco questioned, stunned. He stared at his mother and her unmoving expression. She wasn't denying it. The woman who had raised him couldn't have done that. She couldn't have actively tried to ruin this for him.

"The wedding is nine weeks away. Twelve weeks is the earliest that a first pregnancy will begin showing." His mother spelled out slowly, staring at him with a blank expression, as if her words were simply facts, and not a terrifying façade of an explanation.

"This is about a wedding? You've been drugging her to protect her appearances at a wedding." Draco demanded, snapping at the older woman. She didn't even blink, as if it wasn't insane.

"To protect her reputation; she already has questionable roots." His mother asserted firmly, as if Granger wasn't even in the room.

"How did you even know that we were trying to get pregnant?" Granger asked, outraged. Her hands were clenched into tight fists. Two months ago, he would've put his hand on her back to calm her. He still didn't know if his touch would be welcome.

"I didn't. I simply knew you were having sex and I didn't trust either of you to be responsible enough to prevent this outcome," Narcissa explained casually. Later he would parcel out the disturbing fact that his mother knew he was having sex, for now he still had to figure out her reactions.

"I just don't get how you could look in me in the eye every day and poison me. I thought you liked me. You must have seen what it was doing to me!" Hermione accused, her hands shaking with anger. These months of pain could've been avoided. They hadn't need to go through all of that. His mother had did this to them, had almost destroyed them.

"I told you that there were responsibilities that you couldn't imagine," Narcissa said significantly, and Draco suspected he was missing part of this conversation.

"I won't be poisoning my in laws, that much I can guarantee," Hermione responded coolly. He jumped as she took his hand and led her out of the room.

He didn't say anything as she led him to the garden. They walked through the hedges silently and he followed her to his spot, to their spot. He sat down first and she dropped into his lap. He leaned back against the trunk of the tree as she tucked her head under his chin.

"What are we supposed to do now?" She asked seriously.

"Are you okay?" He asked seriously.

"Not really. I... I thought I was broken. I thought that you couldn't possibly want me if I couldn't give you a child. It just felt pointless." Her voice shook with the admission. He kissed the top of her head. He knew assurances were meaningless, that they were far past logic.

"I couldn't figure out why you wouldn't talk to me. I thought, I thought I had done something wrong, or that you couldn't trust me," He explained.
"You didn't do anything wrong," She told him sincerely.

"Neither did you," He reminded her.

"What are we going to do about your mom?" She sighed heavily.

"I have no idea. I still don't understand how she could do that." He admitted, shaking his head.

"Me neither," She shrugged. They paused heavily, simply breathing in each other's company. It felt right, like they had a shot of being okay again. It felt like healing.

"Maybe it wasn't even about the wedding, maybe she was just trying to postpone the curly haired brats," He teased her gently, recalling his earlier words.

"Don't you bad mouth our curly haired, smart mouthed brats, they're going to be irresistible." She asserted firmly. She smiled, but there were tears in her eyes.

"This isn't too soon?" He asked gently. They had both been coming to terms with not getting it, maybe the pain was still too fresh to go back in and mess around with it for a while.

"No, I… I have hope again. This is exactly what I want," She told him firmly.

"We're going to get married and then were going to have a truly ridiculous number of children and be so sickeningly happy people will hate us," He murmured. She took a breath to say something but then froze and sobbed hysterically, collapsing into him. "Shh… you're okay," he whispered soothingly.

"I know, happy tears," She sputtered nonsensically.

"Okay?" He asked uneasily. Granger pulled back and looked up at him with giant doe eyes. She took a breath again and he was prepared for more crying, but then she lunged forward, kissing him as if every second that she had spent not doing it physically hurt.

He kissed her back, his fingers tangling in her hair as their breaths passed between them. He sucked and nipped at her bottom lip, relishing her taste. She sighed happily and he carefully brushed his thumb down the back of her neck. They kissed for what felt like hours, soft touches and gentle caresses. It felt right. It felt perfect. He cupped her face gently, pulling back to study her.

She raised a questioning eyebrow but he simply looked at her. There was light in her eyes, a smile. There were still bags under her eyes; she was still too pale, but she was awake, and present, and alive. He loved her and she loved him. It would all be okay.

…

Hermione

She never would have guessed that she would be so happy to see the color pink.

Chapter End Notes
Summary: Hermione and Draco attempt to get pregnant, experience a difficulty conceiving, which creates feelings of insecurity and pain for both of them. It is later discovered that someone close to them has been drugging Hermione to prevent her from becoming pregnant. The deceit is discovered and Hermione and Draco begin to heal.

I had no intention of this chapter happening, it just kind of did. I have a cuter, fluffier, smuttier chapter planned that I will post as soon as possible.
Jealousy, Paperwork, and Names

Hermione

Things were better, healthier. She spent her nights in Draco's rooms. Sometimes they had sex; sometimes they didn't. It was okay. No one knew about the pregnancy yet, though the pink bottle sat happily on her headboard. They wouldn't discuss names until she was showing. They wouldn't tell anyone until they absolutely couldn't hide it. They weren't getting their hopes up. They would be healthy and mature and patient.

Hermione ducked back around the corner, sighing heavily as she looked up at the ceiling. She cautiously peeked again, grimacing as she did. They hadn't caught her! Draco was still talking to the maid, Rachel. Rachel, the one who she sent to pick up her laundry, was talking to her fiancé, flirting with him, even. At least, that was what it looked like from here.

Hermione hadn't known that she was the jealous type, hadn't thought she could even get like this. She never would have thought that she'd have the temperament or the ability or even the time to spy on someone all day. Except now she didn't have real duties, especially since she abandoned Narcissa's lessons forever, or chores, or anything to do other than read. So, she was going insane, and that included spying on Draco and her very pretty, extremely sweet maid. Rachel wasn't the smartest witch, but she was nice. Hermione never got "nice," she got: determined, hardworking, loyal, and focused, but no one called her nice. Maybe Draco wanted nice. Maybe that's why he was flirting with the maid. Rachel was nice.

Hermione knew she was nuts, she knew Rachel didn't deserve the suspicion and that Draco wasn't cheating on her. It didn't make her feel any less nuts. She pulled back and sighed, whacking the back of her head against the wall.

"Ow," She groaned lowly, rubbing the back of her head.

"Got a problem?" Draco asked casually as he strolled around he corner, amusement clear in his tone.

"Nope," She answered with wide eyes, deliberately meeting his eyes directly before turning away.

…

"Why were you following me today?" Draco asked, smirking. She moaned as his lips brushed against her neck. His hand tugged her skirt down, over her hips. She arched her back, encouraging him. He was hard against her stomach and he groaned at the contact.

"What are you doing with my maid?" She bit back, scratching down the pale trail of hair that led to the quickly slipping waistband of his trousers.

"Okay, I'll accept this random subject change," He teased, kissing between her breasts and moving down her stomach. "Do you want me to be doing something with your maid? Because apparently, you're into watching now." He teased, hovering over her knickers.

"Draco!" She gasped in protest, blushing fiercely as he breathed over the damp cotton. She groaned, the wet heat a sharp surprise. She raised her hips towards him, urging him on. He just leaned back and smirked at her.

"Of course, I'd prefer it if you were doing something with your maid," He suggested, finally pulling the fabric down.
"My God!" She whimpered as swiped his tongue down her slit. He gently kissed her clit in agreement.

"'Alpha' works just fine, thank you," He teased, the words vibrating against the tiny bud.

"Alpha? Fuck me," She ordered, tugging at his hair to pull him up. He laughed.

"Eager, today, aren't you?" He teased, slowly kissing up her stomach.

"If you don't fuck me in the next thirty seconds, I'm going to lock myself in that bathroom with that lovely little charm that you taught me, and take care of it on my own," She threatened seriously. That was a fabulous charm and it had gotten some good use. She wasn't afraid to use it again.

"Alright," He placated her, kissing her firmly as he yanked his trousers and pants out of the way.

"Don't take mistresses?" She breathed as he slid inside of her.

"Wasn't planning on it," He grunted, rolling his hips. She sighed as he mouthed along her neck.

"I mean it," She insisted rocking against him.

"You want it in writing?" He asked, for a beat she thought he was joking but he paused, pulling out of her slowly and looking at her seriously.

"Actually?" She questioned, not quite believing it.

"Do you want a fidelity clause, Granger?" Draco pressed, both of them ignoring the very pressing problem between them.

"You'd agree to that?" Hermione asked, Draco laughed, slumping to rest his head on her chest with a heavy sigh.

"Do you really want to have this conversation right now?" He asked, laughing. She blushed but just nodded.

"Yeah," She muttered, now that it was on her mind, the odds of putting it aside were slim.

"Clearly I'm not doing this right if you're thinking about paperwork." He groaned in defeat, rolling over onto his back and yanking his trousers back up. She huffed, the mood definitively gone.

"Is that all it would be, paperwork?" She pushed; Astoria's fidelity clause had seemed like it was the end of the world. She couldn't believe hers would be this easy.

"Considering it's something I was going to do anyways, yeah," Draco huffed like the answer should have been obvious.

"Really?" She asked, sitting up curiously.

"Didn't we already have this conversation?" Draco groaned. It took her a moment to remember their conversation all those weeks ago. No birds.

"That was…" Hermione started uncertainly.

"It was what?" Draco pushed, squinted slightly as he studied her.

"That wasn't a marriage. It had a time limit," She concluded uneasily. Draco opened his mouth to
speak before closing abruptly. He paused for a heavy moment before taking her hand and kissing her
knuckles gently.

"Do you think you're going to get sick of me?" He asked softly against her skin.

"Of course not!" She snapped, her hand twitching in his in her haste.

"Then why do you think I'm going to ever want anyone else?" He questioned, that sad look in his
eyes he got sometimes when she mentioned the more painful elements of her past life.

"Well, you used to… you know," She blushed at the memories. Draco groaned and dropped her
hand with a sigh, tucking his head against her shoulder.

"Yup," He confirmed, dropping his head back on to the pillow.

"You don't need to be ashamed of your past Draco, but-" She trailed off, desperately wishing to have
never brought it up in the first place.

"But what?" He asked, his tone carefully measured.

"You don't think that you'll miss it, down the line…” Hermione shrugged as if the words weren't
painful. She had been a slave for so long and now she was free but she knew that they weren't
equals. Even if that was how they saw each other, it wasn't how the world saw them.

"I'm not going to cheat on you and I don't miss it," He insisted firmly.

"You'd be within your rights," She prodded, aware she was arguing against herself again.

"Didn't you start this conversation saying no mistresses?" He reminded her playfully.

"That was so long ago," She groaned.

"Feels like it," He agreed far too easily. She hit him. "Ow," He deadpanned before continuing,
"Why would I want a mistress, let alone multiple?"

"You used to want multiple," She reminded him.

"You're not a mistress," She raised an annoyed eyebrow, but he just held her gaze. "Look, Granger,
you're the most beautiful, passionate woman I have ever met. You're the mother of my child and the
sex is the best I've ever had. Besides, I couldn't sleep with someone else if I wanted to; you wear me
out."

"I didn't think that was possible," She admitted. Since they had given up on pretending to be
abstinent, their sex life had rebounded and she hadn't witnessed anything even bordering on worn
out from her fiancé.

"Let's find out." Draco leered. Hermione just rolled her eyes and nudged him off. He collapsed
beside her again with a groan.

"I'm serious, I want to talk about this," She insisted.

"Do you trust me?" He asked seriously.

"Absolutely," She agreed without a doubt.

"Then believe me. You are the love of my life and the only woman I want." He assured her, before
propping himself up to kiss her sweetly. She smiled against his mouth.

"What if that changes?" she asked anxiously. He sighed but seemed to accept that she needed the reassurance. She supposed that she'd need it for at least a little while longer.

"I'll sign the contract, fidelity clause and all, and I promise to you, if I ever take another woman into my bed, you'll be included," He teased, kissing her nose.

"Hmmmm…" She smirked and made a thoughtful sound.

"What?" He asked his voice playful.

"Just considering the possibilities," She leered.

"Jesus Christ," Draco groaned and Hermione glanced down at the front of his trousers. He was hard again.

"There's still a lot you don't know about me," She reminded him, doing that thing with her eyes that she knew he liked. His pupils dilated.

"That is a wonderful thought," He groaned again, moving to kiss her. She met him halfway as they slowly discarded their clothes. When they both lay bare he kissed down her throat, lingering between her breasts for a moment before kissing her stomach. She didn't have even the slightest bump yet but she still found herself examining her stomach in the mirror, aching for the moment she could see the life growing inside of her. "I know we said we would wait but we should talk about names," He suggested, continuing to kiss her stomach.

"Is this really the time for that?" She protested as he dragged his lips down to her mound. She had started trimming those curls since she now had the luxury of long, warm baths.

"You really don't have a leg to stand on for that argument. Also, I think this is exactly the right time," Draco smirked, gently spreading her legs wider.

"Why?" She asked, her breath hitching as she felt his warm breath on her skin.

"Because this way, I might have a shot of convincing you," He suggested before softly kissing her thigh.

"Draco…” She groaned in protest.

"Traditionally, children from my line have been named after stars or constellations," He informed her, as if she didn't already know.

"Oh no," She groaned as he smirked and gave a cautious lick down her seam.

"I have some suggestions," He admitted, brushing his thumb around her clit.

"Bring them on," She sighed in defeat, content to just enjoy his mouth and suffer through the words coming out of it.

"Carina," He started confidently.

"That's the bottom of a boat," She sighed happily, even as she shot him down.

"How did you know that?" Draco whined, even as he kissed her thigh again.
"I have researched your family traditions, remember?" She reminded him with an eye roll.

"Cassiopeia," Draco tried.

"Terrible- and refers to a boastful queen who tied her daughter to a rock," Hermione pointed out reproachfully.

"But think of how cute little Cassie will be," Draco prodded, speeding up the circling on her clit.

"Nope," She groaned.

"Berenice," Draco contributed as he slid two fingers inside of her.

"No way," Hermione moaned, her head tilting back in response.

"Delphi" He offered. She paused, and shook her head.

"Bad vibes," He shot her a skeptical look.

"Why?" He asked seriously.

"Not sure," She shrugged, pressing his hand closer to her. He smirked but took the cue to resume his earlier ministrations.

"Equuleus?" He suggested carefully.

"She will literally hate us forever," Hermione predicted with a groan.

"Why?" Draco protested.

"She won't be able to spell it! Plus, the story is about a mother who tries to hide the existence of her baby and gets the child transfigured into a horse," Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Lacerta?" Draco continued unfazed.

"Lizard!" Hermione squeaked as Draco curled his fingers inside of her, reaching for that spot that made her see stars.

"Lyra?" He offered hesitantly.

"The harp or the poet who was killed by a horde of women?" She asked bitingly.

"Norma?" He asked, seeming to slow.

"For the carpenters?" She quipped. Even she knew that a Malfoy could not be named after tradesmen.

"Pavo?" He tried once again.

"Cute, but it also means turkey in Spanish and I won't have it," She insisted. Her child would not be subject to that mockery.

"What are the odds she goes to Spain?" Draco protested but she just rolled her eyes and gestured for him to continue. "Vela?"

"You're insane," She reminded him forcefully.
"Virgo?" He prompted, not even seeming to want that one himself.

"Promise me we'll never tell our daughter her entire worth is being a young maiden?" She insisted, sitting up quickly. He nodded solemnly and kissed her stomach in promise.

"Vulpecula?" He continued, a glint in his eyes now.

"Adorable story, terrible name," She shot down firmly, allowing herself a careful smile.

"Phoenix," He declared firmly.

"You saved that one for last," She accused.

"How'd you know?" He demanded, not the least upset to have been found out.

"You were going in alphabetical order," She teased with a grin.

"Severus made me learn them in that order when I was twelve and you're avoiding the question," He reminded her.

"How exactly will you cold, snakey family feel about their heir being named after a fire bird?" She asked warily.

"The tree could use some shaking up," He responded with a grin of mischief. They were good at that.

"Aren't we not supposed to pick out names this early?" She reminded him, thinking idly back to their earlier promise.

"We've never been great at supposed-to's," He reminded her teasingly. She paused heavily, resting her hand on her stomach uncertainly. She knew how much hope could hurt, but she also knew how much there was to gain.

"You're not wrong," She agreed slowly, but smirking as she sat back, stretching onto his sheets with a smirk. "Convince me," She ordered. Draco grinned, more than willing to do just that.
A Wedding and a Witch

Pansy

Sometimes she wished she could paint. She wished her hands were good for something other than pleasurable entertainments and potions, though, she supposed those were art in their own way. Not the way Drake could make art though, as clever and sneaky as that boy thought he was, she had discovered more than one smudge of charcoal behind his ears and quite a few flicks of paint on his face. Unlike Drake, it would have been fine for her to paint, encouraged even as a lady-like pursuit. The problem was that she was terrible at it, incapable of more than a few lazy brushstrokes, normally it didn't bother her, but some days she wished she could commit images to austerity. One such image was Daphne Greengrass, naked and sweaty and practically liquid with how relaxed she was, draped across Pansy's emerald green sheets. If she were to try to paint paradise, it would look something like this.

"Aren't you tired? Even a little bit?" Daphne asked her breathily and Pansy nearly laughed before turning back to her dresser and dabbing perfume on her skin. The room the Malfoys had provided was well stocked and she supposed she should be grateful for the curtesy, their standing in court was certainly not what it once was. Not that Pansy would ever, ever regret it. Daphne had kissed her for the first time when they were fifteen and stupid and Pansy had kissed her for the first time when she was seventeen and stupid. She would never, ever go back.

"I've told you time and time again my lovely nymph, la petite mort only energizes me," Pansy reminded her. It was true, sex always made her want to get up, run around, conquer. Daphne on the other hand, simply want to sleep until the next round. It made for some interesting nights. "Do you think Granger will wear white?" Pansy asked her paramour lightly as she shrugged on her robe and moved to her dresser, taking stock of her assortment of dresses with pleasure.

"What do you mean?" Daphne asked.

"Does anyone actually believe that the bride is a virgin?" Pansy wondered a little sarcastically. Almost no efforts could be made to stop the whispers once Draco and Hermione had ceased attempting to disguise their so-called debauchery. Pansy was kind of surprised though, the straight laced blushing maid apparently had a foracious appetite for all that they disappeared behind closed doors together.

"Maybe Tori," Daphne suggested, her sister was very naïve, or at least she had been.

"Especially not Tori, she did find out about the affair after all," It had been more than slightly surprising to learn that Tori had figured it out all on her own; it filled Pansy with a strange kind of pride.

"Something tells me that Narcissa will make her wear the white anyways, for image purposes," Daphne predicted. Pansy paused, weighing that suggestion as she lifted her own gown and draped it over her chair. The garment was irrationally ornate and expensive and well, she could get away with it because despite her life choices, she was still the only heir to the Parkinson family name. Her family was more than content to ignore her current relationship and just hope for a political marriage down the line. She wouldn't mind.

"If this wedding was about image, Draco would be marrying a virgin," Pansy snorted.

"He is just marrying the newly discovered Duke's best friend and ward, so I suppose that it's a
favorable match with no need for appearances," Daphne reminded her.

"True, somehow that boy managed to get everything he wanted and still help his line," Pansy rolled her eyes, not really too bitter about it. She had stopped being jealous of Drake right around when she realized how deep his Daddy issues went.

"He certainly couldn't have planned it," Daphne admitted with a sigh.

"No, he's just a lucky piece of shit," Pansy rolled her eyes. What she would have given to have been the one to arrange that relationship or reveal it to the couple, there by earning their gratitude, and the Duke's. Harry Potter was quite the powerful friend to have.

"Competitive is a good look on you, though I do prefer it being directed to more mutually pleasurable pursuits," Daphne observed meaningfully, and Pansy turned, smirking at her lover.

"I thought you were tired?" She reminded the other woman. Daphne just smirked and slid her hand meaningfully down her stomach.

"Not quite tired enough," She informed her lover as her hand came to slide between her folds.

"Let's fix that," Pansy suggested, quickly discarding her robe, and crawling over to her lover. Daphne smirked as Pansy settled between her legs. "How quickly do you think I can make you come?"

"See, this is the competitive that I like," Daphne told her, fondly tucking her lover's hair behind her ear. Pansy blushed and ducked her head. She'd deny it until her dying day, but Pansy still wasn't great at accepting affection, far too used to being a quick shag and a bit of fun. Daphne seemed determined to accustom her lover to being cared for. Pansy would never admit that it pleased her to no end.

**Blaise**

Ginny had needs. Whoever had said that sex was for men and women merely grin and bear it knew nothing. Though the woman had insisted on not shagging until he had at least "agreed to make an honest woman out of her," she was eager to sate her appetite in other ways. Blaise was more than willing to help.

He kissed the inside of her thigh before sitting up and stretching out his jaw. He took pride in his endurance, but his ginger haired minx didn't make it easy.

"Try not to piss Mione off today, will you?" Ginny suggested evenly, as Blaise slid out from underneath her sheets. Ginny and her family had been given special dispensation to join the Greengrasses in their travels, even though she technically should have stayed behind. With a stable boy turned Duke, a slave turned Lady, and a waiter turned Knight running around, 'technically' had become much more confusing as of late.

"I never try to piss her off," Blaise insisted as he tossed her dress to her. She caught it with a huff without getting out of bed.

"Oh no, you're successful without even trying," Ginny teased, squirming around as she pulled her dress on.

"See, and my mother said I'd never achieve anything," Blaise quipped as he worked at the buttons on his dress shirt. Ginny shimmied gracelessly towards him and pressed a careful kiss to his brow. He felt his face heat at the tender gesture and once again thanked his darker complexion. He did not
know how Drake and Ginny managed to function with how violently their pale skin flushed.

"You got them a gift, correct?" Ginny confirmed as she stood, sliding on her stockings. Blaise looked away quickly, it was far too easy to distract him these days.

"Yes Mum," Blaise mocked.

"Nothing salacious?" Ginny continued, the stubborn wench, as she tossed her hair over her shoulders and sent him a significant look. He rolled his eyes but stepped behind her, carefully plaiting the red strands. He would never, ever admit it, but their little routine comforted him to no ends. Whenever he was jealous or impatient, all he had to do was look at his witch's hair and remind himself that she let him do that. It was such a small thing, but he knew the fussy witch rarely let anyone so much as touch her precious hair.

"Nothing obviously salacious," Blaise countered. To be fair, there was nothing salacious about the bottle of single malt scotch and the enchanted glass designed to vanish said scotch the moment one had reached their limit. The salacious element was the very boring "History of Magical Breweries" that, underneath the book jacket contained a list of tips for finding time for shagging after kids. Draco would thank him for it, eventually, probably after he forgave him for the stags' weekend.

"If I were a less secure woman I would take offense to that," Ginny reminded him as he finished the long plait and tied it off.

"If you were a less secure woman, we wouldn't be here," He reminded her. "What did you get them?"

"None of your business," She chided, adding a few drops of perfume to her wrists. He noticed the soft hints of vanilla and almond and his nose twitched.

"Your mum got you that?" Blaise guessed as he tugged on his trousers.

"How on earth did you know that?" She huffed as she brushed rouge along her cheeks.

"You smell like carnations, but also almond, vanilla, and peach. Your mother thinks that peach and carnation aren't refined and respectable enough, just like me," He griped. Ginny looked for a second as if she wanted to argue but stopped short and stepped up close to him.

"She," Ginny sighed, "she's been nagging for me to be nice to Prince Longbottom and hope he would consider me as a worthy match." She rolled her eyes at her own words.

"It never ceases to amaze me that that doofus is the heir to throne," Blaise scoffed. The royal family was a terrible mess and an unexpected death had catapulted the Longbottoms into the succession crisis. Somehow the dorky, anxious mess that Draco and Blaise had tormented for years was now The Crown Prince, oops. It was a good thing both Granger and Ginny were good friends with the Prince or he would be worried.

"Be nice!" Ginny smacked his arm.

"To my competition," Blaise scoffed dismissively as he tugged on his dress robes.

"This isn't a competition and I am not a prize," She told him firmly, turning bright brown eyes in his direction.

"Oh, my naïve omega, everything is a competition," He reminded her, wrapping his arms around her waist.
"Even if it was, you already won," She assured him and kissed him soundly. "I'll prove it to you later." She winked and laughed as she stepped out of her embrace.

"I'm going to hold you to that!" He called after her as she closed the door behind her.

Astoria

"Are you all right?" Her dutiful fiancé asked by way of greeting and kissed her hand with a bow. She smiled at him and nodded encouragement. He was still learning how to be a proper lord. With his knighthood and their impending marriage, the Weasleys were now a major house with a great deal of power and responsibility. The mannerisms required some coaching.

"Of course, my friend's impending joy brings me great happiness," Astoria smiled, the epitome of grace as she took his arm and they made their way out to the garden. The flowers were in full, vibrant bloom and the white chairs and petal strewn aisle seemed to blend into the natural landscape. It truly was lovely, even if Astoria was in danger of sneezing the entire time.


"Shhhh, that's a secret," She reminded him, giggling. Hermione had told her of the impending pregnancy with such glee it had been hard to resent the other woman's joy. It had been harder and harder to do that lately. It wasn't that Astoria was unhappy and she certainly wasn't jealous of Hermione, she was quite happy with her fiancé, for the record, it was just hard to forgive, and far harder to forget. It was just going to take a while longer. They had time.

"Has she told you the sex of their joy?" Ron asked with a wink as he lead her to their seats. Hermione had decided to only have Ginny as a bridesmaid, and Blaise was serving as the best man. Rumor has it that Narcissa was not pleased.

"No, but apparently they have a name in mind," Astoria shared absentmindedly. Mione had admitted it after a tipsy Ginny had pestered her for hours during the Hen's Weekend.

"Mione always was a planner." Ron unbuttoned his jacket carefully, sitting uncomfortably straight in his chair. Astoria smiled fondly and brushed an imaginary piece of lint off of his shoulder in an excuse to touch him. The audience around her chattered mindlessly, expressing their immense joy for the woman that they had never heard of before the engagement.

"Not a very good one, apparently." Astoria rolled her eyes.

"I'm inclined to agree with you, but I can just faintly hear my mother telling me to be nice," Ron teased, laughing. Astoria had met Mrs. Weasley in an unofficial capacity for the first time just a few weeks ago. The woman had hugged her so tightly that she could not quite breathe, and Astoria had found herself sobbing almost instantly at the unexpected and apparently much needed comfort. Her future mother-in-law had not even blinked, but just rubbed the younger woman's back and made soothing noises. The sincere care was so different from the pressure and expectations that she been experiencing for so long that she had not known how to handle it. She found it much easier to function as a future Weasley as opposed to a future Malfoy.

"I can hear my mother suggesting that you see a healer about that," Astoria joked.

"Fresh," Ron chided with no bite. It was strange, being with a man who didn't mind a woman having an opinion or teasing him, but Astoria found that she liked it just as much in a fiancé as she had liked it in a stranger.

"That is how you like me," She reminded him, and a satisfying hard look settled in his eyes and
Astoria might have been a virgin, but she knew lust when she saw it.

"When I finally make you my wife, I will show you exactly how I like you," Ron's voice deepened, and Astoria smirked.

"Is that a promise?" The groom's hurried entrance from the side of the garden cut their conversation short. Astoria had seen her former-almost-fiancé in many circumstances and she had been a first-hand witness of his charm but the smile that stretched across his face was like nothing that she had ever seen before. He reached the dais quickly, probably too quickly, bound into position. Astoria smiled, endeared despite herself by the way his fingertips drummed on the outside of his leg. Draco nodded to the back of the seating and the violinist started the music. They only had to wait a measure or so for Blaise and Ginny to enter. The light blue dress looked lovely with Ginny's hair and the woman flashed a benevolent smile at the gathered crowd. Blaise looked dapper and imposing with the significantly shorter red head, but Astoria knew better than anyone that looks could be deceiving.

She had known Ginny long before their lives had all changed so drastically but in the same way that she had never really spent any real time with Ron before coming to Malfoy Manor, she hadn't really known the redhead. Now that Astoria was marrying her older brother, Ginerva no longer felt any need to act like a servant around Astoria and the red head was quick, both with her wit and her wand. Astoria was quite reasonably intimidated by the other woman. Ron insisted that Ginny wasn't actually that scary, just protective, but Astoria found that such a perspective was easier to have as the protected, rather than the intruder. Ron didn't get it.

A distant cousin was serving as the flower girl, and the adorable child practically skipped down the aisle, tossing petals as she went. The crowd chuckled as she almost blew by her mother before being corralled to her seat. Draco smiled at the little girl just a smidge too fondly and Astoria suspected she might know the sex of Hermione's child after all.

The violinist took a significant pause as the crowd clumsily came to their feet and turned to look towards the aisle. Hermione appeared after a beat, rounding a hedge and Astoria felt herself grin with true pride at how beautiful her friend looked. Her curls were pinned up delicately to show off the beautiful pearl necklace she wore. The dress was lovely, with long lacy sleeves and a sweetheart neckline. Astoria had suspected that her former handmaiden would feel uncomfortable with all of these eyes on her but her gaze was sure. Astoria snuck a peak towards Draco and felt something inside her ache at the sweetness of the moment as she watched a man who appeared to be encountering God.

**Draco**

Wow.

**Hermione**

"Sir Malfoy, you may now kiss the bride," Draco beamed at her for the briefest of moments before cupping the back of her neck where his seal sat and kissing her sweetly. The seal tingled with glee and Hermione suspected that she might be sending out literal sparks as she returned the kiss. She was Mrs. Malfoy and she had never been happier. A sudden, violent sneeze surprised the couple out of their moment and Hermione barely kept herself from laughing when she saw the mortified blush on Astoria's face. She smiled forgivingly at the other woman. It took a beat for the surprised crowd to remember that they were supposed to clap and this time Hermione really did laugh as Draco took her hand and lead her quickly from the garden.

Moments later she found herself being lifted into the air and kissed hungrily. She pulled away from her new husband reluctantly but couldn't help herself from giggling again.
"None of that husband we do have a party to attend. Remember?" She teased him primly. Draco smirked.

"And then, I get to whisk you away while we spend days shagging like bunnies, wife," That word shouldn't sound dirty coming out of his mouth, but it did. It absolutely did.

... 

The reception was lovely and Hermione supposed that she shouldn't have been too surprised because if Narcissa had proven herself trustworthy in any sense, it was certainly in public perception.

It was only after the meal and the first dance that Hermione remembered the unfortunate encounter that she had set herself up for.

"Heads up," Hermione muttered to her husband in between receiving guests.

"What?" He whispered back, somehow managing to not totally move his mouth or shift his eyes. Damn him and his superior sneakiness. It didn't seem to matter as Draco caught sight of the approaching lunatic in a black ballgown and straightened considerably.

"Congratulations, my dear nephew," Bellatrix called far too loudly as she sauntered across the hall. Heads snapped towards her and Hermione remembered with chilling clarity when she had wanted to be her. Now, Bellatrix was merely a bad memory and a grave warning about what power could do to a person.

"Thank you, Aunt Bella, your warm sentiments are greatly appreciated." Draco's hand was warm where it rested on her back and Hermione focused on that as she struggled to level her blank, happy expression at Bellatrix's insane black eyes.

"Though you did it wrong," Bellatrix continued without sparing a glance at Hermione.

"Excuse me?" Draco was going to break his teeth if he kept grinding them like that.

"Omegas make for wonderful mistresses, not brides, particularly not common slaves," Bellatrix explained with a cruel smirk. Hermione felt Draco stiffen beside her as the mark on the back of her neck tingled uncomfortably, but she beat him to it.

"What the" Bellatrix shrieked at the unexpected stinging jinx. Hermione smirked as she stowed her wand away again.

"I'm so sorry, you see," Hermione simpered, even as she lifted her chin and squared her shoulders, "I was only recently freed and I'm still getting the hang of controlling my magic. It appears I have quite a bit of it. I would hate to make a mistake, particularly on my wedding day." She batted her kohl lined eyes deliberately as Bellatrix raised an eyebrow. Even though the music was still playing and various courtiers were still talking, it may as well have been silent for the amount of tension between the two immensely powerful witches.

That is what Hermione was: an immensely powerful witch with an immensely powerful and influential husband who loved her dearly and looked at her as if she could work miracles. Nowadays, she could, and she loved it, almost as much as she loved him.

Bellatrix looked away.

Draco
Damn.

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