The Consequence of All Things

by Ihungerforbrains

Summary

As Hermione and Draco return for their last year at Hogwarts, they find there was an unexpected repercussion following the harrowing incident at Malfoy Manor...

CHAPTER EIGHT NOW UP: Just how *does* Hogwarts deal with expectant mums?

Mentions of rape and violence. Slow-burn Dramione - not for the impatient. Sequel of Flowers of Flesh and Blood
Chapter One

“No, Hermione, for the hundredth time, I am absolutely not returning to school to take seventh year,” Ron, red faced and irate, stabbed a sausage off of her plate and glowered at her from across the worn wooden surface of the Weasley’s dining table.

“There are still three weeks of summer, Ronald,” Hermione pleaded, “I’m sure if you just asked Headmistress McGonagall, she’d be willing to—”

Harry, who was sitting next to Ron, sighed and laid down his *Daily Prophet*. “Look, we’ve been over this loads of times. There’s really no point in us returning to Hogwarts. We have learned so much more this past year than we ever will there. Plus, the Ministry is in shambles, Hermione. They need as many able wands as possible.” He cast her a pointed, guilt inducing look.

She chose to ignore it and press on. “That’s not true, Harry! There are absolute heaps we haven’t learned in practically every subject. Not to mention the N.E.W.T.S! This one over here,” she pointed her fork at Ron, “is severely lacking in Transfiguration. How can you go off into the world to hunt for…for Death Eaters without a proper education, for Merlin’s sake?” Hermione knew her voice had taken on that shrill quality they both teased her over, knew she cheeks were flushed a brilliant crimson and her eyes were wet with tears, but she couldn’t help herself. The Ministry needed properly trained wizards, and she needed her best mates to be there with her for their last true year at Hogwarts. How could they not understand that?

Ron rolled his eyes, oblivious to her anxiety, and still managed to look irritated with half a sausage in his mouth. “Well, when we capture a Death Eater and transfiguring a mouse into a teapot is the only way we’ll get answers from him, we’ll owl you, how about that?” He turned to Harry, a sudden brainwave having struck. “They’re so short staffed, I can’t imagine who’ll they’ll have teach Defense Against the Dark Arts this year. Snape’s portrait?”

While the two boys debated the positives and negatives of a portrait for a professor - “It could work; we had a ghost professor,” or “he technically couldn’t enforce detention,” - Hermione let the issue lie for now and left the table, breakfast untouched.

Out in the garden, summer was making its stalwart presence known. A sweltering heat wave had overcome the countryside at the beginning of August, bringing record breaking temperatures and rolling afternoon thunderstorms that did nothing but add to the intense humidity. Hermione looked upon Molly’s sagging, rain beaten tomato plants in sympathy from her shaded bench.

Left alone with her thoughts, bile began to rise in the back of her throat. Hermione swallowed and tried to refocus her attention to the rustling among the hydrangea bushes to her left, the tiny gnome feet peeking out. Anywhere, but to the growing concern deep in her heart.

It started out with a little niggling at the back of her mind. A stray thought here, a doubt there. She looked down at her somewhat bloated stomach, having before laughed it off as eating too much of
Molly’s delicious home cooking. She was losing weight, not gaining, Hermione thought, absently rubbing her temples as another round of nausea struck her. Her monthly had come, not regularly, but a couple of times in the last months, with occasional cramps waking her up in the middle of the night.

She would have noticed something sooner after it had happened.

_The school year is approaching, and paranoia and loss of sleep are making me delusional_, she had concluded last night as she refolded her Gryffindor scarf over and over in her hands until it was a tight rectangle, laying it neatly in her already packed trunk.

Hermione had much preferred to deny that night had ever occurred. To give it her thoughts was to make it real, she liked to think. And except for the occasional, every-other-day nightmare, she felt ignoring the _incident_ at the Manor was the most logical thing to do.

The Dark Lord had been defeated, and the wizarding world, her world, was left in tatters. She was one among many survivors tasked with picking up the pieces Voldemort and his followers had left ruined in their wake. They had all had terrible things happen to them, she reasoned. There was no point in making them bear the burden of her ordeal. They had so much to think about as it was.

Three more weeks and the summer would be over. Three more weeks and life would begin to become normal again. No more horcrux hunting. No more sleepless nights in a dingy tent. No more cackles of laughter and slimy lips on her own…

_No, no, no…._ she clutched her hands tightly, rubbing them back and forth, back and forth. _No, don’t think about that. It’s over and done. You’re safe here. Look at the hydrangeas, Hermione. You’re safe here._ But as she forced her eyes upward, the shadows being cast from the eastern sun twisted and transformed, and a man crept slowly towards her, dogged and hungry.

_Jus’ a little taste, huh? I bet I can touch ya there an’ you’ll be as slippery as an eel. Oh, ya like that, ya filthy Mudblood slu-_

Hermione barely made it to the hydrangeas before she was violently ill. Yellow bile and a bit of last night’s steak and kidney pie coated the cones of pink flowers. The dry heaves that followed didn’t cover up the wails of indignation from the gnomes who ran for cover and cleanup into the surrounding bush.

“Hermio – oh no!” She heard Ginny’s voice call from the back door then grass muffled footsteps as she ran towards her. “Are you ok? Is it your stomach?” Ginny’s warm palm gently massaged her sweat soaked back and she nodded. “That pie last night didn’t settle well with me either.”

“Yeah, too much I suppose,” Hermione looked up from her kneeling position in the dirt at Ginny who was giving her an odd look, brows furrowed in concern.

“Hmm…yes. I was going to ask you if you’d like to accompany Mum and me to Diagon Ally for school supplies seeing as we’re all here. Looks like you could grab a tummy tonic from the Apothecary as well.”

Smiling gently, Ginny helped Hermione to get feet and brushed back a sweaty strand of curly brown hair from her forehead. “Are you sure you’re ok, Hermione?”

Hermione, hand at her mouth to wipe away the imagined spittle, couldn’t meet her friend’s eyes as she nodded an affirmation. “Um, yes, yes, just an upset stomach, I think.”
Even the dreadful summer swelter couldn’t eradicate the cheerful hum of energy all along Diagon Alley. In the nearly four months since the victory of the light, the previously barren, burned, or boarded up shops hastily reopened or made repairs, giving everyone a much needed sense of a return to normality.

Shops were brimming with customers and new products to entice them with, and despite the occasional blasted roof or boarded window that spoke for the troubles these last few years, the Alley burst with laughter and joviality.

*Perhaps they want to remind themselves that they are still alive,* Hermione pondered, navigating through the overcrowded path behind her two brightly haired companions. *Witches and wizards have spent so much time living in fear and uncertainty, they need to know there are still some things that have survived the war.*

A tawny owl being toted around in its cage by a lively 11 year old stared at her and hooted morosely. She understood how it felt. While she longed to feel the same joy and excitement the crowd emitted, Hermione felt a chill in her bones that wouldn’t warm and an anxiety that twisted her stomach into coils. The answers to her fears was going to be resolved shortly, and that in itself brought another round of dread.

Steeling herself against the sudden urge to run, Hermione quickened her pace to catch up with the Weasley women.

“The Apothecary is just up this alley; I can pop in then meet you both at Flourish and Blotts, yeah?” Both Molly and Ginny agreed it was best to divide and conquer their supply list as Hermione could purchase Ginny’s potion ingredients there as well. After an exchange of sickles, she quickly darted down the small side lane off the north end of the main alley, and walked into the small, unassuming shop.

The much cooler interior chilled Hermione’s sweat covered skin and made goose pimples rise on her arms. When her eyes finally adjusted to the dark, she looked around at the neat rows of shelves and barrels of ingredients lining the walls, each meticulously labeled and sealed so some of the more difficult items could not escape. The shop was quiet, and besides a pair of older witches measuring the length of bat wings and a stray student picking up his supplies before the rush, it was quite empty. Nabbing some empty vials and pouches near the entrance, Hermione quickly acquired the ingredients needed for seventh year Potions for Ginny and herself.

*And now the difficult part,* she thought and, bracing herself, made her way to the rear of the shop to speak with the Apothecary.

The back counter where the elderly woman usually waited on customers to pick up their potions was vacant. Hermione drummed her fingers lightly on the oak counter and looked around. She’d never spoken to the apothecary except to ask where a hard to find ingredient was every now and then. She hadn’t much need to purchase tummy tonics or pepper-up potions as she would either make them herself or ask Madame Pomfrey when she was in school. Hermione was rarely ill, in fact. However, this particular concoction was needed with some urgency. A week was too long to wait when she needed the answers today, and what would she tell her friends she was brewing if they were to ask?

Molly would certainly recognize a pregnancy detection potion, of all people.
Having picked up and put down a small plaque reading ‘Sworn by the Vow to Keep Your Private Matters Private’ a few times, Hermione looked up and there, staring at her with a small smile, sat the witch she’d been waiting for. Hermione jumped back, having not heard her at all, and almost dropped the plaque.

“What can I do you for, dear?” Inquired the witch, her dark green eyes twinkling in the low candlelight.

Nerves badly rattled as was, Hermione stammered to answer her after glancing around to see if they were indeed alone, “Um, yes, hello. If-if you could just, ahem, please tell me if you have a…” she paused and lowered her voice further,” a pre-pregnancy detection potion?” She rushed to say the last bit as a deep flush creep from her neck to her cheeks.

“Of course we do, love! Just one moment,” was the witch’s blithe response, and then quite unexpectedly leap from her stool to peruse the back shelves, moving with a speed that was surprising of a woman her age.

“Yes, let’s see here, hmm, no no, not this one. Right, here we are!” She placed a rectangular glass bottle of clear liquid on the countertop. “Freshly brewed by me last week, and quite accurate, if I do say so. Can’t keep ‘em in stock very long; flying off the shelf, they are!”

Hermione couldn’t help but grimace at the witch and her appalling amount of energy. She gripped the bottle, ready to stow it deep within her knapsack, but stopped and set it back down in hesitation.

“Could you…I mean to say…how, precisely, does it work?”

“Ah, it’s as easy as sneezing, love. You just gulp it down and wait an hour. When you make your waters, if it’s blue colored, you’ve got a little one in ya. If it’s normal colored, you’re free and clear. Now, make sure to drink plenty of water and remember once it’s uncorked, you’ve got to use it within a fortnight, or the stinging nettle will separate. You could purchase all your other items, if you’d like.”

Giving the little bottle one last reluctant glance, Hermione nodded.

Stepping back into the muggy alley, potion ingredients tucked under her arm and an empty rectangular glass vial carefully hidden in her bag, Hermione emitted a long sigh and turned left toward the bookstore.

“No, no, no, no…” Hermione whispered as she hunched against the porcelain sink in her small sea themed bathroom. She had closed the lid on the toilet and flushed, not wishing to see the blue contents any longer, but it wouldn’t make the results disappear.

When she had returned home from Diagon Alley that evening, she had dropped her packages on the floor and rushed upstairs past her parents to the loo. It had been much more than an hour after ingesting the potion, and she had not relieved herself when she was with the Weasleys for fear it hadn’t been long enough.

*Blue. Why did it have to be blue? I shouldn’t have waited so long. I should have done something, taken another potion sooner. Hermione Granger, brightest witch of her age, what’re you going to do? The water was blue…*
An abrupt knock at the door interrupted her thoughts.

“Hermione,” her mother’s concerned voice carried through the door, “are you alright?”

She cleared her throat and willed her voice to remain calm, “I’m fine, mum. Just a bad reaction to dinner, I think. I’ll be down in a bit.”

“Alright, darling. If you like, there is some Imodium in the medicine cabinet. Take a capful with plenty of water.”

At the sound of her retreating footsteps, Hermione let out a bitter snort and ran her hands through her hair again.

*I don’t think drinking any more water will make this go away.*

After picking herself off of the bathroom floor, and informing her parents that she was turning in for an early night, Hermione resolved herself to owl the only person who would understand, or at the very least should be aware of, her predicament.

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**A/N:**

Hello! Thanks for reading the first chapter to the sequel of Flowers of Flesh and Blood. Hermione and Draco are just at the beginning of this journey, for better or worse. This fic will probably for 20 to 25 chapters long so please be patient with me. I have the plot and chapters mapped out and the first few finished.

Please please comment and review even if you have nothing nice to say. Feedback is the kindling to my creative fire.

If anyone out there in a void can spare an hour or two to beta some chapters and spitball minor details with me, I would be truly appreciative!

Thank you for reading and stay tuned for more chapters coming soon!
Draco Malfoy laid fully clothed on his bed, the light of dusk having long faded and given way to the darkness of night. His eyes followed the obnoxious pattern of the curtains. The dizzying swirls and random dots made his head ache, and he decided to burn them first thing tomorrow morning. He turned to his side, and closed his eyes. His mother his had offered him a sleeping draught, but he declined. He’d taken so many these few past months, he feared an addiction.

Draco flipped to his other side, and opened his eyes, just making out his closed school trunk as the slightly darker blot amidst the gloom. Sighing, he turned again, finding it difficult to get a comfortable position. He knew it wasn’t the bed that was making him restless, but the knowledge that he had to return to Hogwarts, but that didn’t still his fists as he pummeled them into the mattress.

The last year at Hogwarts under the control of Voldemort and his Death Eaters had been fruitless, and he had hardly attended classes, choosing instead to get as far from the castle as possible. Days were spent wandering the castle or grounds instead of attending Charms or Transfiguration. As such, he wasn’t able to pass his N.E.W.T’s. The board of governors and Headmistress McGonagall had given him a second chance to graduate, and his mother had absolutely insisted upon it. What other chance did he have to obtain a normal career in wizarding society?

He rolled his eyes at that. Normal career. He can barely walk down Diagon Alley without people practically spitting on him. Any possibility he had at normality had flown out the window the second the Dark Lord had returned and claimed Draco’s future. Their family name was ruined, and he was now a social pariah, a cautionary tale parents tell their children about the consequences of choosing the wrong side. As far as Draco was concerned, he rarely had a choice in anything the last year.

The one time he tried to do the right thing, to be a hero…

He banished the thoughts from his mind, flipping over onto his stomach and squeezed his eyes shut. While his mother was doing an admirable job of removing all evidence of the Dark Lord’s presence from their home, there were parts of the Manor where he avoided. He had blasted apart the cellar, what remained of the entrance now rubble and splinters, but destroying it could not demolish the images that caught him unaware. How many nights had he woken to her sobs and found himself immobile on his bed, stuck in a terrible paralysis. He’d lay there in a panic, helpless and weak.

Weak, pathetic, useless...

Draco reached for his down pillow, attempting to smother the voice when he heard a faint tapping on his window. Pulling himself from the discomfort of his bed, he walked over and let the owl in.

**Malfoy,**

*Please meet me at Gatton Park, Surrey this coming Tuesday at 2 o’clock pm.*  
The matter is quite urgent.

*With Regards,*  
*HJG*
Reading it, sent a thrill of anxiety through him. What could she possibly want? Was she going to tell the Ministry what happened? Draco imagined a squad of dark-robed wizards marching up to the gates demanding he come with them.

The note crumpled in his hand as he contemplated how he would respond. If he simply ignored the message she would send more, he knew, and that would raise questions with his mother. But if he did meet her, what would she want to talk about? Certainly not about that night...no, why would she?

Frowning, he hastily jotted his response and attached it to the patiently waiting owl.

Though Hermione had received his confirmation, she was still surprised to see the back of Draco Malfoy’s pale blond hair bent over a book under the shade of a sprawling oak when she arrived at the park.

She recalled the last time she had laid eyes on him, just one month ago at his trial. He had been sitting stiffly in a high back wooden chair in the center of the room, immaculately dressed and face a blank, emotionless mask before the packed Wizengamot court. Even amongst the shouts and curses coming from the crowded seats, Malfoy remained composed, staring straight ahead as the court heard from witnesses on both sides. The only time he shifted his eyes was when she took the stand, the briefest look of surprise on his face before the invisible mask slid back in place.

She had stayed long enough to hear the verdict of “Not Guilty,” and left before he was presumably whisked away by his mother to the relative safety of their manor.

The afternoon was pleasant if overcast and windy, the air thick with the promise of rain. This spot atop the hill was devoid of people except themselves which suited her just fine. She wasn’t sure how this conversation would go, and having laid awake the night before examining all of the possible reactions he could have to her news, she felt somewhat prepared for the backlash. Not having an audience certainly put her more at ease.

Hermione settled on the bench next to him, and it was a few moments of awkward silence before she cleared her voice to speak.

“I’m sure you’re wondering why I’ve asked you to meet me here,” she paused, waiting for his jeer, a snide remark, the well-worn Malfoy sneer, but he remained silent, eyes still on the open pages of his book, but no longer moving.

She breathed deeply to calm her rapidly beating heart, looking ahead at the rolling hills and distant gardens, and continued. “It’s…it’s about that night. In April. I mean to say, that night, when we –“

The book snapped shut, and Malfoy cut her stuttering off before she could finish. “Of course I know what you mean. How can I ever forget?”

He looked at her finally, his grey eyes narrowed, lips tight with contained anger, and Hermione was startled to see how haggard Malfoy appeared. He had always been lanky, but he seemed to have dropped a stone from the last time she’d seen him. Now his shirt hung from his shoulders, and his normally styled hair was in sore need of a haircut and hanging in front of his eyes. Dark smudges
rested under his pale grey eyes making them seem larger.

If Hermione hadn’t known of his immense wealth, she could have mistaken him for a down and out vagrant.

“Here to blackmail me, then? Upset that I didn’t get sent to Azkaban with my father? I’ve been waiting all summer for the quaffle to drop and now here it is. Well, go on then, send your friends in the Ministry after me. It’s not like a give a rat’s arse anymore,” he spat. He stood, book gripped in long, pale fingers, and turned to leave.

“I’m pregnant,” she whispered, her words barely louder than the rising wind, but he heard them if his sudden jerking stop was any indication.

Shaking his head, Malfoy turned toward her, his eyes suddenly darker than the approaching storm clouds. “No, that’s not possible.” His eyes moved from her despondent face down to her abdomen, her oversized t-shirt effectively hiding the small swell. “You would be, what, five and a half months along now? You look thinner than when I saw you last. You can’t be…with child,” he trailed off, his eyes searching hers, begging her to tell them it’s all a mistake.

It was Hermione’s turn to shake her head. “It’s not uncommon for a woman to lose weight, I have read, at least in the, in the second trimester. I’ve not seen a doctor yet, but-”

“See!” Malfoy pointed a finger at her triumphantly and started jabbering while he paced back and forth in front of her. “See, you could be wrong. You don’t know with absolute certainty, not one hundred percent. You could just have a stomach ache or…or woman issues. And even if you were…even if you were,” he waved a vague hand in the direction of her midsection, “expectant, you can’t be certain it is my child, and-“

“Pardon me?” Hermione screeched, raising from the bench, and surprising even herself, gripped the front of Malfoy’s button up shirt as he passed. He stopped, face frozen in shock. “How dare you imply that I would lie to you about this! That I would ever contact you, you, the last person on the face of the earth that I would want to see, and make wild paternity accusations! It has to be yours. It can’t be... be...his.”

She was sobbing now, hands falling back to find purchase on the bench and slumping down upon it.

Releasing a lungful of air, Malfoy pulled his hands through his disheveled hair, and willed himself to exhale. A gust of wind rustled through the leaves of the oak tree above them, and after a few moments when Hermione’s sobs had quieted to sniffles, he finally sat down next to her.

“Do you want to keep it?” He said, much more brusquely than he had intended, and conjured a handkerchief with his wand.

“I don’t- I’m not sure. I thought about it. A lot, actually, but taking a potion this late…” She dabbed at her nose with the tissue, and subconsciously rubbed her abdomen. It was dangerous, she knew, to abort a fetus at almost six months. Muggle clinics rarely perform them, and even the books she had found at Flourish and Blotts warned against the practice. Hermione had read on in fascinated horror at the descriptions and illustrations of potions and procedures gone horribly awry.

She paused a moment, gazing up at his tense face, and cautiously continued. “Adoption is something I am considering. I’m returning to Hogwarts in two weeks, and then moving on to a career at the Ministry. I will hardly have the time, and it would be better for the ba-baby if it were to have a proper family.” Hermione rushed out, worrying the handkerchief between her fingers.
When he didn’t respond, Hermione glanced at Malfoy to see he was staring off into the distance, eyebrows furrowed in thought.

“No,” he finally stated and turned toward her, his silver eyes piercing hers. “I’ll not have a child of mine raised by strangers. Or worse, muggles.”

Hermione sat straighter in indignation, “I was raised by muggles, and I turned out perfectly fine. Besides, it’s none of your concern what I will or will not do—”

“None of my concern? This child is most likely mine,” he cried, heedless of her icy glare. “Why bother telling me, why bother meeting me if you didn’t want me to play some part in—”

She interrupted, her voice rising to meet his, “I contacted you because you have the right to know! It would be wrong to have this child and put it up for adoption with it’s father none the wiser!”

Malfoy rolled his eyes, “Yeah, thanks for the courtesy,” he paused, and Hermione could see the gears clicking in his mind. “What if,” he stated with hesitation, “what if instead of placing it for adoption, we have my mother raise it. She could tell everyone it was hers and fathers. No one would have to know what happened, Granger, that it was ours. Mother wouldn’t mind, she really wouldn’t. We’d have to come up with some sort of explanation about the baby, of course. She would see through a phony love story straight away…. .”

Hermione considered his suggestion as he rambled on next to her, his voice racing in excitement, as if he had just discovered the missing potion ingredient to a much needed antidote. Could she allow her child to be raised by a family who loathed her kind? Who willfully and intentionally harmed Muggleborns and sowed the seeds of prejudice within the wizarding community? On the other hand, she reasoned, Narcissa was the child’s grandmother whether they liked it or not. If Hermione did give it up, at least it would be with a relative.

Unwillingly, Hermione’s mind conjured a vision of a very small baby crying alone in an enormous and cold manor; and then the genteel Mrs. Malfoy pushing a pram down Diagon Alley and herself watching them from a distance. Draco’s solution made an odd sort of sense, but something within Hermione blanched at the thought of letting that woman raise her child. It’s true that Narcissa Malfoy lied to Voldemort about the death of her best friend, Harry, but one kind act did not erase decades of hate and pureblood bigotry.

“...and if it had your hair or eyes, Mother could cast a disillusionment charm or color it’s hair or something and—”

“Listen, Malfoy,” Hermione rose from the bench and he, out of ingrained etiquette she was sure, stood as well just as the first fat drops of rain fell upon them. “All of this, you, me,” she pointed to her abdomen, “it. I need some time to sort out what I’m going to do.”

“Well, you better hurry. It’s not likely you’ll be able to hide it for much longer,” Malfoy said staring pointedly at her stomach. “School term starts back in two weeks and if—”

Hermione looked up at him in surprise, “Wait, you’re returning to finish seventh year as well? I thought you already did.” She was genuinely curious as to why the heir to the Malfoy fortune would even bother finishing out schooling. What did he need N.E.W.T.s for if he didn’t really need a job?

Malfoy shrugged, “What do you bloody care, Granger?” And with that turned to walk opposite her towards a crowd of trees to apparate away leaving Hermione standing in the rain with a lot to think about.
A/N:

Stay tuned for the next chapter when they return to Hogwarts. What’s in store for the returning eighth years, and just what will Hermione choose to do?

Thanks for reading and if you could, please leave a comment. I needs my fix!
Chapter Three

Hermione glanced around Platform 9 3/4, the tightly packed crowd of students and their families giving her a sense of unease. She recognized the friendly faces of her former school mates and some not so friendly ones as her eyes fell upon the disdainful face of Blaise Zabini. Hermione wasn’t sure if it was her paranoid imagination of not, but there seemed to be a hush among the crowd - eyes darted furtively around, and the small groups seemed to huddle closer in on themselves. Perhaps it was the foggy gloom of the morning, but she never remembered her departure to Hogwarts being so somber before.

Hermione brushed against Ron as Ginny leap at Harry for one last passionate snog before her final year at the prestigious school of witchcraft and wizarding. There was certainly a larger security presence if the two men accompanying them was any indication. Ron and Harry had pretended to act as their security, but as she glanced awkwardly at the two in full embrace, she knew at least Harry had other motives. As what always happens when traveling with her best friend in public, people stopped and stared openly, whispering among their friends at the sight of The Boy Who Lived. Hermione pretended they weren’t looking at her as well.

Ron blushed and scratched the back of his head, looking anywhere but at the two next to them as they approached the Hogwarts Express.

“Well…” He started, finally looking down at her when they were meters from the train steps.

“Ron, it’s…” She said at the same time, and they both shared a brief, embarrassed laugh.

“I just wanted to say that...well, I’m going to miss you,” Ron turned to her fully, his hand reaching out to brush a stray curly hair from her eyes then gently skimmed down her cheek to rest on her shoulder. Hermione’s heart sped up in apprehension. “The holidays can’t come soon enough, really,” he nervously rushed out. “And this summer, it was so chaotic with the aftermath and cleanup and all. We never had time to chat. In private. A proper private chat about, well, you know-” Before she could hear the words he knew he was going to say, the warning whistle blew.

“Ron, the train-” Hermione took a step away from him, out of reach of his warm hand and his gentle heart.

A brief look of hurt flashed across his face, but he gave her a lopsided smile nevertheless and nodded. “I’ll be owling you, I promise. And I’ll come to Hogsmeade when I got the time off for a weekend visit. Just me, yeah?”

Hermione looked into his cobalt blue eyes and wanted to reach out to him, to pull him into a warm hug and never let go. She wanted things to go back to how they were between them before they were captured by the Snatchers. Before the dungeon and the cold and the pain. Ron deserved someone better than her, someone who could return his affections and endure his touch without feeling sick. He deserved someone clean.
She returned his smile for a wan one. “Yes, of course, Ron,” and before her brain had time to stop it, the words erupted from her mouth “I’ll miss you.” Ginny and Harry finally parted lips as Hermione bid her best friends farewell and stepped aboard the train.

Held captive to the sea of students trying to find an empty compartment, Hermione fell into her own thoughts. For the last two weeks, she had stayed awake most nights, anxiety ridden and unable to move as her mind raced with thoughts of the future. She knew she was running out of time, that this child would make its way into world soon, and she would have no alternatives left, and a vast, silent part of herself no longer cared. It wanted her to lock herself in a room, never come out, ignore her friends and her parents and shut the world away.

Hermione wished she could ignore her body and the new aches she was experiencing, but they would not be ignored. While she hadn’t had much weight gain, her belly was more pronounced, the disillusionment charm the only reason no one knew yet. The skin of her stomach itched, her back ached, and her feet were already throbbing. She felt exhausted and frail, as if this thing within her was sucking out her life’s energy.

She no longer felt like herself. Before, Hermione would have had an action plan, would have charted out her course for the next five years. She would have had this mess sorted out straight away. Now, Hermione barely had one foot in front of the other let alone a plan for what to do next.

In her mind, she was standing in the middle of a bleak, empty field, and in every direction an impenetrable grey fog hung in the air. No direction was more alluring than the next, no choice more desirous than any other. She was alone in that field, falling deeper and deeper into despair.

As if stung with a hex, Hermione’s attention was pulled upward when her eyes spotted a familiar white-blond head across the train. Draco Malfoy was halfway through a compartment when his eyes rose as well as if sensing her. Quickly looking away, he entered and snapped the door behind himself. Though only seconds had passed while she was locked in his frosty gaze, Hermione’s heart had jumped to her throat, halting her ability to breathe.

Neither had been in contact since their meeting two weeks prior. During that time, her mind had raced with the possibilities of his suggestion, of any other options she had. She had made her mind up in that regard, but couldn’t bring herself to send him an owl. Now that he was also at school, it would seem she had no choice but to face him.

Hermione chastised herself. She had never thought she could be so cowardly.

A sudden tug on her arm pulled her sharply from her self-castigating thoughts, and she violently pulled away and turned.

Neville blinked down at her. “Here, Hermione. We have a compartment,” he said sheepishly and led her a few doors down.

The compartment was full of her friends, warm and welcoming and Hermione felt the chill of her thoughts temporarily disappear in their company. Ginny was already seated next to the window, staring out of it with a forlorn expression, no doubt mentally tallying the days when she would see Harry again. Neville sat next to Luna who was sporting an incredible jumper that seemed to be made of fresh leaves and moss.

Hermione took a seat next to Dean, who was in the midst of a debate with the ethereal Ravenclaw.

“The only reason I asked, oh hey Hermione, the only reason I asked was because Muggles use those type of clothes to go hunting. They’re called gilly suits. I didn’t mean to offend you, Luna” Dean
said, flopping back in his seat.

“What’s this?” Hermione inquired, stroking Crookshanks who had jumped into her lap after being released from his cage and was furiously nuzzling her hand.

“Dean asked Luna if she were dressed like that because she was hunting which seemed to insult her since she no longer eats meat or uses animal products after a sheep spoke to her,” Ginny informed Hermione, her eyes glinting mischievously.

Luna appeared mildly affronted, “It didn’t communicate verbally. Through its eyes I saw the fear and humiliation of its very existence. To be shaved naked every year for the use of clothing. To be butchered and eaten on Easter day with mint jelly. That is the plight of so many creatures…”

As Luna prattled on about her reasons for not wearing a proper jumper, Hermione and the others looked at each other and smiled.

*Some things, I suppose, never change.* Hermione thought, and settled into the comfortable companionship of her friends.

Hogwarts was not, as it seems, entirely the same. The hulking frame of Hagrid did not greet the first years as they finally arrived at Hogsmeade later that day, and they were instead shuffled into the thestral-drawn carriages with all of the other students by a handful of aurors.

Draco watched curiously as two of them broke away and entered the train, wands at the ready. He was nudged by Blaise to his right who was looking over his shoulder.

“What do you think that means?” Blaise asked as curiously as his polished voice would allow.

Draco willed his hand to unclench the wand in his robe. *Mother’s wand,* he reminded himself, and exhaled through his nostrils. “Haven’t the slightest,” he said, shrugging. But as the carriages brought them closer and closer to the castle, Draco couldn’t ease his mind at the strange welcome they had received.

After the first years were pulled aside by Professor Flitwick, the rest made their way to the Great Hall where another curious sight greeted them. The Hall itself seemed little changed with the exception of a fallen archway or two and some large chunks of stone missing from the walls - remnants of the battle. Above, the velvet black ceiling was dotted with the stars and the waxing crescent moon was just peeking up from the north. The thousands of candles floated overhead as usual, but the four long tables that ran down the length of the hall were gone, replaced instead with four rows of four tables. Placards were at their center, the first one on the left closest to the staff table reading “First Years”.

Draco wasn’t the only one taken aback. All around him, his fellow returning students looked perplexed, but following the cues on the tables, sat with their year. The table marked “Eighth Years” was by far the smallest of the bunch with, Draco counted, only seventeen returning students.

Tracey was the first to say was he was thinking, “It’s strange, don’t you think, being here again. The last time we were all in this hall, it was after the final battle and we were helping bandage each other up and moving the bodies and…” she tapered off, her fingernails scratching at a dent in the table.

Daphne patted her back consolingly, her hazel eyes also averted down. “Yeah, I know what you
Draco heard, but said nothing, his face set in stony apathy. The memories of the aftermath of the battle still gave Draco nightmares, and the smell of death and charred flesh lingered long after he’d awoken.

Draco was surprised that some of his classmates from Slytherin house had returned at all. They all sat at one end of the rectangular table, apart from the others. Blaise was the only other male and Daphne Greengrass and Tracey Davis rounded them out to four. Blaise, ever the elitist, held his head high and vehemently ignored anyone who dared look his way. Draco knew Daphne’s father had prompted her to return with her sister, but knowing Tracey, she had done so out of pure spite and vindictiveness.

A Slytherin through and through. He couldn’t help but admire her.

The Hufflepuffs had the same amount: Ernie Macmillan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott sat next to their group, though there was a large gap, followed by the Ravenclaws. As could be expected, they had the most returnees of any house with Michael Corner, Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein, Padma Patil and Mandy Brocklehurst.

Amoung the Gryffindors, only four returned to complete their final missed year at school. Neville and Dean the only boys. Pavarti and Hermione were the only girls.

Granger, Draco thought, and willed his eyes to stay to the front of the hall. He’d heard nothing from her the last two weeks. He had started a hundred letters asking her what she had decided, but they all ended up in the bin. Draco told himself he didn’t care to know, the child was her problem, and he offered her all the help he could at their last meeting. It was in her hands to take care of things from this point forward, but a tiny nagging voice in the back of his mind was still concerned, whether he would admit it or not.

As the last students took their seats, the Great Hall doors swung open and the first years spilled out, led by Professor Flitwick, to stand before the High Table, and the Sorting Ceremony commenced. It was much longer than Draco recalled it ever being, and as the last girl “Willowby, Britney” was sorted into Hufflepuff and the cheers subsided, he had counted more than forty-five new students.

Odd, Draco thought as Headmistress McGonagall took to the podium. The largest lot I’ve seen yet.

The headmistress cleared her throat, and the hall was hushed.

“Welcome, new students and old, to Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry! We have quite a lovely year of magical education planned for all of you,” McGonagall declared in her stern Scottish brogue, the corners of her lips lifting upwards.

“Now onto business. I would like you all to welcome Professor Tagget to our staff.” A tall, black witch sitting next to Sprout stood briefly at the student's mild applause. ”She has previously taught at Ilvermorny in America and will be taking on the role of Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Professor Sinistra, while continuing to teach Astronomy, will be taking on years one through five of Transfiguration, and I will be instructing the N.E.W.Ts students myself.

“As many of you have noticed, there is and will continue to be for the foreseeable future an Auror presence on the grounds.” There was a sudden outbreak of murmuring among the students. McGonagall raised her arms and all was quiet once more. “Now, now, there is nothing to be concerned about, simply a precaution as construction continues throughout the castle.”
The headmistress paused for a moment, her eyes passing over the students slowly, and when she spoke again, her voice had taken on a solemn quality. “These last years have been difficult, to say the least. We have lost so many in the war against the dark, yet this castle remains, this beacon of light and learning is still standing in the face of those who would have burned it down and had ignorance and intolerance stand in its place. We are here, all of us whole and triumphant, while others cannot be. We must learn from the past and press forward to create a better world for ourselves.

“I am proud to assume the mantle of so many esteemed witches and wizards that came before me. I hope to add to the legacy of Hogwarts by improving house unity. Students will now be seated by year rather than house from this point forward, however, living quarters and classes will still be with your house.” The eighth years were now talking amongst themselves so loudly, Draco almost missed what McGonagall said next. “Eighth years, please meet me in the North Tower after the feast.”

After the usual notices and warnings, the start of term feast commenced.

Draco tried to pretend he didn’t care about the hard stares and the contemptuous murmurs that followed him as he walked out of the Great Hall. They didn’t mean anything to him.

When he finally reached the last door atop the former Divination Tower, he sunk down, head falling into his knees.

Anything.

A/N:

First, let me apologize for how late this chapter is. That certainly wasn’t my intention, but Lady Fate makes liars of us all.

I moved across the country last month, and somehow, somewhere, in someway, I lost my laptop. It’s most likely underneath a motel bed in Tennessee. Unfortunately, 80% of my story notes were on there and not backed up. Sooooo….yeah. Having to remember my chapters and plot details from memory is not at all fun. I threw a week long tantrum and now am back to writing.

Please forgive the grammar and other errors - I’m trying to push the words out of memory as fast as I can and don’t have a beta reader.
Hermione huffed as she finally made it to the top of the steps of the North Tower, bending over the stitch in her side. For the first time, she was thankful that she was the last person to a room as she briefly leaned against the cool stone wall, exhausted from the day’s events.

And to think, I’ll only have to do this many times a day...

As Hermione entered, she was sure this wasn’t the same cramped Divination classroom she had briefly attended during third year. Gone were the overstuffed chairs and small round tables covered in shawls. The air was clear of all cloying perfume, and the walls devoid of the dusty knick-knacks Professor Trelawney had accumulated over the years. The room looked larger now, open and airy with a tall vaulted ceiling. Despite it, it resembled the Gryffindor common room a bit with cozy looking armchairs and tables for studying. It gave her a warm and homey feeling. Instead of the usual red and gold lion banner, however, all of the house banners were on display along the circular stone walls.

At the whoosh behind her, she turned to see McGonagall walk out of the enormous fireplace amid green flames.

Hermione and Neville shared a brief, curious look. The steepled witches hat McGonagall had worn for the feast was gone, and she regarded them each thoughtfully. Now that Hermione was closer to the Headmistresses, she noted that throughout her tightly pulled back black hair, streaks of grey were more pronounced, and the worry lines on her forehead seemed to be etched deeper than before. Having to repair and take on the burden of the school after the battle had clearly taken a physical toll on her former head of house.

“I have to say, having an Eighth year is quite unprecedented. You are the first ever in Hogwarts history. This has been a year of many firsts, to say the least,” she said then gently cleared her throat. “Because of this unusual situation, I’ve decided your own quarters would be best. Occupant lists are posted on the doors. I expect you all to lay aside your house differences for the promotion of harmony after these troubling times.”

She glanced sternly around the encircled group. “You are all adults now, and as such, you will be afforded more freedoms. From Saturday morning until Sunday evening, you will be allowed to leave school premises.” Many of the students turned to each other and grinned, the curious atmosphere becoming one of excitement. “Of course, you will have to sign out with your heads of houses, and if there are any problems, this privilege could be revoked. As adults, I expect you all to act with responsibility and decorum. All other school rules will apply to you as you complete your education here. Are there any questions?”

“Professor?” Mandy asked, her hand in the air.

“Yes, Miss Brocklehurst?”

“Are we allowed to play Quidditch? On our house team I mean?” Among Hermione’s vague Quidditch memories, she recalled the swarthy Ravenclaw as the Beater for her team in their sixth
Professor McGonagall smiled, “Considering the reduction in size of the other years, I wouldn’t object to any eighth years playing for their Quidditch team.”

With no other questions at that time, Professor McGonagall bid them all goodnight, but before turning back towards the fireplace, she beckoned Hermione to her. “Miss Granger, a word please?”

Hermione heart thudded loudly against her ribs. *Does she know? How could she know?* She swallowed thickly and walked to the fireplace, out of earshot of the disbanding eighth years.

“I’m sure you are aware that Miss Weasley was awarded the privilege of Head Girl,” she said, her green eyes softening. Hermione was, and had been present when Ginny read the letter aloud to her proud family. Molly had been absolutely beside herself with joy, whipping up a cake for her only daughter that even Fleur had admired.

Deep down inside herself, a part she now called “Old Hermione”, she had seethed with jealousy.

“I wanted to tell you that I’m sorry that it couldn’t be you. You obviously would have been had...” she trailed off and Hermione filled in the blanks. *Had you returned last year. Had a murderous lunatic not invaded the school. Had you not ruined your own future.*

“Of course, I understand. Ginny will do a great job.” The words rang hollow in her own ears. Professor McGonagall seemed to want to say more on the matter, but instead gave Hermione a thin-lipped smile, a pat on the shoulder, and said “Well, you’ll have more time for your studies this term, anyway” before turning to exit how she had come in.

Hermione sighed wearily, heading up the staircase along the wall to her room and wished with all her might that there was a spell that could halt time itself. She could live forever in a time in-between and hide like the coward she now knew she was.

In a small way, she was glad she no longer would sleep with her fellow Gryffindors. She didn’t deserve the right to call herself a brave lion anymore.

Her journey to her room was blocked by the group of students gathered on the balcony before the four doors. Well, technically it was two groups, Hermione realized - the Slytherins and everyone else.

“I meant what I said, Macmillan. It is absolute rubbish that I’ll have to share a room with you. Tell me, do all of you Hufflepuffs burrow under the rug when it’s time for lights out? I need to know so I don’t trip, you see,” Zabini said scornfully, his handsome features marred by cruel, dark eyes and a smirk. *But he doesn’t do it as well as a Malfoy, Hermione’s sleepy brain rambled. Malfoy’s are the best at smirking and sneering and all manners of ridicule.* The two Slytherin girls stood at either side of him, facing the others. Malfoy stood away from them, closest to the last door on the left, and watched the exchange with disinterest as if a fight was the least interesting thing in the world to him. His eyes briefly caught hers for the second time that day, and she quickly looked away.

Ernie Macmillan looked about ready to explode with anger. His face was blotchy red and a vein pounded at his temple as he inched towards the taller boy. “Well no one wants to sleep in a dorm with a bloody Death Eater or any of you slimy lot for that matter either! You should slither back to the hole you call a dormitory!” At that, Zabini’s hand shot into his robes.

Hermione was suddenly wide awake, and her wand out of her pocket and in her hand faster than she had time to mentally process what she was doing. Her non-verbal *protego* charm caused the two
encroaching groups to spring apart from the invisible shield she had created between them.

She tried her best to keep her voice from shaking as she addressed the two in the center of the commotion. “Listen, it has been a long day for us all, and we could use some rest. If you want to discuss sleeping arrangements with McGonagall, it will have to wait until the morning. How about tonight we enact a temporary truce and head to bed?”

Ernie paused in thought, his jaw still grinding, but slowly nodded at her and begrudgingly held his hand to Zabini.

Zabini, his eyes now slits of disdain, walked past the hand extended of truce and into his shared room. Everyone else followed suit soon after.

Hermione’s thumping heart had settled by the time she sussed out her own sleeping arrangements. Each of the four four-poster beds had its own corner with their school trunks sitting at the end. The girls she would be sharing the dorm with - Parvati, Hannah, and Susan - were in the process of getting changed into their pajamas.

“Good call on the shield, Hermione,” Parvati smiled at her as she buttoned up her silk night shirt. “I hope the boys won’t be that mental for the rest of term.”

She huffed a tired laugh, “Yeah, I hope so, too,” and accio’ed her own PJ set from her open trunk, heading to their shared lavatory with them in hand. *I really, truly hope so.*

The letter in Hermione’s hand was already crumpled in her excitement as she hurried along the corridors to the west tower on her first Friday back at school. Professor Tagget had agreeably allowed her to skip the N.E.W.T class with the 7th and 8th years to instead complete an independent study, and while she knew her free period would be better used for continuing her DADA research, she just couldn’t wait another minute to reach the owlery.

Her first week had rushed by in a flurry of parchment and ink as she acclimated back to the hectic pace of Hogwarts. Others in her year were already floundering at the new pile of assignments and books to read, but Hermione welcomed their return with open arms. She had easily fallen back into her old study habits, and while she hadn’t read her textbooks before the start of term as normal, she was confident she could finish them before the coming weekend.

The seemingly endless summer days of disquiet and uncertainty already seemed light-years away as she fell back into the regimented structure of school days.

With her confidence returning slowly, she was treated to good news that had flew in with the post just that morning at breakfast. Harry had owl’ed her, inquiring about Hogwarts and the repairs and how she was doing. Auror training was difficult, but not impossible, and, oh, he and Ron were able to get time off next weekend to celebrate her birthday. Her heart had leapt at reading the words, and for the first time in a while, she had beamed.

While classes proceeded like normal, Hermione sometimes felt she wasn't in the same place that had held such wonderful memories. It was lovely see see Ginny, Luna, Neville, Hagrid, and even Pavarti, but the two faces she wanted to see the most were gone, and a part of her heart with them.

Just as she reached the steps to the owlery, Hermione was not prepared for the arm that reached out and yanked her into the classroom. She twisted out of the grip of her assailant, and the expression on Malfoy’s pale, pointed face turned to shock as he dropped to the ground to avoid her binding spell. It
barely missed his ear.

“Malfoy! How dare you manhandle me, you-”

“Bloody twit, you could have taken my head off!” He wailed and jumped up, brushing the dust from his cloak. “You’ve been avoiding me this whole week. What other option did you leave me?”

“I have not been avoiding you. You could have sent me an owl!”

“And have it ignored? Or better yet, get the whole castle gossiping as to why I would be sending you a note? My owl is quite recognizable, you know.”

“You could have used a school one,” Hermione seethed, crossing her arms in front of her chest. Malfoy chose to ignore her logic. “So?” He asked instead, avoiding her eyes by staring at the entrance behind her.

“So, what?” She asked, flicking an invisible bit of lint from her arm. If he wanted to be a prat, well then, so could she.

“The baby!” He shouted then looked at the closed door nervously as if Filch were just outside it, preparing to pounce.

She cast a muffliato spell behind her and took a deep breath, willing her rising blood pressure to settle. “I scheduled a doctor’s visit tomorrow to get checked out. A doctor is a muggle heal-”

“I know what a bloody doctor is Granger!” Malfoy exclaimed, starting to run his hand through his blond hair in agitation, but quickly stopped himself as if he were ashamed he had such a pedestrian habit. “What are you planning to do with it? I know you haven’t told anyone yet. Everyone’s treating you like the Gryffindor swot, same as always. That disillusionment charm isn’t going to last forever, you know. Were you planning on hiding a baby in the castle?”

When she gave no response, he scoffed. “Maybe you think that oaf Hagrid could raise it in his hut.” His hard expression softened just a bit, and his eyes bore into hers. “Have you even considered what I suggested? About my mother?”

How could she tell him that she’s barely thought of what she was going to do with the baby at all? That she felt no connection to thing within her, yet the thought of someone else raising it...it sent a thrill of dread through her soul.

“Oh, so you’ve told your mother?” Hermione fired back. “Or better yet your father in Azkaban? Did you write to tell him about impregnating a Mudblood? That your precious heir will be a half-blood monstrosity? Or better yet, what you did that night?”

She knew she was being irrational, that his question was legitimate, and she could have easily told him ‘no’ and left it at that, but she there was a certain thrill in this. Her heart was racing, her blood pumping wildly through her veins as the heat rose throughout her body. She wanted to curse at him, to grab his shiny, blond hair and smash it into her knee over and over. She felt enraged, frenetic, alive.

The tip of Malfoy’s wand grazed her collarbone. His face had lost what little color it had, his breath coming in heavy pants. “Don’t ever mention my family again, Mudblood.”

Hermione’s chest grew tight as bile rose in her throat. Her fingers convulsively gripped the bottom of her jumper as fear fogged her brain, and her eyes darted around the room full of unused desks,
searching for one to duck under. Before she could lift her suddenly leaden legs, however, Malfoy had pushed past her, unlocking the door with his wand, and rushed out.

*It’s alright, it’s alright, it’s alright,* Hermione chanted to herself like a mantra, willing her body to unseize. The sight of the wand pointed at her had triggered that reaction. Shaking her head, she released a shaky laugh, embarrassed that she had let him stun her so thoroughly. *That will never happen again,* she vowed, but the sound of a familiar voice shook her from her thoughts.

“Watch it, Ferret!” Ginny’s voice echoed around the stone corridor, and Hermione barely had time to exit the classroom and duck behind a column before she rounded the corner.

“Hey, fancy meeting you here!” Ginny said smiling. “What are you doing up here?” Her jovial expression turned to one of confusion as she accessed Hermione’s drawn face. “You’re paler than a ghost. Was it Malfoy? Did he say something to you or try to hurt you? I can’t believe they let that bigoted prat back in after all that he’s done.”

“No, I’m ok, he just…just startled me, and I ducked behind here.” Hermione said and plastered a small smile on her face. “After everything that happened here last year, sometimes I’m so jittery. I jump at the slight creaking of a door sometimes.”

Stepping closer, Ginny regarded her thoughtfully. “Do you want to talk to me Hermione? Tell me something? Because ever since this summer, you’ve been acting...strangely. Jumping at every sound, sleeping more. Some days you barely eat and others you act like you’re starving. Yesterday at breakfast, I thought you were going to stab me with your fork for eating the last sausage.”

Hermione was oddly touched that Ginny had noticed anything out of the ordinary at all. She hated lying to her, hated lying at all, but telling her the truth would lead to more questions, questions she wasn’t ready to answer yet.

“It’s odd being back here after all that happened barely four months ago,” she said, telling her at least part of the truth. “Sometimes I will walk down the corridor and remember that was where we found Tonks or Lupin or—” she cut herself off before she said the name she knew was on Ginny’s mind. *Fred.* “I miss Harry and Ron most of all. It feels like the castle is empty without them.”

“I-I think about that, too,” Ginny admitted. “When walking to classes or sitting in the Great Hall. It’s difficult, but we need to put that all behind us and focus on what remains.” She threaded her arm through Hermione’s and tenderly patted her hand. “Look, when you’re ready to talk or just need someone, let me know. I’m always here for you.” Squeezing her friend’s side, Hermione nodded.

“So this was supposed to be a surprise, but we’re planning a birthday party for you at the Burrow next Saturday,” Ginny said as they walked up the steps to the owlery.

“But I’ve made plans with my parents already, Ginny. I’d feel awful having to cancel on them and—”

“I’ve kinda already owl’ed them to ask if you could visit on Sunday instead,” she confessed a bit guiltily. “C’mon, it’ll be great! We’ll get that somber look off your face. George says he has some new products he wants us to circulate around the school, test ‘em out and—”

“Ginny, you’re Head Girl! You couldn’t possibly be thinking of—”

Ginny burst out laughing, “There’s my old Hermione! I was joking, I promise. So you’ll come?”

Hermione rolled her eyes and laughed as well, the previous tension all but forgotten. “Of course I’ll be there. Mainly to make sure you lot don’t blow your own heads off.”
“Well George had mentioned making improvements to the Weasleys’ Wildfire Whiz-bangs, and it wouldn’t hurt if we tested one or two during the Quidditch match against Slytherin—"

“Ginny, really.”

A/N:
This was a difficult chapter for some reason, but thank you for sticking with me! I’m more on track now, so stay tuned. Updates will be coming about every two weeks.

Next Chapter: More drama at the Weasleys!
Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

The plot thickens as Hermione spends her birthday at the burrow.

Chapter Five

As the sun fully ascended over the lake to the east, the diamond-pane windows were struck with the first morning light, casting prisms of brilliant color across the walls of the girls lavatory in the north tower. Hermione Granger stood in front of the full length mirror between the enormous bathtub and shower stalls, and inspected her underwear-clad form. She had always been an early riser, and though she was sure none of the other eighth year girls would be awake yet on the cold Saturday morning, she had cast a locking charm on the door just in case.

The steam of her recent shower still curled around her feet as she ran her hands down her neck, her ribs, and resting them just above the swell of her abdomen that seemed to have grown decidedly larger since the last time she dared look at herself undressed. Her bra, a recent, slightly embarrassing gift from her mother from a boutique shop in France, barely contained her swollen breasts. Hermione wrinkled her nose. She would have to use a resizing spell on it soon, and hoped she was skilled enough at the useful charm Molly had taught her to not ruin the delicate red lace and careful stitching.

Hermione’s hands traveled further down until they rested on her expanding hips, rubbing at the sore joints. The extraneous walk across the castle and up the tower steps several times a day were causing her immense pain in her legs. Her pelvis felt heavy as it she was wearing a belt of rocks with another one being added every day. The cushioning charms she had cast on her shoes were the only things keeping her from refusing to walk at all.

_How do women do this everyday without magic?_ Hermione pondered, finally resting her hands upon her distended stomach. She ran a light finger up one of the faint red lines that were starting to appear lengthwise along her belly.

It had been difficult to see the muggle women sitting in the waiting room last week as Hermione attended the obstetrician appointment she had delayed for so long. Most of them had come with their partner, and amoung them the joy was evident. Their expectant mother’s eyes shone brightly as they caressed their abdomens with tenderness. One was reading a parenting magazine while the women next to her chatted happily with her husband, their fingers twining together, pulling back, than seeking each other’s warmth again.

Hermione felt a twist of envy at their looks of devotion as she sat alone, absently skimming a gossip magazine. Before, when she had thought about the future and the children she might have, she had imagined a scene such as the one next to her. The child in her future had been wanted, born of love with a doting father. She bit her lip, and stared guiltily down at her swollen belly.
This poor creature, to have such a cold mother and such a cruel father.

“I’m guessing twelve weeks. Am I right?”

Hermione looked up, pulled from the inner world of her thoughts where she spent so much time as of late, and stared blankly at the woman who had taken the other seat next to her.

“Pardon?” She asked.

The woman smiled, her caramel skin glowing even under the harsh fluorescent lights of the office. “Whenever I come for my appointments, I try to guess how far along everyone is. Staves off the boredom of the wait. So, twelve weeks?”

“Um, well no. Nearly twenty-three weeks along,” Hermione said, pulling herself up straighter.

The woman tisked and adjusted the purse that was sitting on top of her belly. “You’re so tiny! Are you sure you’re eating enough, darling?”

Hermione could feel her face heating up in embarrassment, and before she could politely tell the shaming woman to mind her own bloody business, a clipboard-yielding nurse came to the check-in counter and called her name.

If Hermione thought the mortification was done, she was mistaken. Inside the office, Dr. Andreas subjected her to a slew of tests and a pelvic examination, all the while chastising her for not coming to the clinic earlier in her pregnancy. When she was finished with the exam, and everything appeared to be normal (“Though you need to gain more weight, Miss Granger”), the doctor gave her a dozen pamphlets on proper nutrition and the development stages the fetus as well as book recommendations.

After scheduling a follow-up appointment for the results of her blood-work and an ultrasound, Hermione had popped over to the adjacent chemist to purchase some prenatal vitamins then headed back to Diagon Alley. Before disapparating back to school, however, she discreetly purchased some books: “The Witches’ Essential Guide to Expectancy”, “The Witching Womb”, and “Baby and Brew: Practical Potions for the Magical Pregnancy”.

The last book had certainly come in handy. Rubbing an ointment she brewed for the stretch marks, she felt the tiniest of movements flutter against her fingers. Hermione gasped and poked the spot on her abdomen, hoping to feel it move again. The feeling was odd like something was tickling her from the inside. It didn’t feel so alien anymore, so intrusive.

It was a part of her.

“Could you feel me, baby? Did you know my hands were near you?” Hermione whispered softly, patting her skin where she had felt its movement. She didn’t know if it was a boy or girl, didn’t care to know, as long as it was healthy.

A stab of guilt flashed through her as she thought of the last few months. After finishing all of the books and pamphlets, Hermione had unexpectedly burst into tears at her own negligence. The last year had been filled with ambiguity and fear, and she had endured things that would have broken others. A part of her old self had died on the cold, hard floor in Malfoy Manor.

Those were things that she had lost, but she was not lost. The grey fog in her mind was starting to clear, slowly, and the first bits of light she’d seen in months were shining through. Had she lingered in the gloom much longer, Hermione knew it would consume her. She had survived and must survive for herself.
For us both, she thought as she caressed her belly. She had been selfish and indulgent in her misery, but was it the fault of the child within her? It was a victim of circumstances it had no control over, like herself.

But now, now she had control, and after she had finished mourning her past mistakes, Hermione sensed a strength she hadn’t felt in months return to her. She could handle this. She would eat healthily, take her vitamins, consult a mid-witch. She would do what she had known in her heart she could do months ago - love and care for this child who had not asked to be born.

The realization had been a confusing mix of anxiety and dread, but also relief and optimism. Finishing school, telling her friends, her parents…she pushed those thoughts away before they engulfed her again. She had finally chosen a path to walk and those obstacles would be dealt with when the time came.

The first hurdle, thought Hermione as she finished dressing for the day and cast a disillusionment charm on herself, is to get to breakfast before Neville eats all the bacon.

“Ok, when we open the door, pretend to be surprised,” Ginny instructed after side-apparating meters from the front steps of the Burrow.

Hermione’s vision blurred, her stomach twisted violently, and she lurched forward to throw up in the grass.

“Is there something about our garden that always makes you sick?” joked Ginny.

“Ugh, I hate side-apparating,” Hermione groaned, closing her eyes to stop the spinning.

“Well, here,” Ginny said, casting a clean-up charm on her ailing friend, “and don’t forget to appear shocked and awed by how wonderful and thoughtful we are,” Ginny whispered theatrically as they opened the front door.

“SURPRISE!” came the cheer from the Burrow as they both entered.

“Happy 19th” hovered in the air like lit sparklers as George, Angelina, Lee, and Seamus heralded their entrance with little trumpets that sounded like blowing raspberries. Hermione laughed and glanced about the house in authentic surprise. The Weasley’s long table was filled with all manner of tasty food with a large, gold cake in the shape of a lion at the center. The ceiling could hardly be seen with all the red and yellow streamers and glowing balloons littered across it. Shimmering white lights zipped across the room, creating the illusion of a hundred fireflies - no doubt an invention of George’s.

“Happy birthday, Hermione!” Harry and Ron cried in unison, coming around the table to envelope her in a tight hug. She turned just in time for them to not feel her bump, and was eternally grateful she decided to wear the largest, fuzziest sweater she owed. Harry pulled away from their group embrace, but Ron held her a few moments longer, giving her the slightest peck on the cheek. His cheeks had a smudge of scarlet across them as he let her go. Her heart fluttered to her throat, and she was sure she was as red as him.
Hermione cleared her throat, “Thank you! This all looks brilliant. You didn’t have to go through the trouble, Molly.”

The Weasley matron waved her hand as Bill handed her more plates for the table. “S’no trouble at all, dear! You’re practically a member of the family, and we all need more reasons to celebrate.”

“Oy, I helped, too,” Ron protested, snatching a plate from his passing mother.

“Helped eat most of the meat pies, more like,” George chimed in and winked at Hermione. “Are there any more steak ones left?”

Ron shrugged as he carefully piled food onto his already-crowded plate, “Dunno. I need the protein for my auror training. They have us running drills everyday at the crack of dawn, haven’t they Harry?”

“Yeah, but at the rate you’re eating, mate, they’ll have to have you running two a day,” Harry answered, laughing, and pulled Ginny in for another kiss. Hermione couldn’t help but notice the way Ron’s arms and chest filled out his long sleeve shirt that had always been baggy on him before. The additional food and exercise didn’t seem to be hurting him one bit.

“Ha ha,” Ron said sardonically and sat next to Hermione. “And, gross. Get a room, you two.”

“Gladly. How about yours, Ron?” Ginny replied, smacking her brother’s head as she joined them at the table.

Hermione chuckled and tucked into her birthday feast, surrounded by the comfort of her friends.

The Burrow was, for the most part, the same as it has always been - full of the warmth of love and laughter and Molly’s multitude of knitting projects - but it took Hermione a moment to discern the differences. Some of them were obvious changes. The Weasley’s now only had two children living at home, and with Arthur’s long-overdue promotion to Head of the Muggle Liaison Office, it had allowed them to finally update some of the older furniture and hire magical contractors to make repairs to the house.

The other changes were more subtle. The lack of errant school supplies and Quidditch gear; the silence in the rooms above them; Arthur’s prematurely white hair; the missing hand of the Weasley clock.

Hermione watched as one of the shimmering fire-lights fell onto the tablecloth, leaping about and buzzing intermittently before it stopped, and it’s light dimmed forever. She touched it and it dissolved to ash.

“Are these an invention for your shop, George?”

George smudged the ash further into the cloth, frowning, “Yeah, they’re only in the prototype stage. Lee and I are testing them out, but can’t get them to last longer than an hour.”

“Hope you get these working before the end of the year. My mam would love them for my sister’s birthday,” Seamus added. Hermione hadn’t been surprised to learn Seamus wouldn’t be returning to Hogwarts and instead joining her two best friends in auror training. It was an open secret that his mother struggled financially while raising her children alone, and having her son help out was a huge relief, she was sure. “So, how’s Hogwarts been, Hermione? Are they teaching you all the secrets of the magical universe that’ll we’ll never be privy to?”

“Oh, just the mystery of life after death, how to achieve immortality, and why cats always land on
their feet. Stuff you’ll never need to know, what with being an Auror and all,” she quipped in amusement. “No, it’s not all that different from before, really. Easier, in fact, without all of the adventurous distractions.” Hermione elbowed Harry in the ribs, and he choked on his food.

“I never made you come with me…” he muttered and Ginny guffawed.

“Of course you wouldn’t mind the impossible list of assignments we have, Hermione. I have to bring my textbooks to the loo with me just to keep up! Flickwick is requiring all charms to be cast non-verbally, and if McGonagall spots one tiny little mistake in anything you transfigure, you don’t receive full marks. It’s maddening!”

“I don’t envy ya that!” Ron chimed in. “Being on the field is tough, but at least it’s fun. Last week, Croyston let us come along for a real manhunt.”

Harry snorted, “It was more like an “all hands on deck” situation. The death eater that escaped custody is one of the most dangerous and unpredictable wizards they’ve faced. They need everyone they have out there looking for him.”

At that, the whole table quieted, and Harry’s mouth snapped shut, a look of guilt on his face.

“Who was it?” George asked at the same time Angelina whispered, “What do you mean escaped custody?”

Hermione’s stomach started to knot up as she asked, “Nothing was in the Prophet about an escapee.”

Ron answered, his mouth a grim line, “They’re hushing it up; don’t want to cause a panic, you see. He escaped while being transported from Azkaban to a special facility on the continent. It’ll make the Ministry look like idiots if the public finds out some aurors bungled the job. After all the troubles recently, the last thing they want is to seem incompetent.”

“Why was he being transported?” Angelina pressed on in the tense silence.

Harry ran this hand through his already disheveled black hair, releasing a sigh, “We’re not really supposed to be telling you lot all this,” he paused and looked at the concerned faces around him. “With the Dementors leaving and all the chaos after Voldemort died, the Ministry threw a bunch of death eaters or anyone suspected of being one into a cell at Azkaban. It started to get overcrowded.”

“All slapdash like. Weren’t paying attention to names,” Seamus added.

“One of them was a werewolf,” Harry grimly explained. “The guard's found that out the hard way the night after a full moon.”

“I heard the other prisoners in his cell were so mangled and torn up, they couldn’t tell who was who or what went where.”

“Thanks, Ron,” groaned Ginny.

Dread seized Hermione’s breath like a hand of ice around her throat. No, it can’t be him. Please anyone else, but him.

“And you haven’t caught him yet?” Bill demanded.

“Greyback is a right slippery bastard. We’ll get the drop on him soon. He was spotted heading north just yesterday....”
The frantic pounding of her heart drown out Seamus’ defensive voice, and Hermione ambled towards the back of the Burrow, unaware that she had stood at all.

The air had abandoned her lungs, and she gasped for breath, the mantra “no, no, no, no” repeating relentlessly in her increasingly foggy mind.

Hermione?

Hermione!

Her name was the last thing she heard before passing out.

A/N:

I’M NOT DEAD! YAY! (?) Depression is a bitch, guys.

This chapter is dedicated to Titasha, the bilingual woman who has patiently bore with me and my terrible writing habits from the get-go.
Chapter Six

Chapter Summary

Our dear Molly would be the one to find out, wouldn’t she?

Chapter Six:

The gentle chiming of glass on glass woke Hermione from her fitful slumber, and she opened her blurry eyes towards the sound. In front of a window, a small glass dragon hung, it’s tiny red wings expanding and flapping in as big of a circle as the twine that held it would allow. It was no doubt magicked to seem as if it were in flight. Dim light from a bedside lamp highlighted posters of prancing dragons hung on the wall to her left.

This must be Charlie’s room. Hermione groggily thought. But why…

Something cold pressed against her forehead, and she was startled to find Molly Weasley sitting by her bedside, a look of deep concern on her freckled face. Looking down, Hermione realized her large jumper had been removed, and her belly was clearly visible under her thin shirt. The disillusionment enchantment was gone as well.

Dread seized her and Hermione bolted upright, pushing away the cool cloth from her forehead. Her head swooned as she attempted to stand upright, but Molly held her arms and gently pushed her back onto the bed.

“It’s not what it seems, Molly…” she whispered.

“Shhh shhh, it’s ok, Hermione. Here, have some water,” Molly said soothingly, handing her a glass.

She took a gulp, bidding a few moments to construct a believable excuse. Her mind raced wildly in an attempt to lie. “It’s- it’s a transfiguration spell gone wrong. I was...I need to ask Professor McGonagall for help when I get back to Hogwarts and-” She faltered at the look of disbelief in Molly’s eyes.

“Hermione if anyone could catch a fibber, it would be the mum of Fred and George, and I dare say you’re not very good after it,” Molly’s lips turned slightly upward in her attempt at humor, but her concerned eyes remained. She sighed and placed the washcloth in a bowl on the nightstand.

Hermione sat up against the mound of pillows and covered her stomach with a crocheted shawl. Oh God, she knows… There was no more point in lying to this woman who had been like a mother to her when her own was a world away. What would she think of her when she finds out the truth? Hermione closed her eyes and willed herself to breathe.

“So, when did this happen?” Molly asked lightly.

“Mid-April,” Hermione whispered.
Molly pulled the shawl over Hermione’s middle tighter, stood up, and started pacing the little room. “I had Bill when I was about your age, you know,” she said, and stopped to fiddle with the items on top of the dresser. “I would have preferred you and Ron to have been married before you had a child, but, it’s all a bit too late for that, isn’t it?”

She caressed the spine of the book she was holding, and sighed. “Though I suppose you could still could. It’d have to be soon so the wedding couldn’t be too grand - just close friends and family. A simple bonding spell. I’m sure Arthur knows someone in the registration department who could keep this hushed up…” she paused, laying the book back where she found it.

“I can't believe Ron kept this from his father and me,” Molly lamented in frustration. “And to think I let you lot run around willy-nilly searching for horcruxes, sleeping together in tents, and Merlin knows what else. Oh course this would happen!” She flopped back into the seat next to Hermione.

Shame seeped out of every pore, and Hermione wished she could dissolve into the mattress. “Molly, it's...the child. It's not Ron’s,” she finally managed, unable to look her in the eye.

“What? You mean it's...Harry’s?” Molly gasped incredulously. She looked at Hermione with an odd expression then, one she had never seen Molly look at her with before. It was akin to repulsion, as if Hermione were a foul bug she found in her white frosting.

“Merlin no! He's not! I just...I just need to go,” Hermione pleaded, flinging the crocheted shawl off and attempted to stand as dizziness overtook her again. She was trembling in indignation and shame, but she wanted to get out of there immediately. She needed to be somewhere with fresh air and light - anywhere but in a room with the judging glare of Molly Weasley. Hermione hadn’t thought through how this would go, how she would tell the people closest to her, but she certainly hadn’t expected it to be like this.

A hand gripped hers before she could dash towards the door across from the bed.

“Hermione, please, you need to lay down…”

“Where's my wand?” She weakly muttered, pulling against Molly's hand.

“It's ok, you can talk to me. Please, Hermione!”

Her heart started to pound, and panic took over again as Hermione determined what she was going to tell Molly. Deep in her heart, she knew she couldn’t lie anymore. For months she had carried the burden of her ordeal, and it was smothering her to exhaustion. She needed a release.

“Do you remember,” she stopped and sat on the other side of the bed away from the Weasley matron, her eyes following the glass dragon flap around in it’s pointless little circles. “Do you remember last April when I had apparated here unexpectedly?”

Hermione had arrived, bloody and haggard, to a suspicious welcome. When she at last answered all of the questions put to her by Arthur and passed the screening tests Mad Eye had taught them before his demise, Molly had helped clean her up and gave her a place to rest. Hermione had left the next morning for Shell Cottage, the location she knew Ron would’ve told Dobby to take them both.

“Yes,” Molly hesitated, “you told us you had just escaped from Malfoy Manor, but that’s all you would say. You testified later that Draco had helped you.”

Hermione nodded, “He did. But...but I didn’t tell you what happened before I left.”

Molly’s trembling breathe filled the awful silence, “Oh God, he didn’t. Please tell me he didn’t…”
and before Hermione could respond, Molly’s warm weight was next to her, her arms holding her securely.

“It wasn’t his fault,” murmured Hermione in her shoulder.

Molly pushed back hair from her face, compassion warming her amber eyes. “Whose fault? What happened?”

“Draco’s. It’s just...he tried to help, I think, but it made it worse. And, and Greyback, he-” she is able to stammer before succumbing to her tears. A tidal wave of shame, loneliness, and grief consumed her.

She had been assaulted in the worst possible way, the most carnal and personal violation she had ever experienced, and she hadn’t been able to stop it. All of her magic hadn’t halted his vile hands as they gripped her hair, forced her to disrobe, forced her to…

Hermione hadn’t let herself think of it before, had pushed the memories of the trauma of the past to the darkest corner of her mind, but now it all came flooding out in the compassion of Molly’s embrace.

It was a long while before her sobs subsided, and she was able to speak again. She told Molly of the Imperius used on herself and Draco, of what the werewolf made them do for his own sick amusement, but, for some reason, couldn’t bring herself to tell her what Greyback had done after Draco was finished. Instead she skipped to him being called away by Voldemort, how they shed the curse, and the familial escape route in the Malfoy cellar.

Though she left out Greyback’s assault on her, Hermione felt lighter as if the burden of the curse had pulled her down deeper into murky water, and she had finally cut off it’s terrible anchor.

Molly didn’t speak for some time after Hermione was done confessing, just continued holding her, though from her shaking breathes and sniffling, she could tell she was crying as well.

“I’m sorry, Hermione. I’m so terribly, terribly sorry this happened to you. To have had this load on your shoulders to carry by yourself; you must have been so lonely. You are brave for telling me.”

Hermione shook her head. “I don’t feel like I am. I should have done something after it happened. Taken a potion or...or told an Auror. Anything, really. I’m such a fool-”

“Don’t say that!” Molly asserted. “You are not a fool, Hermione. You are brave and you are strong. It is not your fault this happened, do you hear me? It’s not your fault.” The crushing hug Molly gave her caused Hermione to pull back and rub her belly.

“Molly, the baby!”

“Oh, right,” she looked sheepishly down at her abdomen. “Have you thought about what you’re going to do with the child? Have you told Draco?”

“I did. He wants me to give the baby to his mother and have her raise it as her own, but I’m keeping it,” she said firmly and squeezed Molly’s hand. “I don’t care how it came into this world; it’s my responsibility now, and I’m keeping it.”

Molly gave her a watery smile, “Of course, dear. What do you need me to do?”

Throughout her life, Hermione had taught herself to start with the most difficult task. She started her schoolwork by completing the longest essay first and ate all her brussel sprouts before she touched
her chicken. As she thought of all the people she loved, she knew she would have to tell the most problematic of them first.

Hermione hesitated before saying, “I need to talk to my parents. I don’t think they need to know the whole truth - they wouldn’t understand what the Imperius curse can do, even if I explained it. But they have to know.”

Molly nodded, “Alright. Now here, lie back down. Drink a bit more - that’s it,” she settled the shawl over Hermione once more as she laid back into the cushions. “I’m going to talk to Arthur, yes I have to, and then he’ll fetch your parents. I’ll talk to them first, how’s that? Not about the...the cellar. But, perhaps, you and Draco had a, well, tryst. One that resulted in pregnancy. They’ll understand that, right?”

Hermione closed her eyes. “Yes, I think they will.” And as the lights dimmed and the door closed behind her unexpected confidant, she felt the tiniest bit of hope flutter in her heart.

A/N:

Almost done with the heavy revelation stuff, and then I can move on with the plot!

There are some who would disagree, but in my opinion, with her circumstances being the way they are, I think Hermione would want to tell her parents first. She’s best friends with Harry and Ron, but she’s still barely 19. A girl needs her mom and dad. Idk why, but it’s always bothered me that Hermione was never seen interacting with her parents much. They got kind of a raw deal by the books.

Also, thank you for the love and support sent my way! I truly appreciate the words of encouragement ^_^

Next chapter: Meet the Grangers! And the Malfoys receive a visit from a certain Headmistress
Chapter Seven

“What the bloody hell were you thinking?”

Hermione flinched as if struck. She had faced murderers, lunatics, a werewolf, and a dark wizard, but her mother’s voice could always make her feel like a small, naughty child.

“Obviously, you weren’t thinking or you wouldn’t be in this situation. How could you do this to your future, Hermione? You’re a child! What are you going to do with a baby?” Maureen Granger cried.

Hermione’s parents sat across from her; Mr. and Mrs. Weasley to her left. Her father’s eyes remained fixed on a spot on the table, silent as his wife fumed.

Ashamed, Hermione thought. She inhaled deeply and tamped down her urge to break apart.

It hadn’t taken Arthur long to retrieve her parents after Molly had left. Hermione had them connected to the Floo network as soon as she retrieved them from Australia, partially as a symbolic gesture to make them feel more connected to her other life.

After they had arrived and a muffled conversation commenced, Hermione had heard a rapid knock and urgent whispers on the other side of Charlie’s door. The bolt slid back as someone cast alohomora and she hastily locked it again.

“Hermione?” Ron urged and jiggled the doorknob. She could hear Harry and Ginny whispering behind him. “Are you ok? Why are your parents here?”

She bit her lip, a million excuses running through her head, and responded: “Could you...could I talk to you later?”

There was a pause, more whispering and then, “Ok.”

Hermione had sighed. She waited a few minutes longer, then crept into the living room to face the music.

Now she could barely meet her mother’s eyes. Eyes so similar to her own now filled with ire and disappointment.

Maureen’s normally tidy, short hair was a mess of salt and pepper waves as she glared at her daughter. She gripped her cup of tea with white fingers. Hermione was afraid the porcelain would shatter in her hand.

“It just happened. It was a confusing time and we didn’t use proper protection. There isn’t much I can do about it now,” Hermione’s voice rushed out.

“What is going on with you? I don’t feel like I know you anymore, Hermione. When you’re home, you’re either hiding in your room or you’re off with your friends. We didn’t even know you had a
boyfriend.”

“I don’t,” Hermione said through gritted teeth. She felt her face flush crimson in exasperation. Tears hung on the edge of her eyelids but she refused to shed them.

Arthur cleared his throat. “You see, Draco and Hermione had a tryst. A bit of love during the war. They met up, so to speak, when Hermione was held captive and….well, you know. Never knew if they’d see each other again, that sort of thing,” he said, laughing awkwardly.

His eyes widened in realization at his mistake when both his wife and Hermione glared at him. Calvin Granger’s head shot up, and both of her parent’s voices practically shouted at once.

“What?” Her father exclaimed.

“Held captive? When was this? What is he talking about?” Maureen demanded.

“It wasn’t for long, Mum. And Malfoy helped me escape. I mentioned it after-”

“Malfoy?” Her father asked, looking at her then to Molly and Arthur in confusion. “Is he the son of that blond fellow we met at the book shop? Wasn’t he one of those death seekers?”

“Death eaters,” Arthur corrected.

“The father of this child is one of those people? The ones you were fighting against? Who tried to kill Muggles; people like ourselves?” Maureen questioned, pointing between herself and husband. “Is this man the reason you were a captive? Why would you and his son-”

“A son isn’t his father,” Molly hastily interjected, looking nervously between Hermione and her mother. “Draco doesn’t hold those same prejudiced ideas. Anymore.”

“And where is this man?” Maureen demanded, ignoring Molly. Hermione and her father had once likened her to a bloodhound - when she got a scent she wouldn’t let it go until she found what she was searching for. “Is he okay with his son having a child?”

“Lucius, well... he’s in Azkaban. It’s a prison in the middle of the North Sea. So you needn’t bother worrying about...” Arthur trailed off as Molly furiously elbowed her husband.

Hermione recognized that look on her mother’s face. Maureen’s brown eyes were narrowed, her lips drawn tight, and her posture impeccable.

She was beyond furious.

“Prison,” Maureen said flatly and shook her head. “I don’t understand this, Hermione. I don’t understand how you could be so reckless, so irresponsible. It’s not like you at all. Why didn’t you tell me before it got so out of hand?” Hermione heard the hurt in her mother’s voice and it was like a knife twisting into her heart.

“I should have….I’m sorry, Mum,” Hermione whispered.

There was a pause, and the silence seemed to drag on for ages.

Calvin massaged his forehead, exhaling deeply through his nostrils. “The new house in Dorset only has two bedrooms and a small office upstairs. We could convert it into a nursery, hopefully by the time the baby gets here.”

He looked at his wife who returned his glance with a tight lipped nod. ”I suppose we’ll have to have
a chat with your headmistress... let her know you won’t be going back to school.”

“What?” Hermione exclaimed in confusion.

“Obviously you won’t be returning to Hogwarts. Not in your state,” her mother’s clipped voice responded. Hermione barely heard through her madly racing thoughts.

“Of course I’ll be returning. I’m sure Professor McGonagall could accommodate me, I mean us, after the baby is born…” She trailed off as uncertainty took hold.

Was she so sure McGonagall would approve of her continuing on as a student, child in tow? Now that she thought of it, she had never seen or heard of a pregnant student at Hogwarts. *Hogwarts, A History* certainly made no mention of it. How did the school deal with such matters?

Maureen *tsked* and set her cup down with a *thunk*. “This nonsense with the wizarding world. Look at what it’s done to you. What you did to us. We do forgive you, but it’s hard to forget that year in Australia. These talents of yours have brought you nothing but grief, and honestly, it’s as if we’ve lost our daughter,” she said, her voice catching. She looked off in the distance for a moment, clearing her throat, and continued.

“You’ve fought everyday against people who think you don’t belong in their world and they’re right. You belong home with us.”

Hermione was stunned. She had known for a long time how hard it was for her parents to come to terms with her magical talents. The Grangers were practical, realistic people. After she was born, they had expected her to grow up to be a bright, normal child with a bright, normal future. That future had literally flown out the window with the owl when her Hogwarts acceptance letter had arrived. The newfound knowledge of a different, hidden world filled with magic and mystery had shaken them to their cores.

“No,” Hermione said in a tone that brooked no argument.

“I will never be able to convey how sorry I am about what I did to you. I truly, truly am. You both taught me to be brave and true to myself, and this is who I am. I am Hermione Granger, witch. Running away won’t change anything. I’m going to complete my final year regardless of the baby.”

Maureen’s face was blotchy red with suppressed emotion as she stood. “Then I suppose I have nothing else to say.” She then turned on her heel and left through the front entrance.

Hermione stood as well. She took a deep breath and willed herself to exhale slowly through her nose as the door clicked shut behind her mother. Calvin’s large hand reached for her and he pulled her into an embrace. Hermione closed her eyes and rested her head for the briefest of moments against her father’s shoulder, inhaling the scent of mint that always clung to him even outside of his dental office.

“Happy birthday, Hermione,” Calvin murmured into her hair. “We love you, you know. Whatever happens with you, we’ll always be there. Your mum will come around. She’s just, well, your mum.”

Hermione chuckled and pulled away. “I know. I love you, too. Would it be alright if I still came over tomorrow? We could talk more.”

“Of course,” he said with a small smile, then turned to leave the same way as his wife.

The Weasleys shuffled behind her as Hermione watched the closed door in silence. She heard Molly fiddling with the teapot as Arthur brushed past her.
“I should probably go after them,” Arthur said and pulled on a light cloak, a small sympathetic smile on his lips. At her quizzical stare he explained. “The nearest village is quite a walk from here. I’ll apparate them home, safe and sound. Perhaps chat to them a bit more.”

Alone with Molly, Hermione twisted her fingers in her hand. She hadn’t expected the revelation of her pregnancy to be easy, but not that difficult either.

*If they only knew the truth. What would they think of me then?* Feelings of guilt and grief, anger raged inside her, and she pushed it all back down to deal with another day.

“Here dear, why don’t you sit and have something to drink?” Molly said. She gestured to the steaming cup waiting on the table. Hermione nodded her head and didn’t miss the nip of whiskey Molly quickly slipped into her own glass.

Hermione tried to keep her voice from wavering as she voiced what she feared. "Do you think she’ll ever want to see me again?"

Taking her hand in her own, Molly said in a soothing tone: “I don’t think your mum meant to say all that, Hermione. Finding out you’re pregnant - it’s all quite a shock. She’ll come around like your father said.”

“But why would she-”

“You’re her daughter. She’s upset because you kept this from her. But more than that, she’s hurt because you are hurting.”

At Hermione’s skeptical look, she continued. “When you become a mother you’ll know. It’s terrible watching your child suffer and not be able to do anything about it. We - Arthur and I that is - take it for granted that we were born into a world of magic, and all of our children were, too. It must be difficult for them to love you, but not be able to be involved in your life as a witch.”

For the first time in a quite a long time, Hermione was dumbfounded. While she knew it was confusing for her parents to comprehend her obligations to the wizarding world and the responsibility she felt her magic imbued her with, she rarely considered how they felt about being separated from her life. The holidays and summers she spent with her friends; the letters she forgot to write back to because she was busy; all the things other girls her age did with their parents. Little cuts that added up to hundreds.

How many nights had they sat together in their living room missing her while she spent so little time thinking of them?

She was interrupted from her remorseful thoughts by Molly. “Should I perhaps call upon Minerva?”

“No, I honestly only have the energy for one more confession tonight. She’ll have to wait until the morning.” Downing the rest of her tea, Hermione walked the first steps up the stairs where she knew her friends were waiting in trepidation, her heart thumping madly in her chest.

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A/N:

MANY MANY MANY thanks to my lovely beta, Gabrielle! She is fantastic and so incredibly
helpful <3

Also, sorry for the delay. Midterms, amiright?

If you like the fic so far, please leave a comment! If you hate this fic and continue to read it out of either masochism or some misplaced sense of obligation, please write me a two page explanation, 12pt font, double-spaced, as to why I suck. Extra credit will be given to those who provide pictures.

Next Chapter: Meet Narcissa Malfoy, disgraced socialite and future Grandmum!
Chapter Eight

The east wing of Malfoy Manor had a dreary quality to it, being the the oldest part of the estate. It was the last remnant of the original house built during the high medieval period by the first Malfoy to set foot on English soil. The ceilings were low with rough-hewn stone floors and walls. Small, arched windows barely allowed any light though, and it invariably smelled of rot and mildew. Ancient, decayed oak doors dotted the walls periodically; entrances to rooms long since forgotten by the inhabitants and house elves alike.

It had given Draco the feeling of disgust when he was a child.

He remembered asking his father once why he allowed this crumbing wing to remain. Other sections of the manor had been added and updated, but the east wing stood, ad infinitum.

“Ah, but don’t you feel it, Draco?” Lucius had asked, placing the hand that wasn’t holding his son’s against the chilly stonework of the wall. “The place our forefathers built upon was one of primordial power. It’s magic is old and deep, rooted deeper than the foundations. It is the legacy they left us, the sovereign calling we are endeavors to pursue in this world: to use the magic that is in our blood and govern over the base, vulgar people. We have the gift of magic and none shall stand in our way.”

Draco had nodded his head then, pretending to understand his father’s meaning.

But now as his hands skimmed the rugged surface he felt it. The hum of magic ignited his senses. The power of it drew him back to the crumbling, humble remains, and away from the ostentatious artifice of aristocracy other parts of the manor were rife with.

The pretense was gone here. The magic wild and raw. And as he walked alone with his thoughts, Draco was glad of it. There was a comfort here in the ruins that he barely understood, but nonetheless sought out.

As he slowly started back toward the foyer, a small figure stood shadowed in the entrance of the east wing. Draco waited for it to speak.

The house elf twisted his long fingers in his hands as he regarded his master nervously. The elves knew not to bother him in his solitude. “Mistress Narcissa requests your presence in the parlor,” Quincy squeaked, then apparated away with a faint pop.

It was just past breakfast, and having dined alone in his rooms, Draco realized he hadn’t seen his mother since luncheon the day before. A touch of guilt added to his dark mood as he walked briskly past the portraits of stern-faced ancestors lining the halls.

He knew his mother was lonely. House elves were her only company in their vast, empty manor. Social invitations had dried up and family friends were nowhere to be found after their fall from grace. Though he hadn’t picked up a Daily Prophet in ages, he was sure there was plenty written about the Malfoys in the society pages.
He could almost hear bitter witches’ quills scratching away in celebration at their glorious humiliation. Posh Narcissa Malfoy, who had never invited them to her exclusive balls, now as undesirable as a pickled slug.

Draco wished he could be a better son to her, wished he could be better company to anyone, really, but the dark void inside him overwhelmed everything else.

Who would want to be around you? You can barely stand yourself.

As he approached the parlor doors, he heard his mother’s muffled voice filtering through, and a certain dreadful curiosity filled him.

With whom was she speaking?

“. . . Miss Granger’s parents...expectant...see no need…”

The words flitted in and out of his hearing as he snuck closer to the doorway to get a better listen. He recognized the tart Scottish brogue, had heard it scold him dozens of times in his years at Hogwarts.

Draco’s heart sank into his stomach, hands reflexively balling into fists as the realization of why Headmistress McGonagall was there dawned on him.

She knew.

Before his cowardly feet could turn and make a run for it, Draco steeled himself, and entered.

His mother’s face, pale and elegant, was a mask of cordiality, but he could see she was upset. Her posture had drooped into the settee and her navy blue eyes held a hint of sadness as she watched him take a seat beside her.

McGonagall’s expression remained neutral as she regarded him. “Eh, Mr. Malfoy, I’m sorry to interrupt you at your home. As I was discussing with your mother, I’ve just come from the Weasley’s residence. Hermione Granger had a concern that needed to be addressed with some urgency. Do you know of what I speak?”

Draco nodded his head, but offered no explanation. He didn’t miss the quick, sharp glance his mother gave him out of the corner of his eye.

“And you hadn’t thought to mention this to me?” She asked quietly.

Draco’s expression didn’t betray the guilt lacing through him like a poison. “Granger wanted to wait, to see if she could find any other alternatives to the pregnancy.” The lie rolled smoothly from his lips, and his eyes remained fixed on the rug behind McGonagall’s chair.


“If I might be so bold, Mr. Malfoy, I’m having a hard time wrapping my head around this. Are you telling me Hermione Granger and yourself had a liaison in the midst of a war? I recall you both despising one another at school,” the headmistress said. Draco didn’t miss the accusation implied in her hard stare.

“Stranger things have happened in times of war,” Narcissa said sharply, her spine straightening as she rose to her son’s defense.

“I suppose they have. But by some coincidence, she came to be with child around the same time she
was held in this manor as a captive—"

“I hope you are not suggesting my son did anything untoward to the young woman,” his mother retorted, smoldering fire tempering her words. “By Miss Granger’s own admission at his trial, Draco freed her from captivity and assisted in her escape.”

There was a pause as the two women glared at each other in tense silence.

Draco stood suddenly, his mouth set in a grim line. “I’ll send a house elf to collect my belongings from Hogwarts.”

Every bit of him longed to make a dash from the parlor, escape the hurt and suspicion, and get as far as he could from anyone who would recognize his face.

“That won’t be necessary, Mr. Malfoy. However, I would like to see both you and Miss Granger before breakfast tomorrow morning to discuss your arrangements.”

She took another long, shrewd look at Draco, then rose as well. “I’ll see myself out.”

After the headmistress’s departure, the silence yawned between Draco and Narcissa. A house elf from the kitchen briskly refilled the tea pot and departed before his mother spoke again.

“I suppose congratulations are in order,” Narcissa said as cold as an arctic night. “You are to be a father, after all.”

“It’s not like I wanted any of this to happen, Mother,” Draco seethed through gritted teeth.

“You make quite the star-crossed pairing,” she continued, ignoring him. “The Prophet will have an absolute field day when they learn the news.”

“The Prophet can sod off! All of them can!” Draco shouted, his breath coming out in heavy pants as his bottled-up rage finally boiling over.

Narcissa sat stock still, her eyes blue plates of surprise as he paced back and forth before her.

“It was a stupid, bloody mistake. I shouldn’t have gone down there, I didn’t want - fuck! It doesn’t matter. Nothing fucking matters;” he raved, no longer caring if he used vulgar language within her hearing.

It was all a mess. His life, the situation with Granger - bloody everything. And it was all his fault.

Remorse intensified within him. If he had the chance, he would have done a great many things differently. He would have told his mother first; would have stayed in his chambers all those months ago; would have taken Dumbledore’s offer when he still had a chance.

“What happened, Draco? In the cellar.”

“Greyback,” he said, collapsing into the nearest chair, his head in his hands. He breathed deeply to calm the tremendous thundering of his heart. “Greyback happened. It doesn’t matter.” He couldn’t explain it to her. The imperius curse or what he did to Hermione or how weak he was.

Narcissa’s hand gently touched his head, and he started, having not heard her come stand by his side. She gently ran her fingers through his fine hair and Draco’s eyelids drooped closed, immediately relaxed by her massage. It brought him back to when he was a child sitting in her lap as she read him stories. Back when everything was right with the world.
“I’ll send for the barber later. Your hair is an awful mess, Draco,” she said, tucking a shaggy blonde lock behind his ear. He was grateful she didn’t ask him to elaborate on the cellar and Greyback.

“When she told me about the baby, I wanted her to give it to you; to pretend it was yours. I suppose she’s keeping it now.”

“I always wanted more children,” Narcissa sighed, coming to sit beside him. “We never told you this, but I had several miscarriages before you were born.” Her eyes were far away when he turned to look at her.

“Will you- are you going to tell Father?” He changed the subject.

She paused, examining him for moment. “He’ll know eventually, Draco,” she said. “Let me deal with him.”

Draco rolled his eyes, “He’ll be happy for the social advantage having a child with that muggleborn will bring us.”

Narcissa tisked, “Do not think so despairingly of your father. He won’t be thrilled with the knowledge, however, you know how he feels. He won’t let any harm come to his family.”

Draco snorted, but didn’t say anything. *Oh yes, quite the protector. Letting that monster into our home.*

“You’ll dine with me tonight, and we will discuss this further. Devy is making veal scaloppine, your favorite,” her mother stated, then stood.

“Where are you going?” Draco inquired as Narcissa swiftly walked from the parlor.

“I have some inquiries to make.”

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The Office of the Headmaster had changed drastically since Hermione had last seen it. Gone were the wizarding gadgets emitting noises and puffs of smoke from their spindly little tables.

Books now lined the lower walls of the circular room and above them the portraits of the former heads of Hogwarts hung in neat order. Most of them had abandoned their sleeping act and were rather pointedly staring at the two sitting in front of the clawfoot desk.

The events of the last two days swirled together in Hermione’s head, and she wondered how everything had changed so suddenly.

*Perhaps McGonagall kept Dumbledore’s pensieve somewhere in office,* Hermione pondered. She would love to be rid of the dizzying array of thoughts dancing madly around her mind.

After her parents had left Saturday evening, Hermione had trudged up the stairs, summoning what remained of her strength, and finally told her best friends the truth.

They had indeed been waiting impatiently, and Ginny jumped back as Hermione swung Ron’s door open. The trio’s look of shock was plainly written on their faces when they noticed her swollen belly.

“Hermione?” Harry questioned, his dark brows knit in confusion.
“Oh, Merlin!” Exclaimed Ginny, her hands coming up to cover her mouth in shock.

Ron’s mouth was a tight line on his pale face, and he said nothing.

“I think you all better have a seat,” she said, and she finally told them.

Tears spilled from her eyes as the words flowed from her lips. The torture she had endured at the hands of Bellatrix and being chained in the cellar. Greyback’s Imperius and what he had forced her and Malfoy to do. She withheld nothing except what the werewolf had done to her himself.

The truth had gotten easier to unload. She laid bare her ordeal with relative ease having had to do so twice just that day, but she felt the sting of every memory she tried so hard to repress keenly in her friend’s reactions.

Harry’s green eyes were startling against his sheet white face. His eyebrows furrowed in that particular way they did when he was feeling an overwhelming emotion. Having spent so many years at his side, Hermione could guess which ones.

Ginny had her eyes closed, her fist holding her head up on her knee, and her other hand clutching Harry’s. She finally looked up at Hermione when she was finished.

“Hermione-” Ron mumbled, shaking his head. She reached for him then, but as soon as her fingers brushed his arm, he stood and left, slamming the door behind himself.

Dismay filled her at his reaction, and Ginny made to go after him, but Harry held her back.

“Let him go, Gin. I’ll talk to him later. It’s just so much to take in. We- oh God, Hermione. We had no idea. We should never have left you, never...,” and Harry cried, leaning into the doorframe as tears escaped from under his glasses.

Hermione stifled a sob. “No, I should have told you lot straight away and-”

“Oh hush,” Ginny pulled her into an embrace. “I knew something was up with you. I bloody knew it...” she murmured into Hermione’s thick hair.

Harry came to them and rested his head on hers. Hermione’s heart soared at finally being able to tell them the truth. Ron’s reaction hurt, but now they all knew.

It could be ok again, surely?

After a fitful slumber due to nerves or relief or Ginny’s light snores, Hermione had woken early the next morning to make her final confession to her headmistress.

Even with Arthur and Molly’s support, it had been difficult to reveal her circumstances to her teacher and mentor of seven years. Of course McGonagall had been understanding and reassured her she could remain at Hogwarts. She had to make some arrangements, but they would discuss them later.

True to her word, the headmistress had summoned her to her office before breakfast on Monday morning.

It didn’t surprise her to see Malfoy sitting stiffly in the chair already, arms crossed in front of him chest, his eyes adamant in their avoidance of hers.

“Miss Granger?” McGonagall inquired again, and Hermione’s thoughts returned to the present, not realized she had drifted.
“Pardon?” Hermione asked, mildly embarrassed.

Headmistress McGonagall gave her a sympathetic look. “The baby is due in mid-December, correct?”

“Oh, yes, Professor.”

“As I told you yesterday, you both still have a place at Hogwarts. Your professors and I held an emergency meeting last night, and they have agreed to leniency regarding your attendance to their classes.”

At that, Malfoy’s head shot up.

“That mercy does not extend to you, Mr. Malfoy, as you are not the one physically affected.” He looked crestfallen and slumped further into the hard chair.

She continued. “The house elves have been at work all night restoring the quarters in the west wing on this floor. It will be prepared before midday today.”

“Restoring it, Professor?” Hermione asked. “Was it damaged during the battle?”

“No, no, it just needed sprucing up. Peeves had quite a bit of fun in the turret, and the elements did the rest. The school hasn’t had an expectant mother in some time so it’s been neglected.”

“Wait, there have been others before? In Hogwarts, A History-”

“You’re a practical girl, Miss Granger. Do you truly believe this is the first pregnancy at Hogwarts, or the last for that matter? Both of you, please pack your belongings after breakfast The house elves will move them when everything is ready this afternoon. Now, let me show you where they are.”

“I beg your pardon?” Demanded Malfoy, his dark blonde eyebrows crinkled in confusion. “We’ll be sharing these quarters?”

“Of course. In these circumstances, it would be prudent to have Miss Granger closer to her classes to save her the burden of walking. Not to mention proximity to my own quarters in case of emergency. It would be best if both parents were close by to help after the child’s birth, wouldn’t you agree?”

Draco muttered something that sounded like “my mother” under his breath, but McGonagall made no indication that she heard him.

“Now, if you will follow me…”

For the first time since entering the office, Draco and Hermione shared a look and followed her out of her office.

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**A/N: FINALS ARE OVER!!**

I took a bit of a creative winter and lost touch with the Dramione fandom for a sec, but FEAR NOT, I am going to finish this fic if it kills me!!

Any recs for long or short, realistic Dramione fics?
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!