Masterchef
by fragilereality

Summary

Hermione Granger's presence in his kitchen forces Lucius to rethink his prejudices. This little one shot grew arms and legs, then things got steamy in the kitchen.....
Chapter 1

The mudblood was in his kitchen, and she was cooking.

Lucius blinked a few times as if the simple action of lowering and raising his eyelids might erase the horrific imagine forever. No. She was still there, in his kitchen, still cooking. He had known that she and Draco were friends. They had been the only two students from their year to return to Hogwarts to sit their NEWTS. Draco had gravitated towards the girl, much to Lucius’ disapproval. Apparently, she had been kind to him, offered him friendship and support as he had struggled to find his place in wizarding society. Lucius had thought the friendship was designed entirely to spite him, but he had tolerated it, because the Malfoy name was looking rather tarnished these days, and nothing glittered quite like a member of the golden trio. Besides, Narcissa had told him not to interfere.

That didn’t mean that he had to put up with the girl in his kitchen though, handling his Sabatier knives, and chopping…..well he wasn’t quite sure what she was chopping, that wasn’t the point.

Of course, she could have been living permanently in his kitchen and he, most likely, would not have noticed. He didn’t think he had actually entered the cavernous room since he and Narcissa had christened the table, some time back in the late seventies. He was only here now because Narcissa, hell bent on redeeming herself through the medium of charitable works, had taken all of the house elves off to London to cater for some benefit she was throwing. Lucius was not following her down
this particular route. As far as he was concerned she could walk the road to redemption alone. He was quite happy lurking around the freshly decorated manor, reading rare and obscure volumes from his overstocked library, and drowning himself in tea.

Tea! That was what had brought him here in the first place. He was parched. He had put up with the burning thirst for as long as he could. Finally, he had succumbed. He would bloody well make a pot himself, how difficult could it be?

It would have been a lot easier if Draco and his hideous houseguest were not already occupying the kitchen. Neither of them had noticed him, and he hovered in the doorway as he tried to decide whether to abandon his mission. There was plenty of brandy in his study, surely that would suffice. No dammit, he wanted tea!

His gaze was drawn once more to the mudblood. In truth, it was only her pedigree that was unpleasant. The rest of her was rather appealing. That monstrous mane of hair, which had once reminded him of a particularly unkempt Old English sheepdog, was pinned up on top of her head. The style was haphazard, with wispy curls trickling down her neck and bobbing up and down with the force of her rapid chopping. She was wearing those horrible muggle trousers, what were they called? Ah yes, jeans. Whilst they offended him on principle, they cupped her buttocks rather provocatively, and the strings of the apron she wore highlighted the narrowness of her waist. Merlin's beard, was he actually sexualising the woman? He had known he was frustrated, but this was too much to bear. He would have a firm talk with Narcissa when she returned, his enforced celibacy was driving him to distraction.

He was so irritated by the treacherous direction of his thoughts that he strode into the room, all ideas of hiding himself away in his study forgotten.

"Father." Draco spun around to face him. His son was also wearing an apron, and wielding a rather impressive knife of his own.

"Draco," Lucius greeted him coolly. He ignored the mudblood who had turned to look at him, her wide brown eyes flicking nervously between him and his son.

"I didn’t expect to see you down here." Draco’s expression was defiant.

"Evidently not." Lucius allowed his disparaging gaze to run over the girl’s unmoving form, she stiffened a little. He turned his back on them both, rummaging through the cupboards in search of tea.

He could feel his son’s displeased stare impaling him right between the shoulder blades. The girl gave a soft cough, and he heard the dull thud of the knife on the wooden board as she resumed her cutting. Moments later, the sound of another knife joined hers.

"You need to chop them more finely than that." Her voice was soft, melodic.

"You're as bad as Snape," Draco complained. His chopping grew faster.

The girl huffed out a soft laugh. "I shall take that as a compliment. Now you're mincing them, don't drag your blade across them. Here, I'll show you." Lucius lowered his head and glanced over his shoulder. The girl had placed her hand over Draco's and was showing him how to angle the knife.

"Couldn't we just use magic?" There was a whiny note to his son's voice, it set Lucius' teeth on edge. The mudblood seemed more tolerant, however.

"Magic doesn't prepare them as well. You want this to be perfect don't you?"

Draco didn't answer but the chopping continued and Lucius surmised that, whatever he was doing, Draco did indeed wish it to be perfect.

He dropped a tin of something onto the floor and cursed as it bounced off his foot.

"What exactly are you doing Father?" Draco turned away from the worktop once more.

"I'm making a cup of tea," Lucius responded haughtily. Although he still hadn't located the bloody leaves, let alone a cup and saucer.
"Tea!" Draco's face brightened. "I'd love a cup, make me one too, would you?"
"Of course." Lucius bit back his retort, Narcissa had instructed him to be nice to their son, and nice he would be.
"Hermione?" Draco asked.
The girl looked once more between Draco and his father. "I'd love some thank you, Lapsang souchong, if you have it."
As she spoke his hand closed over the box of leaves. There were several types of tea in the cupboard and he felt a petty urge to deny the existence of her preferred blend. Instead, he merely slammed the caddy down on the worktop without responding.

As he began to search for the strainer Draco and the mudblood began to converse.
"Next we need to blend the chickpeas."
"Ok, I've got the chickpeas, how do we blend them?"
"In a..........." Her voice tailed off, and once more Lucius could not prevent himself from looking over at her. She was pressing a finger to her lips thoughtfully.
"I use a muggle blender." She looked around the kitchen, carefully avoiding the part of the room in which Lucius stood. "But if a kitchen as well stocked as this doesn't have one then your flat certainly won't." She tapped that finger against her lips once more. "Let's try this shall we." She muttered an incantation he couldn't quite hear, and flicked her wand. The yellow beans in the bowl Draco held began to jump as they were pulverised by an invisible force.
"How did you do that?" Draco had jumped too when the beans began to move, and quickly placed the bowl on the worktop. Hermione smiled.
"I combined a charm I made up for crushing potions ingredients with one Arthur Weasley uses for cutting grass." She eyed the, still vibrating, mixture. "It seems to have worked rather well. I'll write it down for you before I go."

Lucius hid his face in the cupboard once more. He absolutely did not want his look of surprise and admiration to be seen. She was how old? Twenty? No, she was older than Draco. Twenty-one perhaps. How many twenty-one-year-old witches could come up with a new charm at the drop of a hat? Even if it were for something as domestic as crushing chickpeas. He wondered what exactly she and Draco were doing. His son had moved into a flat in London in preparation for starting university that autumn. He had refused the services of a house elf and Lucius had assumed that the boy would simply eat out or return home when he required sustenance. Evidently not.

"Ok, now add the onion, garlic and parsley. Watch your fingers!" There was an element of alarm in her voice. "I don't know what that charm would do to your body parts."
"Probably best not to find out." Draco sounded amused. "What's next?"
Lucius found a teapot and used his wand to fill it with boiling water. He measured out the leaves and placed them in the strainer before carrying the pot to the scrubbed wooden table in the centre of the kitchen. He took a seat, waiting for the tea to steep.
"Now you add the spices......No Draco not that much cardamom, you don't want them to taste like cake."

"It smells amazing," Draco reported, bending over the mixture. To Lucius' surprise, the girl pulled him forcefully backwards.
"That will be the last thing you ever smell if my charm cuts off your nose," she reprimanded him. Draco grinned in response, and Lucius was struck by their easy camaraderie. When had Draco ever smiled at him like that?
"Now the fun part." She was smiling, a small dimple had appeared in one cheek.
"It makes me nervous when you say that." She rolled her eyes and flicked her wand over the pulsating mixture. "Take some of the mixture out and form it into a ball with your hands. You can put them on...... this tray." As she spoke she stretched sideways to reach across the worktop. Her checked shirt rode up at the back exposing a
brief sliver of flesh, it was gone as quickly as it had appeared.

Draco made a sound of disgust as he plunged his hands into the bowl. The girl laughed again and placed her fingers lightly on his arm.
"Sorry ferret, the things you do for love, right?"
"Right," Draco muttered, as he moulded the balls and placed them onto the waiting baking sheet.

Reluctantly, feeling like an intruder in his own home, Lucius cleared his throat.
"How do you take your tea, Miss Granger?" Until he had opened his mouth to speak he had not known he would address her so politely. He had considered simply ignoring her request and serving himself and Draco. He had considered leaving the kitchen altogether, in order to avoid interacting with her. He had not, for one second, considered treating her as an equal, and a guest in his home. It wasn't nearly as difficult as he might have thought. The girl spun to face him. A stain of colour appeared across her cheeks and she went from being relaxed and graceful to gauche and uncertain.
"Just black please, Mr Malfoy, if it's not too much trouble."
"It's no trouble." As he poured the fragrant liquid into one of Narcissa's bone china cups and carried it across the room to where she stood, frozen and staring, he realised that it wasn't. Her fingers trembled as she took the saucer from him, and the cup rattled slightly, tea sloshing into the saucer. She spun around and placed the cup and saucer on the worktop.
"Thank you."
"You are welcome." He returned to the pot and made a cup for Draco, adding the large volume of milk and several spoons of sugar he so disapproved of. As he carried his son's cup over he looked with interest at the light brown mixture which coated Draco's hands.
"What on earth are you making?" he could not prevent himself from asking.
Draco looked helplessly at the mudblood. "What are they called again Hermione?"
"Falafels." She spoke quietly and avoided looking at either of them. Lucius retreated to the table once more. He made her uncomfortable. He wondered why that did not make him happy.

The mudblood sipped her tea as she watched Draco shaping the falafels.
"Great," she said cheerfully, when Draco finally finished the task. "Now we put them in the fridge." She looked around the kitchen. "Or not," she added, casting a cooling charm over them instead.
"What's next?" Draco carried the dirty kitchenware to one of the sinks. Lucius didn't think he had ever seen his son tidy up before.
"You sprinkle some flour on the worktop while I get the dough out of the proving oven," the mudblood instructed him. Draco obeyed, and Lucius watched covertly as the girl bent down to open what looked like a drawer beneath the Aga. The muggle trousers stretched tighter across her ripe buttocks and he looked away, it would not do for his son to catch him ogling his friend, even if she was a mudblood. Especially because she was a mudblood.

"I can't believe you have a proving oven." The scent of yeasted dough filled the kitchen as Hermione removed the cling film from the bowl.
"I know, I'm so lucky," Draco's sarcasm was obvious and the girl smacked his arm.
"You have no idea." She glanced around the kitchen, whipping her eyes away from Lucius as soon as they set on him. "I would kill for a kitchen like this. Mind you, I'd never get anything done and I'd probably be the size of a house before long." Draco snorted and Lucius was inclined to agree with the unspoken rebuttal. The girl was petite, and radiated a degree of nervous energy which suggested she was unlikely ever to run to fat.

"This has turned out beautifully." She placed the dough onto Draco's floured worktop and gave an, almost carnal, sigh of appreciation as she sank her hands into it. "Just give it a quick knead like I showed you before." She moved back to allow Draco to work, she had a smudge of flour on her cheek. Awkwardly, Draco began to work the dough. "You know this is a lot of work." She was leaning back against the counter now so Lucius could see her face, not that he was looking. She was
entirely focussed on his son.
"You said you didn't mind." There was a hint of uncertainty in Draco’s voice.
"Oh I don't. I didn't mean it was work for me. I love cooking and I love bossing you around. This is my dream afternoon. I mean it's a lot of work you're going to for Astoria. You've got all this." She gesticulated vaguely, her action encompassing the manor at large. "Why don't you just wine and dine her in some flashy restaurant?"
"I've done that." Draco's cheeks had turned a little pink. Lucius pricked up his ears. He hadn't known his son was seeing the Greengrass girl. He had thought that the Malfoy families’ fall from grace would have put her off honouring the agreement he had made with her father all those years ago. Apparently not.
"I wanted to do something really special." Draco had apparently forgotten his father was in the room, Lucius had never heard him speak to plainly.
"Still." The mudblood had turned back towards Draco and was now bent over a clean section of the worktop. Her chin rested in her hands, her bottom swayed gently as she fidgeted from foot to foot. "You could just get me to come round earlier in the day and cook for you, Astoria would never know."
"I would know," Draco said sharply. "I'd rather serve her up a meal that's burnt in places and still raw in the middle than cheat by having someone else do it. I want her to know I've made an effort." He paused, looking around at the debris which littered much of the kitchen. "Are you sure she'll like all this?"
"I'm certain," the mudblood sounded very confident. "She said she liked Middle Eastern food and she's a vegetarian, she will love this, and she'll love that you've made the effort." She touched him again, this time a gentle pat on the arm she had previously swiped. "She's lucky to have you."

Lucius was simultaneously wondering what a vegetarian was and when the last time anybody had touched him on purpose had been, when his attention was dragged back to the conversation. "So how are things with you and Weasley?" Draco spoke with a kind of forced casualness that made Lucius wince.
"Draco." The girl snatched the dough out of his hands and began to chop it into small balls, the knife hitting the counter with unnecessary force. "You know I don't want to talk about him."
"That well then." Draco seemed a lot less receptive to the girl's minimal ques than Lucius, he would not have dared pursue the topic. Undaunted, his son ploughed on. "He's an idiot, you know that right? If it wasn't for Astoria I'd be after you myself." Lucius nearly choked on his third cup of tea. Fortunately, the mudblood seemed as appalled by the idea as he.
"Immensely comforting as it is to know that I am your runner up choice, I don't think that would go down particularly well with certain members of your family." She lowered her voice toward the end of her sentence, and Lucius realised that whilst Draco might have forgotten his presence, the mudblood had not. Draco was about to respond, and Lucius had unconsciously leant forward in his chair, eager to hear what his son said next. He was desperately curious to find out what the Weasley boy had done to have become persona non grata, but sadly his curiosity was left unsatisfied.
"Draco!" The girl gave a little shriek and snatched a ball of dough away from him. "You have to tuck the edges under, like this." Lucius craned his neck to see what she was doing. "You can't just roll them up into a ball, what sort of a philistine are you?" She sounded genuinely aggrieved but Draco merely snorted. He appeared not to have modified his practice either as the mudblood barged her hip against his and leaned in to assist him. Lucius watched their fingers entwine with something that felt strangely like jealousy. Nobody touched him, he realised. Nobody. And this girl, this mudblood, she touched so freely, so unconsciously. If she were his friend would she place her hand on his with so little thought? He tucked his hand under the table, as if he were afraid that she might suddenly press her affections on him.

The teapot was empty and he was awash, three cups was his limit even on the most tedious of afternoons. Still, he found himself refreshing the pot, trying to move as unobtrusively as possible, not
wishing to remind the couple of his presence although they must realise he was still in the room.

The balls of dough had been covered over with some sort of clear sticky substance and put to one side. "We'll fry everything up at the last minute," Hermione declared. Hermione? When had he started thinking of her as Hermione? "That's going to be the tricky point of the evening for you, but if you get slick at it Astoria will think you're a domestic God." She was on her hands and knees rummaging through a low cupboard as she spoke, but as Draco responded with, "she already thinks I'm a God." She jumped to her feet and took a well-aimed swipe at his head with a frying pan. Draco jumped backward, avoiding her swing, and in a display of transfiguration which impressed his father more than a little, transformed the frying pan into a bunch of flowers.

"Draco," she could barely speak through her laughter. "What are we supposed to cook the falafels in now?" She whacked him with the flowers instead, giggling as she did so. Draco was laughing too, so hard in fact that his attempt to transfigure the flowers back into a pan missed completely, his spell ricocheting perilously close to Lucius' head.

The couple stopped as if they had been petrified. They turned as one to face Lucius with identical looks of terror on their faces. Lucius considered his response. In the days prior to the second wizarding war, he would not have tolerated such tomfoolery from his son. But those days were long gone, both he and Draco had changed, he hoped for the better. In those days he would not have considered making his own cup of tea or allowing a muggle born girl to cavort in his kitchen either. He bit down the blistering censure which had been his first response, and instead, calmly sipped his tea, as if he had not almost been transfigured into a frying pan seconds before.

The girl was the first to recover. She produced her own wand and flicked it at the flowers, turning to place the newly transfigured pan onto the Aga. Lucius watched as she instructed Draco in adding oil to the pans and adjusting the cooking temperature. She was patient with him, almost motherly as she warned him to stand clear of the spitting fat and smiled indulgently as he burned the first pitta bread. When Lucius had first come upon the scene he had been afraid that he was witnessing a courtship ritual. Watching the two of them interact now, it was clear that there was no hint of romance in their relationship. Draco was lapping up the attention she gave him, but it was as if she were a favourite aunt or an older sister, not a lover. He told himself that it was because of her blood status that he felt so relieved.

Once she appeared confident that Draco was in control of the cooking element, she turned her attention to preparing a salad. Lucius observed through his lashes as she used a mixture of magic and muggle methods. Knives flew, lettuce washed itself and condiments combined in mid-air as she manually scooped the seeds out of a pomegranate. Draco turned away from the Aga and rolled his eyes.

"Now you're just showing off Granger," he sneered.
"Watch it ferret," her words were sharp, but she smiled as she spoke. She left her salad to its own devices for a moment, as she checked on Draco's work.
"I think these are nearly ready." She stuck a finger into the pan and prodded at one of the falafels. "Ouch!" She withdrew her hand quickly and blew on her injured digit.
"Idiot," Draco said fondly. Lucius felt his pulse sky rocket as she pushed the finger between her lips and sucked, why on earth did he find the image so painfully erotic? He poured yet another cup of tea, at this rate his bladder would burst.

"I think we're ready to plate up," She had applied some sort of salve to her finger and was once more ordering Draco around. "Now it's going to be tricky to make these look good." She placed some plates on the worktop. "First slice open the pitta bread. These are excellent Draco." His son blushed at her praise.

The two danced around each other as the food was prepared. The kitchen was filled with delicious smells and, despite the gallons of tea he had consumed Lucius felt his mouth begin to water. It had
turned from late afternoon to early evening as he had watched the two cook, and he realised that their normal dinner hour had come and gone. There was no sign of the return of the house elves or his wife. Narcissa's lack of care for his own home comforts was, he feared, merely a symptom of the wider rot in their marriage. At some point, he was going to have to rouse himself from the stupor he had existed in for the past two years, in order to have the difficult conversation that would culminate in him letting her go. He was suddenly glad that she was still absent, the prospect exhausted him.

Draco and the girl had paused. Draco was whispering something to her, his nose so close to her ear that his breath stirred tendrils of her hair as he spoke. Lucius wondered what she smelled like at that proximity, and if the skin of her ear was as soft as it looked. Her body had frozen at whatever his son had said. It was strange to see her so completely still, he didn't think she had stopped moving all afternoon. Her shoulders rose in a shrug. "If you're sure," she muttered.

"Would you like to join us, Father?" Draco turned to him holding a plate of food in his hands. The plump pitta was split open and contained a generous serving of the golden falafels topped with hummus and another dressing he could not identify by sight. A crisp salad garnished the plate, the entire creation was studded with jewel-like pomegranate seeds. Draco's expression was a strange mixture of defiance and anticipation as he awaited his father's response. Lucius felt his heart constrict, his son expected some sort of scathing put down at best, but he was still willing to risk his father's condemnation on the off chance Lucius might accept his offer.

"I would be delighted." He saw the mudblood - No. Hermione, widen her eyes in response to his words, but she quickly set about preparing a third plate and brought it to the table along with some cutlery. She slipped onto the bench next to Draco and opposite Lucius, unconsciously shifting a little closer to the boy and avoiding Lucius' gaze. None of them spoke, and Lucius realised that both he and Draco were waiting for Hermione to start eating the appetising, but strange looking, concoction in front of them. She picked it up with both hands and took a delicate bite from one corner. Father and son immediately followed suit.

Lucius could not quite believe that he was sitting at the scrubbed pine kitchen table in the bowels of Malfoy Manor, eating Israeli street food with a muggle born witch and his son. It was a situation both surreal and fantastic. His father would have turned in his grave at the sight and Narcissa? Well, he had no idea what Narcissa would think.

"This is amazing, Hermione." Draco appeared to be the least affected by the other-worldliness of their experience. He had a smear of sour cream on his chin.
"Thanks, Draco. You have a little..." She gestured at his chin and he dabbed at it ruefully with a napkin.
"I'm sorry, this isn't the easiest meal to eat." She looked down at her plate, her lower lip briefly compressed between her teeth. "Maybe I should have taught you to cook something a bit less messy."
"Oh no, this is perfect." Draco paused in the act of taking another bite. "Messy is good, I want to show her that I'm not some formal, stuck-up pureblood who only wants to marry her for her pristine bloodline." Hermione's cheeks turned the same colour as the pomegranate seeds, and Draco's blanched as they looked up in unison at Lucius. The girls' shoulders visibly relaxed as he said mildly, "I didn't know you and Miss Greengrass had renewed your acquaintance Draco."
The girls' shoulders visibly relaxed as he said mildly, "I didn't know you and Miss Greengrass had renewed your acquaintance Draco."
The colour slowly returned to Draco's face. "We've not been seeing each other for long. I didn't want to tell you and mother until things were a bit more serious."
"And this is not serious?" Lucius' hand gesture encompassed the meal and the evidence of its preparation which littered the kitchen. The girl smiled and elbowed Draco in the ribs.
"I suppose it is a bit serious." He returned her smile and avoided his father's eyes.

They ate in silence for several a minutes. Lucius forced himself to concentrate on the food in front of him, which was delicious, and not on the girl who sat opposite. The table was narrow and he swore
he could feel the heat of her legs only inches from his own. "You are an excellent cook Miss Granger." She startled at his words, the fork she had been using to eat her salad falling to the table with a clatter.

"Thank you Mr Malfoy," she spoke boldly but her tongue flashed out to moisten her lips and her soft brown eyes were uncertain. He picked up the fallen fork and proffered it to her. He wasn't sure if he was amused or saddened by her discomfiture in his presence. Her fingertips brushed his as she took the fork, and they both jerked back as if stung.

Draco appeared unaware of the entire exchange. "Do you think we should put more mint in the tzatziki?" he asked. Sticking a finger into the sauce in a manner Lucius found most uncouth. He hoped that wasn't how is son behaved around Miss Greengrass.

"I'm not sure." Miss Granger's voice was uneven, and she swallowed hard, her eyes flickering once more in Lucius' direction. "Draco, I need to go. It's getting late and I have work in the morning." It was not yet 8 o’clock, but neither Malfoy challenged her in her lie. Draco stood politely.

"No problem Hermione, thank you for all of this."

"It was my pleasure." She looked around her. "Do you need help clearing up before I go?"

"I will assist Draco with the tidying." Lucius was as surprised as the other two at his own words. He too stood.

"I'll walk you to the gate," Draco offered.

"No really, stay here and finish your meal." She hugged him quickly then backed away, almost running out the room now, her eyes wide, reminiscent of a startled deer. "Goodbye, Mr Malfoy."

Her eyes did not meet his.

"It has been a pleasure, Miss Granger." Before she could anticipate his action he caught her hand in his and brought it to his lips. Her skin was warm and soft, he resisted an almost overwhelming urge to run his tongue over her knuckles.

"She left in a hurry." Draco shrugged in an unconcerned manner, already returning to the table.

"Would you like some more Father, there's plenty?"

Lucius was still staring at the kitchen door which swung back and forth on its hinges, the subtle scent of Miss Granger's perfume lingered in the air and he breathed deeply as if trying to capture the last of it.

"Yes Draco, I believe I would like more." He retook his seat at the table. "Much more."
Narcissa did not come home that night. Lucius told himself that he was neither surprised nor concerned by her absence. The champagne would have been free flowing at whatever event she had hosted and to apparate whilst inebriated was dangerous, the floo network was relatively safe but extremely unpleasant. It made sense for her to have stayed in their London townhouse.

Draco did not remark on his mother's absence the following morning, nor the lack of house elves. They breakfasted on left over falafels and Lucius made tea for them both. The kitchen seemed quiet and strangely empty without the presence of the mudblood. Lucius wondered how she had come to define the space in such a short period.

After breakfast, Draco rose reluctantly from the table. "I need to go back to London Father, my flat still needs organising before term starts."
"Of course." Lucius was perusing that morning’s prophet and gave his son only a cursory glance. "Will you be all right?"
This brought his head up sharply. Draco was regarding him carefully as he half stood, half sat at the table. Lucius was uncomfortably struck by the realisation that Draco's frequent visits to the manor were not out of hunger or a need to refill his pocketbook. Nor were they fuelled by a desire to remain tied to Narcissa's apron strings. Draco came back because of him. His son was worried about him. His first response was a strange warming in the regions of his belly which had nothing to do with the tea he had drunk. He second was angry dismissal. He was the Malfoy patriarch, he did not need a mere boy watching over him.
"I am fine Draco." He returned his gaze to the newspaper. "I will tell your mother you were here."
"Alright then." Draco hesitated and Lucius was reminded of the brief hug he had witnessed the day before. He couldn't remember the last time he had touched Draco. He resisted the impulse to wrap his arms around the boy's skinny frame, wondering what was wrong with him.

He felt the wards shift sometime between lunch and dinner. Narcissa had entered the manor. He had purposefully set himself up in the library. It was his favourite room anyway, but it also afforded an unobstructed view of the entrance hallway. He bent over the text he was translating, feigning ignorance of her return. "I know you know I'm here, Lucius." Her bell like voice came from the doorway. "Nobody can get within half a mile of the wards without you feeling them."
He put aside his papers and rose to his feet. "I did not wish to impose on you my dear."
"You are my husband, you could never impose." They sounded like two well-rehearsed automatons, each reciting their scripted lines, responding to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the other. Would they sound perfect to the casual observer, or was the hollowness of their words apparent to anyone who cared to listen? Was this why Draco stayed so close?

He regarded his beautiful wife. Her face was as familiar as his own. She was fragile, and perfect and cool, but he realised now, that she had always been opaque. In twenty-five years of marriage he had never even scratched the surface of Narcissa Black, in truth he had never cared to. They had each
served their own purpose to the other and as long as that functionality was in place what point was there in searching for anything more meaningful?

"I have a headache, I believe I shall rest before dinner."
He inclined his head in response. He might once have enquired further as to her health, but now there seemed little point, they both knew the other’s script of niceties’ so intimately that verbalising the contents were no longer necessary.

After she left he returned to his work. He painstakingly translated the ugly Trollish into English, his neat script flowing like water across the page, in stark contrast to the dark, smeared scrawls of the original paper. It didn't matter that nobody else was ever likely to read the obscure text describing the fourteen properties of night-root tubors. All that mattered was that he was engaged in some kind of industry, that he did not allow his mind to lie fallow for too long.

At dinner he observed his wife once more. Her posture was perfect, her back ramrod straight, her neat ankles crossed in a gentile manner beneath her floor length skirt. He was reminded of the mudblood, of her propensity to fidget, the way she moved closer to Draco when she felt threatened by his presence, of her apparent lack of concern for her external appearance. Once he would have demeaned her for it. Once he had believed that appearances were everything, now he envied her.

"I wish you could have been there last night." Narcissa spoke without malice, it was not a complaint. "I would not have wished to come between you and your latest paramour."
Her eyes flashed a little at this and she sipped her wine before she responded. "There would be no need for a paramour if you were willing to shoulder your responsibilities."
He considered her words. That she had a lover was neither surprising, nor painful. That had both enjoyed other partners during their marriage. Lucius had conducted a two year affair with a delightful French veela of which Narcissa had been fully cogniscent. He could not fault his wife in wishing to continue this tradition, he was free to do the same. His mind flitted briefly to the girl's denim clad backside, and then skittered away. Their extra-marital affairs had always seemed to bring something with them in the past. They had been the gilding on an already-perfect union, a public declaration of the endurability of their marriage and of their exhaulted state, they had been beyond the rules of polite society. But to seek out another partner because his marriage was failing? That would be demeaning in the extreme, and it was equally so to be cuckolded under such circumstances. All these things flashed through his mind before he answered, “And what responsibilities are these my dear?”
Narcissa swallowed. “You know exactly what it is I want of you.”
“All the same I should like to hear you say it.”
“Very well, I wish you would accompany me to the events I organise, perhaps shoulder some of the burden of my works yourself.”
“I have not objected to financing any of your projects.”
He was surprised when she slammed her hand down on the table. “That’s not the same thing and you know it Lucius. I do not need your money, I need your support. Your physical support.”
It would have been easy to respond to her anger with his own. He had always been short tempered, Draco frequently bore the brunt of his rage. But not Narcissa, never her. Even now when their marriage shook at its foundations he would not raise his voice to her.
“I can’t do what you ask of me.” He avoided her gaze, concentrating on the food on his plate.
“Why not?” The pain in her voice was evident.
“We did something wrong Narcissa. I cannot simply walk out into society with my head held high and pretend that it didn’t happen.”
“You did before.” Finally he met her gaze, there was no remorse there, no inkling that she truly believed she had done anything wrong. There was only the steely determination he had always admired. He looked away.
“We were exonerated Lucius, we both assisted Potter, we did not fight in the final battle……..”
“Out of cowardice.”
“Out of fear for our son.”
He pursed his lips before he answered. “We did what my family have always done, kept our heads down, played the political game and took the advantages when they were offered to us. Just because we escaped incarceration does not mean we were blameless. If I had truly renounced the Dark Lord after the last war then who knows what might have happened. Perhaps some of the horror we all lived might have been prevented.”

The haunting image flashed before his eyes. The mudblood, Hermione, writhing in agony on his drawing room floor. He had had dreamed of her that way the previous night, and many nights before that.
Narcissa gave a delicate sniff. “Nobody renounces the Dark Lord.”
“Severus did.”
She gave a slight frown at this, and then, as if remembering that the expression might permanently mar her beautiful face she relaxed.
“We are not talking about Severus, we are talking about you. I am doing my best to make amends with society Lucius, but it is hard to do when you are skulking around here like a teenager who has been sent to his bedroom.”

“Are you truly trying to make amends Narcissa, or are you trying to repair our damaged reputation?”
This time she was the one to look away. “The two are not mutually exclusive.”
“I won’t be a part of it.”

She gripped the table with white knuckled fingers, her red tipped nails reminded him of talons dipped in blood.
“I can’t live like this Lucius.”
It was almost a relief, to hear her say the words. They had been hurtling towards this moment for weeks, months even, he would never be the one to walk away but he had often felt that Narcissa was the one who felt trapped. She got up from the table, laying her napkin beside her uneaten meal with the exquisite grace and economy of movement which was a marker of her breeding. As she made to leave the room Lucius reached out and caught her wrist.

She stilled instantly, not struggling. Only the beating of her pulse, like a caged bird against his palm, gave away her fear.
“Where will you go?”
“Bella and Rudophus’ house, the renovations were finished weeks ago, it is perfectly habitable now.”
“Can you really bear to live there?”
She shrugged. “It’s just a house Lucius. You manage to endure living here.”
Lucius glanced around him. The stains Voldemort had left on the manor would never be erased. Yet it was still his home, generations of Malfoy’s had lived and died here, he could not live anywhere else. “Is there anything you need? I will deny you nothing.”
She took a breath, opened her mouth to speak and then appeared to think better of it. “There is nothing I need from you, several of my relatives died recently. I believe I’m almost as rich as you are now.”

He winced at the coldness in her voice. Once it had excited him that she could be so cool, so focussed on her own goals, now he was almost afraid of her.
“Let me go Lucius.”
He looked down at has large hand encasing her tiny wrist, it was the first time he had touched her in months. He let go.

After she had gone he slumped back in his chair, pushing his uneaten dinner aside. He felt curiously numb. He ought to be sad, he knew that. He and Narcissa had been together for more than half of his life, since their school days. She permeated his memories, happy and otherwise. She had given him his son, she and Draco had been the centre of his being for so long he could not remember what it
was like to want things on his own account. But the sorrow was tempered with relief. He was no longer the man Narcissa needed and now she was gone he was at liberty to carve his own path. Or he could hide in his library translating rare texts for the rest of his life.

He considered taking refuge in the bottle, short term oblivion was an attractive prospect. He crossed the room and fingered the crystal decanter which held his treasured very expensive brandy. With a sigh he returned to his seat and summoned an elf to bring him a pot of tea.
Hermione makes a serious sartorial faux pas.

Hermione looked furtively over her shoulder before she undid the clasp at her neck and allowed her wizarding robes to puddle at her feet. She sighed with relief, lifting the heavy weight of her hair away from the back of her neck allowing what little air there was to cool her overheated skin.

Her employer was a stickler for propriety. What need was there, he would ask, for her to wander around in a state of undress when she was capable of casting a cooling charm? Hermione had argued that no cooling charm, however competently cast, could compete with being appropriately dressed for the season. It wasn’t as if her outfit was obscene. She was wearing a perfectly decent, and rather pretty, shirt dress which buttoned up all the way to her neck and dropped to just above her knees. Whilst the sight of her bare shoulders might have been enough to send her employer into a state of mild apoplexy, she really didn’t think anyone else would bat an eyelid. It was a moot point anyway. Her employer was in the basement working on an extremely volatile new product. Hermione had been instructed, on pain of death, not to disturb him.

This arrangement suited her just fine. She hummed along with the latest Wyrd Sisters’ hit as she climbed the rickety step ladder and began the weekly stock take. Blaise Zabini, Hermione’s co-apprentice and the bane of her life, considered the stock take to be an activity far beneath him. He absolutely refused to have anything to do with it. In fact, there were many facets of life as a potions apprentice that Blaise did not consider worthy of the attentions of a pureblood wizard. He was not particularly keen on scrubbing cauldrons or serving in the shop either, often mysteriously absenting himself when these tasks arose. Hermione bore his laziness with a considerable amount of grace. This was, in no small part, because she knew that their employer was acutely aware of who did the majority of the work. It seemed too much of a co-incidence that the bulk of the complex and experimental brewing also seemed to fall to her.

It was through mutual agreement that Wednesdays had become Hermione’s stock take day. The apothecary was quiet as the post weekend frenzy had died down and the pre-weekend rush had not yet begun. In addition, Wednesdays were Blaise’s research day (or his recover from student night at the Leaky Cauldron day, Hermione privately thought) so she was left in glorious isolation to complete the mind numbing, yet curiously satisfying task of cataloguing every potion, lotion, tincture, ointment, cream, and ungent the shop had to offer.

She ran her hand across the top shelf, moving bottles to the front, turning labels so they were more easily visible and ticking off items on the clipboard which hovered beside her. She was completely absorbed in her task and gave a little jerk of surprise when the shop bell rang, cheerfully announcing the arrival of a customer. Unfortunately, Hermione’s little jerk was more than the aging step ladder could take. It decided to return to its constituent parts and with a loud crack slammed itself closed, hurling its’ occupant rapidly towards the flagstone floor.

She braced herself for the impact. Her wand was in the pocket of her robes and even had it been in her hand, she doubted she would have been quick enough to stop her fall. She was therefore surprised when her descent was arrested, mere centimetres from the floor.
“What….?” She looked around frantically before giving a shriek of terror as she met the grey-eyed stare of Lucius Malfoy. He looked rather surprised himself, as he stood over her in his impeccable robes, his blond hair spilling over his shoulders and catching the light that shone in through the apothecary window. In one hand he held his wand, still trained on her, in the other was his cane. It occurred to Hermione that he must have incredibly quick reflexes to have drawn his wand and stopped her descent so quickly. It was only as she began to rise gracefully upwards that she registered exactly which spell he had used. Before she knew what was happening, she was dangling upside down, suspended by one ankle. Worse still, her summer dress succumbed quickly to gravity and dropped itself over her face, no doubt giving Mr Malfoy an unimpeded view of her underwear. Hermione felt her face begin to redden and knew without a doubt that this had far more to do with the fact that Malfoy senior was getting a good look at her smalls than her uncomfortable position.

Of course, it had to be washing day. Her bra was rather nice, a lacy concoction in fuchsia pink, if she remembered correctly. But her knickers! Her knickers were of the serviceable white cotton variety. The kind of underwear that thoroughly covers a witch’s rump, keeping her warm on even the coldest of Scottish mornings. They were absolutely not the sort of knicker that one would wish Lucius Malfoy to see. Not that she would ever want Mr Malfoy to see her underwear at all, even if she were wearing her best set.

Galvanised into action by the thought of Lucius Malfoy and his, no doubt, lascivious scrutiny of her undergarments, she grabbed the hem of her dress and, contorting herself wildly, heaved it over her belly and down to her thighs.

“Mr Malfoy,” she gasped, doing a sort of aerial sit up in order to remain decent. “Please put me down at once.” She twisted her head around to look at him, thinking that this definitely counted as working her lateral abdominal muscles and her evening gym class was therefore no longer necessary. He was indeed staring at her with his mouth slightly open and it crossed her mind that if someone as regal as Lucius Malfoy were capable of looking gormless this would be exactly how it might manifest.

“Mr Malfoy,” she prompted again, not sure how much longer she could maintain her decency. He gave a start.

“Of course, Miss Granger.” He positioned himself beneath her and, with a muttered finite incantatum, cancelled the spell. Moments later she plummeted into his arms. She was briefly assaulted by the musky scent of sandalwood and jasmine, and the firm warmth of his chest, before she began to struggle wildly in his arms. He dumped her on her feet, and rapidly stepped away, holding his hands up in the air as if trying to pacify an armed robber in a petrol station.

“I do apologise, Miss Granger, that was perhaps not the best choice of spell.” It was her turn to stare at him. He was apologising. Lucius Malfoy, death eater extraordinaire, hater of mudbloods, was apologising to her, still a mudblood last time she’d checked, after saving her from a nasty encounter with the shop floor. She shook her head.

“No, I’m sorry. You just gave me rather a fright, thank for catching me.” She licked her dry lips. “It’s washing day.” She gesticulated nervously in the direction of her knickers. Then, not wishing to continue standing around discussing her underwear with a former death eater, she scurried over to where her robes lay in a crumpled heap on the floor, and pulled them on, in the vain hope that their presence would somehow remove the memory of her undergarments from his mind. She then positioned herself behind the safety of the shop counter.

“How may I assist you Mr Malfoy?” She asked in her most professional tones, before the likely reason for his presence suddenly hit her. “I’m afraid Severus is working downstairs and is not to be disturbed.”

“I am not here to see Severus.”
“Oh.” She glanced around. He was between her and the door, but surely he couldn’t mean to harm her. If so there wouldn’t have been much point in preventing her from smacking her head off the flagstones. The intensity of his stare made her want to look over her shoulder, was there somebody else standing behind her? She surreptitiously checked, no just her. He flicked a stray lock of his blonde hair over one shoulder. It drew Hermione’s eye to their breadth beneath his immaculately tailored robes, they had felt remarkably well muscled when she had briefly clutched them in her attempt to escape. She bit her lip for a second, before remembering it was not an attractive habit, and releasing it quickly.

“I am here to purchase some dreamless sleep potion if you have it.”

“Oh.” Say something else, anything, just speak. “Dreamless sleep has addictive properties and should be used sparingly.” Brilliant, just brilliant, Hermione.

“I am aware of the limitations of the potion Miss Granger, I have purchased it before.” There was a slight bite to his voice and she decided not to antagonise him further.

“Of course.” Loathe to turn her back on him she sidled up to the shelves behind the counter and gathered together three bottles. “We have chocolate, mint and banana flavour.” She placed the bottles on the counter and clasped her hands behind her back so he wouldn’t see them shaking.

He raised an eyebrow. “I wasn’t aware there was a choice.”

“There wasn’t.” She fiddled with the bottles, lining them up carefully. “Professor Snape wasn’t keen to take on another apprentice. He had already chosen Blaise when I approached him. I developed the flavoured potions as a means of convincing him otherwise.” Shut up, shut up, shut up, he doesn’t want to hear your life story.

Lucius raised an eyebrow. “I imagine Severus was delighted to take you on with such a range of products in your repertoire.”

“I don’t think Severus is ever delighted by anything, but he grudgingly acquiesced, the original formula was extremely unpalatable. “ Why was she allowing him to engage her in conversation? More concerningly, why was he talking to her?

He examined each of the vials in turn. “Which concoction would you recommend, Miss Granger?”

Merlin, how did he make such a banal statement drip with innuendo? “The chocolate,” her voice was surprisingly steady, considering her legs were jelly and her stomach was about to leap out of her mouth. Was she frightened, nervous, aroused, insane? “The banana tastes artificial and the mint is just plain odd.”

He smiled slightly as if responding to a joke only he had heard. “The chocolate it is then, two bottles if you please.”

“Of course.” She grabbed another bottle from the shelf and shoved the two into a paper bag, the glass clinking loudly in the silent shop as she fumbled with, and almost dropped, his entire order. “Is there anything else I can help you with?”

He shook his head very slightly and she moved across to the register. “That will be eight galleons and four sickles then please.”

He counted out the money as she tore a receipt from the book and patted her pockets in search of her quill. The ministry was very strict about semi-controlled substances such as dreamless sleep. She had to record every sale in triplicate. She gave a squeak of terror as Malfoy leaned toward her. She still didn’t have her wand, he was going to strangle her and she was just standing staring at him.

“Allow me,” his voice was smooth as he plucked the quill from her hair and offered it to her with a gallant smile.

“Thank you.” She snatched the offending implement, not returning his smile and scribbled the receipt as quickly as possible. Just go, she chanted in her head, just go, please.

He appeared not to be psychic, for he lingered in front of the counter, his long, elegant fingers wrapped around the handle of the branded apothecary bag. “Do you have plans for lunch, Miss Granger?”
What? She looked frantically up at the clock. Shit! The hand was pointing straight up to, Get your lunch now or you’ll miss your chance. “Er, I normally just get a sandwich from next door.” She avoided his gaze. He wasn’t going to………..surely he wouldn’t………..

“I would be delighted if you would join me then, I took the liberty of booking a table.”

“You did!” That was not what she had intended to say. Something along the lines of, I’d rather eat my own foot than dine with an absolute bastard such as you, now get out before I hex your balls off, sounded about right. But somehow, even though she opened her mouth, no further sound was emitted and Malfoy, clearing taking her mute staring for a positive response, held open the shop door expectantly.

“Come along then, we don’t want to miss our table.”

For a man who presumably wished to spend time with her, Malfoy made no accommodation is his pace for the considerably shorter length of Hermione's legs. And he bloody well ought to know they’re shorter, she thought, trotting after him, he'd spent enough time looking at them while she hung upside down like a side of ham in a butchers' window. Although maybe the hideous sight of her matronly knickers had diverted his attention from her, rather nice, (in her humble opinion) legs. She wasn’t quite sure why she cared what he thought. He was Lucius Malfoy after all. He remained neatly filed away under her list of 'bad people'. Despite Draco’s protestations to the contrary, Hermione found it hard to believe that Malfoy harboured any real remorse for his previous actions. Oh, he might regret the way things had turned out. Himself and his son barely more than social pariahs and his wife, ex-wife she corrected herself, bleeding the family dry in an attempt to re-purchase their previous standing. But she didn't for a minute believe that he was truly sorry for the atrocities he had helped to perpetrate. So why then did she feel all hot and flustered in his company? Why did his presence make her heart pound and her palms sweat in a way poor Ron had never managed? She shook the errant thoughts out of her head and valiantly attempted to keep up with his broad back and mane of blond hair.

The June sun beat down unrelentingly and, after a few minutes, Hermione was seriously overheated. "Stop,” she gasped out. Coming to a grinding halt in the middle of Diagon Ally and really not caring if her companion heard her or not. He did and turned to look enquiringly at her just at the point where she removed her wizarding robes for the second time in less than an hour. The look of shock on his face was quite comical and reminded Hermione of Severus. "For goodness sake," she said primly. Coming to stand beside him with her robes folded neatly over her arm and smoothing down the front of her dress. "There's no need to be so prim, I am perfectly decent, as long as you don't turn me upside down again."

"Of course." Lucius looked pointedly around the street, which teemed with witches and wizards all still dressed in their robes. Hermione shrugged. "I've never understood why you all go around casting cooling charms willy nilly when you could just simply enjoy the sun on your skin." She held out a slightly tanned arm in front of her as if to demonstrate.

Lucius sniffed. "The fabric of my robes in permeated with climate control spells," he said rather stiffly. "I don't even notice the ambient temperature."

"Oh."

He had begun to walk again and Hermione followed after him, back to monosyllabic answers. "You will get sunburn." He didn't look around as he spoke. "No, I won't." Hermione felt rather like a petulant child. "I tan very easily, besides I have to be back in the shop in........." She checked her watch. "Fifty-three minutes."

Lucius held open the door to a small and extremely exclusive looking restaurant. The sort of eatery Hermione would never choose to frequent, a lunch there probably cost her entire weeks salary. Ron had no such qualms. If he fancied a nice meal out he simply owled the restaurant informing them that a member of the Golden Trio wished to dine. Much to Hermione's embarrassment, he was always
furnished with a window table and a free meal, it might impress other woman but it had made her feel like an exhibit in the zoo. She gave a soft sigh and Malfoy looked sharply at her as he held out her chair.

"Is something the matter, Miss Granger?"
"No." She looked up at him, he looked, interested, concerned even, what did he want? She snatched up her menu, sweet Merlin it didn't even have prices, and ordered the first thing she recognised.
"Wine?" Malfoy offered.
She shook her head. "I have to finish my stock take, preferably without falling off the ladder again."
They both paused, and Hermione wondered if he was relieving the memory of her suspended upside down with her pants on show.

Enough was enough. It was high time she took control of this encounter. She folded her hands on the table and looked him straight in the eye. "What do you want Mr Malfoy?"
He blinked and she thought what an excellent poker player he would be, if the wizarding world even had poker. "I beg your pardon, Miss Granger."
It was her turn to blink and she pursed her lips in irritation. "This is all very nice." She gestured around the restaurant. "But I know for a fact that you never do anything without an ulterior motive. So what is it exactly that you want from me?"
The secretive smile ghosted across his lips once more before he answered, "You."
Hermione's heart rate, which had just about returned to resting, elevated exponentially. He wanted her? This beautiful, powerful man wanted Hermione Granger. She quelled the urge to look behind her once more, there definitely wasn't anyone else there. She gazed at him, aware that her mouth had dropped open, but unable to control her response. It was wrong, so wrong for her to want him back. She sensibly reminded herself that he was a Bad Person. But what would it be like, once, just once to be with someone so physically perfect it made her eyes hurt just to look at him? She realised, rather belatedly, that he was speaking again. Trying to ignore the clammer of her nether regions she tuned in to his voice.

"I would like you to teach me to cook, as you did Draco."
"What?" And just like that, all the warm and fluttery feelings evaporated. Of course, he hadn't wanted her that way. He was Lucius Malfoy after all, he probably had ladies queuing all the way down the drive of the manor, he probably had to beat them off with his cane.
"Er, why?" She managed to string the two almost words together.
"For the same reasons you assisted my son."
"To impress a woman?" Hermione tried to keep the incredulity out of her voice. He was a divorced man now, there was no reason why he wouldn't want to see other women, Narcissa certainly hadn't held back. Malfoy inclined his head and turned his attention to the salad which had been placed in front of him. Hermione ignored his own food.
"Surely you could get somebody else to teach you."
"Who would you recommend?" He impaled her with his steely gaze and she quickly dropped her eyes.
"I can't think of anyone off the top of my head," she muttered, fiercely forking up a prawn.
"I would, of course, pay you for your time."
"I don't need your money." Her answer was automatic and vehement. She looked up sharply at him as a thought occurred to her. No, she didn't have the audacity to ask him for that. Yet he was the one seeking her assistance. He needed her, it was a sellers' market, why shouldn't she name her price?
"You do have something I want though," she said speculatively. Malfoy returned her gaze calmly enough, of course, a Slytherin would never expect to get something for nothing.
"I am willing to be generous."
She ignored the way her stomach turned over at his words. This was business. "My research thesis explores the healing properties of some of the common trollish poisons."
Malfoy raised an eyebrow. "A rather obscure field of study."
Hermione gave a rueful smile. "Too obscure I'm afraid. I made excellent progress in the beginning, but I've almost run out of primary sources, I've exhausted the British Library, Severus' private collection, and even the Hogwarts library...." she allowed her voice to tail off and her eyes to meet those of her companion.
"I believe I may have some pertinent texts," he replied smoothly.
"Excellent. Then I propose that after I have taught you to cook I am allowed an equal amount of time in your library, with unrestricted access to any volumes and texts I wish to examine." She worded the offer carefully, she didn't trust him not to try to slither out of the agreement once he had what he wanted.
He smiled again. "I will, of course, have to supervise you, some of the books can be a little aggressive, but I am otherwise delighted to accept your offer."
"Good." Hermione held her hand out across the table. She had to bite the inside of her cheek to prevent a moan as he closed his warm fingers around hers, she was going to have to do something about her libido before the cooking lesson.

"Are you available on Saturday?" He was still all business, apparently, his libido was a much better-controlled beast than hers.
Hermione nodded. "Yes, Saturday is fine. What do you want to cook?"
Malfoy frowned. "I have no idea, I assumed you would instruct me on that also."
Hermione rolled her eyes, men, all the same, all equally useless. "You need to find out her favourite food," she said patiently as if speaking to a child. "Owl me once you know what it is, I'll find a recipe, and then we shop for ingredients before we cook."
"That will not be necessary." Malfoy looked a little horrified, presumably by the thought of setting foot in a supermarket. "My house elves will provide the necessary raw materials."
"Absolutely not." Hermione shook her head, enjoying her power. "For starters, I don't approve of elf labour and secondly you need to be able to see the ingredients to ascertain their quality. I made Draco do it too," she added when he looked about to argue.
He sighed heavily. "Very well, I shall owl you once I have a recipe in mind."
"Excellent." She transfigured her fork into a biro and scribbled an address on her napkin. "You can apparate to this address. Meet me there at 1:30 on Saturday." She pushed back her chair, glancing at her watch as she did so. "Thanks for lunch, I must go." Picking up her robes she fled before he could even think about kissing her hand again.
Sul Tavolo

Chapter Summary

In which Lucius gets in touch with his feminine side.

Lucius ordered a pot of Earl Grey and took several restorative sips. There was no doubt about it, his encounter with Miss Granger had gone spectacularly badly. He had fully expected to have her bent over his kitchen table by this point in the afternoon. All of his salacious fantasies involving the girl took place in his kitchen, but he would willingly have had her anywhere. As long as she was screaming his name in ecstasy he didn't really care which room of the manor they utilised, although he admitted that past events would make the drawing-room a little awkward. He had never failed in a seduction before, and it had not even occurred to him that Miss Granger would not succumb as easily as his previous conquests. He had gone so far as to mentally pen a snide little note to Severus, apologising for his employee's failure to re-open the shop after lunch, thank goodness he hadn't actually sent it.

What in the name of Merlin had gone wrong? He was faced with the horrible thought that maybe he was finally losing his looks. He was on the verge of conjuring a mirror in order to check his face for lines when he remembered that Narcissa had declared vanity to be one of his least attractive qualities. Furthermore, he had looked his usual impeccable self on leaving the house that morning, it was unlikely he had aged significantly in the three hours he had been away from the manor. If it wasn't his face that was the problem, then he had to consider the, possibly more distressing, probability that there was something about his personality that did not appeal to the girl. Indeed, she didn't really appear to like him, and he could hardly blame her, their shared history didn't exactly paint him in a good light. He groaned quietly. Levicorpus had been a poor choice of spell, what had he been thinking? He hadn't used it since that rather unfortunate incident at the Quidditch World Cup, he prayed that the girl hadn't made the association. He hadn't thought that her obvious distrust and dislike would necessarily be a barrier to their shared passion. He had engaged in many a thrilling sexual encounter with witches he actively disliked, and, in truth, had found the idea of Miss Granger succumbing to his advances, in spite of herself, rather appealing.

He breathed in the calming scent of bergamot and reminded himself that the interlude had not been a complete fiasco. He had secured a further assignation with the girl, an opportunity to present himself in his best light. Much as he longed to take her in every possible position, on top of and up against every flat surface in his home, he was not averse to experiencing her in others ways. He remembered her interactions with Draco, the warmth she had shown his son. He had envied their easy camaraderie and the way she bestowed her touch so freely. Whilst hate sex had a lot to recommend it he wondered what it would be like to have the girl smile up at him without the guarded reserve she had shown earlier, to have her seek his opinion or ask after his health because she genuinely cared. To make her like him; now that would be a truly immense conquest.

He poured a second cup of tea and allowed just the smallest dash of milk for comfort. It was all very well sitting here and philosophising as to how to win her over, but the reality remained that she at best, disliked him and, at worst, was actually afraid. What qualities did he have that might appeal to such a creature?

The apothecary had not been his first stop on his trip to Diagon Ally, he had visited Scriveners early
that morning in order to stock up on parchment and quills. He withdrew a fresh sheet now and began to make a list.....

Wealth - well that was an obvious one, best to start with his greatest assets first he supposed. Miss Granger didn't seem particularly impressed by it, unfortunately.

Looks - a given! The girl didn't seem blown away by those either. Perhaps Muggles had different aesthetics.

He puffed out his cheeks and refrained from chewing on the end of his quill. Physical beauty and immense wealth had been more than enough to secure the objects of his desire in the past, he wasn't sure he had ever had to demonstrate any of his other attributes. He must have some though.

After a moment he cautiously added tenacity to his list. Admittedly his greatest display of this had been his unwavering support of Voldemort (until it had become quite clear that the man had gone crackers of course, by which point anyone would be forgiven for, at least mentally, jumping ship.) He didn't think that unaltering support of a maniac bent on genocide was likely to get him far with Miss Granger. He crossed tenacity off of the list.

He considered adding excellent taste in clothing and soft furnishings before deciding that Miss Granger did not care two hoots for either of those talents.

Devoted Father, he wrote, then winced mentally. He adored Draco, but in the harsh light of the retrospectoscope, he realised that he had been neither a good father nor a good role model to his son. Furthermore, he wanted to get into Miss Granger's large and singularly unattractive knickers, not start a new dynasty with her, his prowess as a father was not going to be an issue.

Finally, inspiration struck and he proudly added, good working knowledge of Trollish dialects, to the (now rather messy looking) parchment. The girl had said she was researching Trollish poisons as part of her dissertation, there couldn't be many wizards who would be able to help her in that endeavour. Not even Severus spoke the language.

He sat back in his chair, draining his, now cold tea, and reading over his list. It did not make for encouraging reading. If he excluded his wealth, looks, dress sense and impeccable taste in upholstery, he was left with an ability to speak Trollish as the sole weapon in his arsenal. Any wizard would have been daunted by the task ahead. It did occur, very briefly, to Lucius that he might actually not be a very nice person, but he quickly discounted the possibility. He'd never had any complaints before, although most people he knew were too frightened of him to express a negative opinion.

As he gathered up his belongings and paid the bill he felt himself filled with a new sense of purpose and optimism. He was not just going to sleep with Hermione Granger. Oh no, he would do the unthinkable, he was going to make her like him.

The following morning, still filled with the same buoyant enthusiasm which had assailed him the previous day, Lucius entered the small cafe next to Snape's apothecary. He spent some time perusing the extensive selection of teas before ordering a pot of Russian Caravan and taking a seat at a small corner table, from which he could observe the counter from behind a particularly luxuriant pot plant. He winced as he sat down and almost let out an undignified shriek of pain as he leaned forward to pour his tea and trapped his pendulous breasts against the edge of the table. He wished he had thought to bring a bra with him, transfiguring such a garment was far beyond his capabilities, and his back was already aching from the weight of his appendages. How on earth did witches cope with this agony on a daily basis?

The elderly custodian of the distinctly seedy apothecary at the far end of Knockturn Ally had been
most unwilling to supply him with one of her hairs along with the bottle of polyjuice potion he had purchased that morning. Indeed, when Lucius had first made his request she had looked at him in horror, her expression clearly suggesting that he had nefarious and lustful intentions toward her person which he planned to fulfill by transmuting into her and making free with her bits and pieces at his own leisure. He had significantly dented the family Gringotts vault convincing her otherwise. The transformation had been extremely painful. He had almost shed a tear as his beautiful lean body had been replaced by her lumpy, squat person and he had deliberately averted his eyes from the mirror in the ladies bathroom of the Leaky Cauldron as he had righted his freshly transfigured robes. He was already wishing he had transformed himself into someone more attractive, or at least in better health. Along with the back ache, the sagging breasts and the excessively hairy wart on his chin, he also feared he was suffering from piles.

Poor health aside, he felt more than a little pleased with himself as he settled down in in his corner. Ten minutes later he was bored and fidgeting, casting frequent glances at the cafe clock, the large hand of which stubbornly refused to move round to lunch time rush. Struggling to reach over his not insignificant spare tyre, he leaned down to retrieve his latest translation work from the satchel at his feet. To his disgust, he found himself to be immensely short sighted and was forced to hold the text so close to his face that he obscured his view of the cafe window and almost missed the entrance of his quarry.

She was dressed in yet another unsuitable Muggle dress. This one was covered in exuberant polka dots and hugged the curve of her small waist extending up over her breasts to tie behind her neck, leaving much of her lightly freckled back naked. His appreciation of her smooth creamy skin was tempered by envy for her small breasts and the obvious support offered by her dress. He glanced dismissively down at his own pair before returning his eyes to his book. He was here to observe, not to be caught staring.

He strained his ear, hoping to overhear her order as she gave it at the counter, and cursed his benefactor once more on realising that he was not only short-sighted but hard of hearing to boot. To his relief, she took a table close enough for him to observe her without having to strain any of his failing senses. She rummaged in the same tatty shoulder bag she had carried with her the previous day, and removed an improbably large textbook, which she proceeded to bury her nose in.

A busy looking waiter brought a toasted sandwich and a glass of pumpkin juice to her table and she smiled her thanks, barely lifting her eyes from the book and completely missing the appreciative look the waiter bestowed on her small form. Lucius intercepted it though, and glowered so viciously at the poor man that he scurried quickly back to the counter, probably wondering what he had done to offend the crone in the corner.

Try as he might, Lucius could not make out what the filling to the girl's sandwich was, and even if he could, he wasn't convinced this would provide the insight into her culinary tastes which he sought. He wondered how he could spy on her at her next meal too. As if she sensed the force of his stare the girl looked up and caught his eye. He quickly returned his attention to his book, reminding himself firmly that there was no way she would associate the bedraggled old woman in the corner with Lucius Malfoy.

"Excuse me," her soft voice came from directly above him. He reluctantly looked up from the book. She offered him a tentative smile. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I couldn't help but see what you are reading." She gestured her hand to the ugly runes which covered the front of his book. "Do you speak Trollish?" Her brown eyes shone with interest and Lucius felt a sudden stab of jealousy toward his polyjuiced self. She had never looked at him in that dewy-eyed manner.

"I do indeed," he replied, forcing his voice into an affected, high pitched whine, which he hoped was nothing like his usual smooth drawl.
"Oh how wonderful, you see I'm studying......." her voice tailed off, and she twisted her fingers before asking hesitantly, "Might I join you?"

"Of course." Lucius watched in amazement as she transferred her own book and sandwich to his table.

"I'm studying Trollish herbology as part of my potions mastery," she told him, taking a small, delicate bite of her sandwich. It seemed to contain some sort of cheese, and perhaps sun-dried tomatoes. He watched her lips as she chewed and swallowed, before continuing. "But I am really struggling to find primary sources, and even when I do the language is so difficult. How did you learn it?"

"I learned from one of my aunts as a small child." That much was true. He wasn't about to add that he had become fluent during his many ambassadorial visits on behalf of the dark lord.

"How lucky for you."

The girl was practically beaming at him.

"And might I ask if you know how to..." her voice petered out once more, and he quickly glanced down at himself. He hoped the poly juice wasn't wearing off already.

"Oh, you're tea is finished. Might I get you another pot, I have so many questions if you could just spare me a few minutes?" She looked at him with such guile that Lucius didn't think even the crone in Knockturn Ally could have denied her. How on earth did Severus get anything done with this intriguing young woman around?

"I should love another cup," he said carefully, wondering if there was a version of polyjuice which changed the voice as well as the appearance.

"What are you drinking, no don't tell me," she interrupted herself and picked up his empty cup, sniffing delicately at the few leaves that remained. "Russian Caravan." She smiled beatifically at him. "It's my favourite tea here, the smokiness is just right." She put down his cup and strolled away in the direction of the counter. Lucius tore his eyes away from the smooth expanse of brown leg extending from beneath her dress, and turned his attention to her sandwich. Making sure she was fully engaged in perusing the teas he took a furtive bite. Yes! Definitely feta cheese and sun dried tomato. He chewed quickly and washed the illicit morsel down with a swig of polyjuice. He wasn't sure her sandwich tastes would assist him much in choosing his dinner menu but at least he had gained some insight.

She returned bearing a larger pot of tea and a second cup. "I hope you don't mind." She smiled at him again as she poured for both of them, and he shook his head and thanked her for the tea in his ridiculously affected voice.

"Now." She took a small bite of her sandwich and waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the rather tatty beaded bag that hung from her chair. A parchment and quill settled themselves on the table beside her food. "Can you tell me why verbs in the future and present tenses appear to be the same?"

Lucius was hesitant at first. For one thing, it was extremely difficult to conceal his voice, and for another, he was not in the habit of talking to pretty girls about subjects as dull as Trollish grammar. But she appeared to be lapping it up. She gazed at him in wonder as he spoke, making brief notes on her parchment and taking small sips of tea as she listened in rapture. It was enchanting, and, rather arousing. Lucius shifted uncomfortably in his seat, his eyes were continuously drawn to the small swell of breast visible above the neckline of her dress. He longed to press his lips against that soft skin, to run his tongue along the curve to the crevasse in between, to inhale her scent at that point. He felt a most disconcerting tingling in his own breasts and realised, to his horror, that his arousal was manifesting physically.

The girl was giving him a worried look. "I'm sorry, I've gone on too long." She began to roll up her parchment, now covered in annotations.

"Not at all dearie," Lucius attempted to reassure her, squirming in his seat, was he......growing damp.......please let that not be happening.
"No, I've monopolised too much of your time." She glanced up at the clock. "Besides, I have to get back to work. I don't suppose...." She looked nervous once more. "I don't suppose you would consider meeting me again, I have so many more questions."

"It would be my pleasure, My Dear," he squeaked, wondering what on earth he was agreeing to. "I don't even know your name, I'm Hermione Granger." She held her hand out across the table for him to shake, much as she had done at lunch the previous day. He gave her a sharp look. No, her expression was completely innocent, she didn't suspect a thing.

"I'm..." He hesitated, what on earth would he tell her, he glanced around for inspiration. "Camomile," he said the first word that came into his head. "Camomile Jones."

"What a lovely name." She smiled at him again. "Perhaps we could meet here again next week, at the same time?" She looked at him hesitant but eager and very attractive.

"That sounds perfect, I shall look forward to it." He smiled at her, willing her to go before his new body did something else horrible.

"Thank you." Her smile was wide and genuine and she took him by surprise by coming round the table to give him an awkward hug. "You have no idea how much this means to me."

As soon as she had gone he left the cafe and apparated straight back to Malfoy Manor, absolutely terrifying the house elf who thought a strange witch had managed to breach the wards. He paced irritably in the drawing room, longing for the polyjuice to wear off and return him to his rightful form. His mind was filled with Hermione Granger. His spying mission had not been massively successful. He now knew she liked smokey tea, feta, and sun-dried tomato. This was hardly ground breaking and left him no closer to deciding what to cook on Saturday. He had managed to converse with the girl for almost an hour though, and when she wasn't afraid of him the conversation seemed to flow easily enough. He wished he had picked a more attractive body for his spying mission. Vivid images of seducing Miss Granger whilst disguised as a beautiful woman assailed him and he was forced to dampen them down quickly. These fantasies would be welcome once he had returned to his own form but, in this borrowed body, they had distinctly unpleasant side effects.

He gave a sigh of relief as he felt his body begin to tingle, signifying the beginning of his transformation. As soon as he was back in his own form he would write up his notes, then he would need to consider the next step in his information gathering mission. He now had only three days in which to ascertain Hermione Granger's favourite food.
Lucius proves himself to be a more than capable spy.

It took Lucius quite some time to reassure himself that his body had returned to its former glory. Despite the length of his tenure for Voldemort he had never been required to use polyjuice before and, now he was safely back in his own skin, he was willing to admit that he had found the disappearance of his most prized asset more than a little unnerving. He admired himself for quite some time, turning this way and that in front of the mirrored wall in his bedroom. Only when he was completely reassured that no stray adipose tissue had adhered itself to his abdomen and that his cock had retained its usual pleasing dimensions did he dress in a fresh pair of robes, consigning Camomile’s clothing to the rubbish. He had absolutely no intention of masquerading as the crone again. It had been a horrific experience, and by next Monday Hermione Granger would be much too preoccupied with Lucius Malfoy to give her appointment with his alter ego a moment’s thought.

As he apparated to a dimly lit street in rain soaked Manchester he mused that he had been more socially active in the last two days than in the entire four years following the end of the war. It was good to have a new hobby. As the pervasive rain soaked through the water repelling charms on his Italian leather shoes he began to wish that this particular social activity could take place somewhere a little less damp. The streets around him grew increasingly more depressing and dismal as he neared his location and by the time he reached his destination at Spinners End he felt almost as if a dementor had sucked any joy from him.

“How on earth do you stand it?” He barged his way past the figure of Severus Snape into his meagre home.

“Lucius, how good of you to visit.” The dark haired man followed his friend into the small sitting room where Lucius was already divesting himself of his wet cloak, spraying raindrops around him with a complete lack of consideration for the books and papers that covered every surface.

“Let me take that.” Severus wrinkled his, not insubstantial, nose at the wet fabric, waving his wand to clear some of the clutter, although Lucius suspected it was more to protect his work rather than out of a sense of hospitality.

The two men had known each other long enough for Lucius to know that Severus was a dreadful host. With this in mind he proceeded to remove a bottle of brandy from the inner recesses of his robes. He waved his wand to summon to glasses and, after wiping the dust from them, poured two generous measures before he took a seat in front of the unlit fire.

“Make yourself at home, why don’t you?” Severus’ tone was irritable but his acerbic expression softened a little as he sipped at the brandy.

“What do you want?”

Lucius found himself suddenly on the receiving end of one of Severus Snape’s most interrogative scowls. A lesser man might have been cowed but not he.

“Who says I want anything, Severus, perhaps I simply seek to pass a quiet evening with one of my oldest and dearest friends.”

Severus snorted. “If that were the case I would have been summoned to the manor with your usual degree of pomposity. Your presence here indicates that you have something to ask of me. I’m a busy man, so why don’t you just spit it out.”
Lucius avoided his friend’s eyes. He had already accepted that he would have to be honest with Severus, the man was too good a judge of character and too skilled a legilimens for Lucius to get away with disassembling. Still, it was not in his nature to be forthright. He traced the fabric of his robes where they had puddled over his legs.

“You have something I want,” he said eventually.

Severus raised an eyebrow. “I find that hard to believe, what is it?”

“Your apprentice.” Lucius risked a brief moment of eye contact, just in time to see the surprise on Severus’ face.

“Zabini? My my Lucius, when did you develop such exotic tastes?”

“Not Zabini.” Lucius took a large swallow of brandy, blinking as the harsh spirit stung his eyes. “The other one.”

“Granger?” Severus’ voice rose incredulously. “What on earth do you want with Granger?”

“The usual.” Lucius pressed his fingers to his lips and regarded the empty fireplace. “Given that you are a pureblood wizard and a long time sympathiser of the Dark Lord, might I infer from your response that you mean her harm?” There was a hint of steel in his friend’s usually smooth voice.

“No!” Lucius was genuinely surprised and a little hurt. He stowed the feeling away. Of course he was destined to be forever judged for his previous mistakes. “I don’t want to harm her, I want to sleep with her.”


Lucius shrugged. “I find her…….intriguing.”

“Well if that’s all you want, please go ahead, you don’t need my blessing.” He could see his friend’s feathers were a little ruffled. Severus kept himself as far removed from interactions of the romantic variety as possible and seemed to find even acknowledging the existence of sexual attraction exceedingly difficult.

“I don’t need your blessing, Severus, I need your help.”

The dark haired wizard stared at him for a long time, his mouth a flat uncompromising line. “What sort of help?” He frowned. “You know I don’t advocate the use of love potions.”

“I don’t need a love potion,” Lucius snapped. Merlin, he wasn’t failing that badly. “I have already secured an assignation with Miss Granger.”

“Excellent, then you do not require my assistance.” Severus’ eyes were wandered to the parchments spread over the desk by the window, Lucius had clearly interrupted him at work.

“I do,” Lucius insisted, “and as soon as you provide it I will be out of your hair, leaving you to pursue your fascinating research.”

“Fine.” Severus held out his, now empty glass for a refill. “Tell me what it is you need me to do in order to further your seduction of the hapless Miss Granger.”

Moments later Lucius was looking on aghast as Severus Snape actually roared with laughter.

“She….” He clutched his sides, slopping brandy onto the carpet. “……She is going to teach you to cook?”

“I don’t know why you find it so amusing,” Lucius spoke stiffly. “I believe it will be an excellent way for us to get to know one another.”

“Indeed.” Severus had regained a modicum of control, although he was still smirking. “I really don’t know why you have sought me out though, I have no idea what the girl likes to eat.”

“Really?” Lucius was sceptical. “She has been your apprentice for almost two years, you’re telling me that in all that time you’ve never shared a meal?”

“Of course we’ve shared a meal, but it is usually when we are working on an experimental potion, we order Chinese food or pizza.”

“Chinese food.” Lucius turned the words over in his mouth. Of course he knew where China was, he had a few Ming vases and other artefacts tucked away somewhere, but he had no idea what Chinese food was, it didn’t sound massively appealing.

Severus gave a heavy sigh. “That silver spoon in your mouth is going to get in the way of your seduction technique, Lucius. However, I doubt that Miss Granger would be able to teach you the
finer points of Chinese cooking. I know she is interested in the culinary arts, but beyond that I can’t help you. Why don’t you ask Draco?”

Lucius shook his head vehemently. “Draco would not approve of my….” He searched for a word. “Interest, in his friend.” He finally finished.

“I’m not entirely sure I approve either.” Snape rose to show him the door. “You will not succeed in this endeavour Lucius, the girl is too intelligent to be drawn in by the likes of you.”

“You wound me.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “I really will wound you if you do not treat my apprentice with kid gloves. She may be muggle born but she is truly the most talented witch of her age, if you interfere with her productivity I shall personally make your life a living hell, do you understand me?”

“Of course.” Lucius swept past his friend into the pervasive rain. He gave the excellent bottle of brandy, still sitting next to his unfinished glass, a forlorn look before Severus slammed the door in his face.

Pizza and Chinese food. Lucius added this additional information to his portfolio before ordering a bemused house elf to acquire several muggle recipe books for him. By the following morning he was much better informed regarding the art of wok cookery and dough making, but he was none the wiser regarding Hermione’s actually culinary preferences.

There was nothing for it. I was going to have to continue his sleuthing and his next target was not going to be won over by a bottle of brandy.

In order to avoid a second stint in Azkaban Lucius had sung like the proverbial caged bird. He had seen no shame in his actions following the second wizarding war. The death eating fraternity had never been a happy family. They had been a group of highly dysfunctional individuals, driven by greed, rage, insanity and spite to follow a madman whose own moral compass had been distinctly faulty. When they had not been busy panning to eliminate muggles they had plotted and schemed against each other. With the exception of Severus and Draco, Lucius had felt nothing but contempt for his fellow death eaters, and it had given him a fair amount of pleasure to throw them to the wolves in order to save his own skin.

His sudden about face had not been motivated entirely out of self-preservation. He genuinely regretted at least some of his actions and most of their outcomes during the war, he had no desire to ever again involve himself in such a campaign and he felt that the containment of his ex-colleagues was the best way to ensure the ongoing survival of the wizarding world as he knew it. He was nothing if not a pragmatist though, and whilst he had, of course, given up the most dangerous of his acquaintances in the period directly after the war, there was no harm in a little insurance. His ear was firmly pressed to the ground and he was still in possession of several titbits of information that would be of great interest to the aurors and to the chief auror in particular.

“Mr Malfoy.” The ridiculously young looking chief auror welcomed Lucius into his shabby office on the second floor of the ministry. “Please take a seat.”

Lucius sat and calmly regarded the boy who had lived twice. Potter was not much changed from the scarred and spectacled child he had taunted all those years ago in Flourish and Blotts. That being said, Lucius had a grudging respect for the young wizard. He had after all, rid the word of the plague that had been Lord Voldemort and lived to tell the tale. Even if (according to Severus) the entire endeavour would have failed had it not been for the know it all who was currently the focus of Lucius’ obsession. They would never be friends and neither of them pretended that their relationship was more than a forced, yet mutually beneficial, arrangement which both would rather avoid, yet Lucius sensed a degree of mutual respect between them. He hoped to exploit this and the boy’s ongoing hunger to prove himself, to his own ends.

Without further ado Lucius leaned across Potter’s desk and placed a folded scrap of parchment on the scarred wood. Potter snatched it up eagerly, his eyes scanning the lines of text. When he looked up at Lucius there was excitement and suspicion written there.
“This is the current whereabouts of Elena Carrow?”
The Carrow’s younger sibling had lain low since the end of the war, all of Potter’s efforts to find her had come to naught. Lucius had known of her location of course, but he had retained the information, for a time when it might come in useful. A time such as this. He nodded slowly in response.
“And she was……….”
Lucius nodded again. The evidence regarding Carrow’s support of Voldemort was scanty at best. This was more due to her uncanny skill at obliviation than her innocence.
“You’ll testify to that?”
“If necessary.”
Potter sat back in his chair, fixing Lucius with a gimlet eye. “Why has this information only just come to light now?”
Lucius mirrored the younger wizard’s posture, leaning back and stretching expansively. “I wasn’t aware of the ministry’s interest in Miss Carrow.”
“Really?” Potter had narrowed his eyes.
“Really.” Lucius forced himself to remain relaxed. “I’m rather out of touch with what’s happening at the ministry these days.”
“So I’ve heard.” Potter rolled his wand between his fingers. Lucius didn’t even twitch in the direction of his cane. “So what did alert you to our interest in Elena Carrot?”
“It was the funniest thing.” Lucius tapped his fingers against his lips, as if straining to remember a half recollected conversation. “I believe I overheard Miss Granger discussing the matter with my son.”
A range of emotions flickered across Potter’s all too expressive face. No wonder Severus had failed in teaching him to occlude, Lucius thought. He practically shouted his thoughts across the table.
“You are surprised that I condone the friendship between Draco and Miss Granger?”
Potter nodded, his mouth still gaping a little.
“Times have changed Mr Potter.” Lucius gestured between the two of them. “Our working relationship surely stands testimony to that. I not only approve of the relationship between Draco and Hermione, I plan to actively encourage it.”
The boy looked puzzled now. “But I thought that Draco and Astoria………..”
“Ah yes.” Lucius waved a hand airily. “Draco is as much a victim of our previous prejudices as I. He feels obliged to court a pureblood witch out of a misplaced feeling of familial obligation.” He risked a glance at Potter. The boy was buying his story hook line and sinker. “I for one feel that Miss Granger would be a much better partner for Draco than Miss Greengrass, don’t you agree.”
“I don’t know……….I mean, I hadn’t thought about it…………Hermione’s a great girl.” Potter stuttered, clearly out of his depths.
“Exactly.” Lucius smiled reassuringly at him. “And I only want the best for my son. “ He rose smoothly to his feet. “Well, if you have no more questions for me I’d better be going, goodbye Mr Potter.”
The boy stood politely. “Goodbye, Mr Malfoy.”
“Oh.” Lucius hesitated in the doorway as if a thought had just struck him. “You know it might be rather a nice gesture if I take Draco and Miss Granger out for dinner, demonstrate my tacit approval of their relationship as it were, you don’t’ know where Miss Granger might like to eat do you?”
Potter looked thoughtful. “I’m sure Hermione would love that, she’s really into fancy fine dining type places.” He thought for a minute. “You know that French restaurant, about half way along Diagon Alley, blue and gold sign?” He had named the most exclusive restaurant in London.
Lucius nodded casually. “I believe I am familiar with the place.”
“Well she and Ron ate there a couple of times, Hermione raved about the food. I’m not sure why she wouldn’t go back…….” He shrugged. “Anyway I’d take them there if I were you. Thanks for your help Mr Malfoy. We’ll be in touch if we need you to testify.”
They didn’t shake hands, that would have been a step too far, but they nodded cordially at one another and Lucius made his was back into the foyer of the ministry thinking that Elena Carrow
had been a worthy sacrifice for such a useful piece of information.

Ronald Weasley had finally realised his dream of playing as reserve keeper for the Chudley Cannons and was currently on tour in Moldova, or so the Daily Prophet said. Lucius pulled a lot of strings in order to secure an international portkey and by Wednesday evening had tracked the team down to a bar in Chisinau. The team were celebrating a series of victories, and by the time Lucius entered the night club they all appeared to be well in their cups.

He had procured a hair with a little more caution on this occasion. The witch behind the bar of the club two streets away had been most taken with the handsome blonde wizard who had tipped her so generously all evening, and had been more than happy to accompany him into the alley behind the bar during her break. There they had engaged in a passionate kiss, which had only been slightly marred by her hair becoming tangled in one of his many rings. The pain in her scalp had barely dulled her ardour and she had been enthusiastically reaching for his crotch when he had disapparated leaving her gasping with surprise and frustration.

Lucius was rather surprised by his own behaviour. The witch had been more than comely and, whilst he had begun her seduction in order to procure a hair, he hadn’t objected to the opportunity to indulge in some fellatio while he was at it. Yet as soon as his goal was complete, and he knew at least one strand of her long blonde hair was tangled around his rings, he had simply wanted to get away. He had left her, without a word, in the yard behind the pub. It wasn’t a particularly gentlemanly thing to do he admitted, but then, allowing her to suck his cock before he disapparated in much the same manner probably wouldn’t have been any better.

He had returned to the privacy of his hotel room in order to transform. There he wasted several minutes admiring his naked form in the mirror. The barmaid had been almost as attractive as him. A conclusion clearly shared by Ronald Weasley, whose already protuberant eyes almost popped completely out of his head as Lucius sashayed up to him at the bar. He had succumbed quickly to Lucius’ fluttering eyelashes and gushing compliments and quite before Lucius knew what was happening they were cosily tucked into a snug little booth with Weasley’s hand slowly inching its way up his thigh. He repressed a shudder, feeling a sudden rush of pity for womankind, if this was what they were forced to endure on a regular basis.

Every cloud was lined with sliver though, and whilst the inappropriate touching was making him feel rather nauseated, Weasley was by far the easiest of his targets to interrogate. Indeed the boy had obviously been given some rudimentary lessons in how to talk to woman. He fixed Lucius with an earnest gaze.

“Tell me about yourself Ivanna, what do you enjoy doing?”

Lucius batted his eye lashes and gave a high pitched giggle. “Well, I like watching quidditch obviously, shopping and cooking of course.” He braced himself before placing his hand on Weasley’s knee, the red head beamed at him, Lucius swallowed down a mouthful of bile. “Not that I do much cooking of course.” Another flutter of the eyelashes. “I absolutely love eating out, you see.” “I like all those things too.” Weasley said happily. Merlin if his hand went any higher it would actually be in Lucius’ knickers. “Perhaps I could take you out for dinner one day?”

It was almost too easy. “Oh that would be wonderful, Ronald.” He placed his hand on top of Weasley’s hoping to slow its upward migration. “Would you take me to London? There’s an amazing restaurant in Diagon Alley I’ve always wanted to visit.”

“Oh you mean Amicus Apple?” Weasley’s smile was slightly patronising as Lucius nodded rapidly at him. “I eat there all the time, the waiters know me by name. Of course everybody in wizarding Britain knows me by name. Did I tell you I’m best friends with Harry Potter?”

“I think you may have mentioned it.” Lucius snuggled closer, resting his head on Weasley’s shoulder. The boy didn’t smell nearly as good as he did. “Tell me about the menu.”

Weasley gave him an odd look but proceeded to talk. “Well they do an amazing steak, that’s what I have every time I go, you can’t beat a good steak and chips….”

“Steak and chips.” Lucius pouted disapproving, and hopefully, provocatively. “Don’t they have anything a bit more……feminine?”
Weasley screwed up his face. “Well, I have been there with a girl a few times but she always ordered this really weird thing…..” His voice tailed off. Lucius clenched his fingers, inadvertently squeezing Weasley’s thigh and earning himself the most unpleasant sensation of Ronald Weasley nuzzling his ear.

“What was it?” he purred.

“Well it was fish, right?”

“Right.” The suspense was killing him.

“But it was served with a weird sauce that had grapes in it……..crazy right?” Lucius forced himself to laugh. “Crazy, indeed.” He rose to his feet, balancing precariously in his high heels. “Excuse me for a moment, I just need to powder my nose.” He sashayed away, not before having his backside pinched firmly by Weasley.

He did actually need to urinate but there was no way he was sitting down in the ladies bathroom of the night club. He apparated back to his hotel suite and took care of his business there, promising himself he would never again pass water whilst in the feminine form.

Giving a sigh of relief as he kicked off his uncomfortable shoes he penned a letter to Miss Granger.

My Dear Miss Granger,
I hope your offer to instruct me in the culinary arts still stands. As previously discussed I will be delighted to allow you unrestricted access to my library in return.
With regard to the nature of the dish; I believe the lady in question would be suitably impressed by Sole Veronique, I shall leave the choice of side dish to you.
Until Saturday I remain,
yours faithfully

Lucius Malfoy

He signed his name with a flourish, he’d even incorporated a semi colon, if that didn’t impress her he didn’t know what would.
Thinking about Miss Granger was causing a number of interesting reactions in his borrowed body. He settled back in his chair, taking a thoughtful sip of fire whisky. It had been a while since he had engaged in sexual intercourse, he hoped he wasn’t out of practice. His fingers wandered curiously beneath the waist band of his skirt. Whilst he was in possession of the requisite body parts it wouldn’t hurt to familiarise himself with the anatomy in a little more detail………….
Hermione arched her back, sighing with pleasure as long, dextrous fingers delved between her thighs. She turned her head. The satisfaction glinting in the gray eyes, which looked down so intently, so knowingly, on her naked body, was too much for her to bear. She couldn't fail to hear his soft groan as he encountered her dripping wetness though, and she couldn't resist a glance in his direction. His eyes were hooded and intent. A sharp canine dug into the soft flesh of his lower lip as he concentrated on her pleasure. She whimpered as a single finger, quickly followed by a second insinuated its way inside her. She was already rocking her hips against his hand, desperately aroused, seeking more and more sensation.

He didn't disappoint, his thumb unerringly finding her clitoris, gathering the juices of her slick sex and lubricating the tiny bud with them.
"I want you." He was leaning over her now, his lips demanding against hers, and he was naked, even though she was certain he had been fully clothed only moments before.
"Then take me." She parted her legs further and boldly met his slate gaze, not caring if her begging made him the victor. How could she be anything but triumphant when she was already so close to orgasm?
"With pleasure." He positioned himself above her and thrust home at the same point as his hot tongue invaded her mouth. He swallowed her cries of rapture as she tilted her pelvis toward him, wanting him to take her deeper and harder.

As he began to thrust she fell back, unable even to hold on, so overwhelming was the feeling of him inside her. His scent enveloped her, a heady mixture of sandalwood and jasmine and the sea, it might have been feminine on any other man but on him it was perfect. His hair caressed the sides of her face as he continued to ravish her mouth and his hands held her hips against his own with bruising force.

She was so achingly, agonisingly close. He was grinding his pelvis against hers in such a way that every stroke stimulated her clitoris, pushing her a little further along the ledge to completion each time he thrust.

She didn't care that they were lying on the counter of the counter of the apothecary, forcing an increasingly irritated Severus to reach around them in order to access the cash register. She didn't care that Blaise and Draco were supposed to be re-stocking the shelves with bottles of Skele-gro in preparation for the forthcoming Quidditch season, but instead, seemed to be spending more time sending covert glimpses in her direction and muttering to each other. She didn't care about anything other than her impending orgasm.

"You're crushing the Ashwinder eggs," Severus' voice intruded.
"We're not crushing them, we're powdering them," Mr Malfoy didn't even sound out of breath as he continued to hammer into her.

What?
Wait.

Ashwinder eggs?

Shit!

She awoke with a start, slick with sweat, face down between the pillows, her hips desperately humping against the mattress as her orgasm finally took hold. She was bathed in a mixture of ecstasy and humiliation as her body twitched and writhed and her mind desperately tried to deny the fact that she had just had the most awe inspiring, spontaneous wet dream at the thought of Lucius Malfoy.

No, no, no, no, she muttered, sitting up and burying her hair in her hands. It was irreparably matted, no doubt from all her writhing.

Everything was a disaster. It was bad enough that she was going to have to prostitute herself to Malfoy for an entire Saturday on the off chance that his library may (or may not) contain the resources she needed, but now she was having sex dreams about him. Hermione Granger did not have sex dreams. And if she did she would not have them about Lucius Bloody Malfoy. Except she just had, and it had been the best sex dream ever. Although that wasn't saying much. She'd only ever had one before and that involved Hagrid.... Shuddered at the thought and slumped down against the pillows. How on earth would she face him on Saturday after he'd done that to her? Come to think of it how would she face Severus after she'd shagged his best friend on the apothecary counter? It didn't bear thinking about.

She sat up again looking hopefully at the foot of the bed, but it seemed that even Crookshanks didn't want to sleep with her. He was probably out living it up with some hot lady cat. Since sleep was evading her she might as well make some tea. Then maybe she could put in a couple of hours on her thesis. At the thought of her floundering potions mastery, the warm afterglow of her orgasm abruptly fled. Severus had told her not to take on the project. He had warned her that there wasn't enough data, that this was the sort of project she should could undertake once she was fully qualified and actually had time to travel and view primary sources in the libraries of Finland. She had taken great pleasure in ignoring him. And now, hoisted by her own petard, she was in grave danger of failing her mastery. Meeting Camomile Jones had been a stroke of luck. Her frown faded at the thought of her enigmatic new friend. There had been something so…. warm about the other witch, something familiar and comforting. Hermione had felt an instant bond with her as if they had known each other for much longer than the hour they had spent together in the café.

Still, she feared it would take more than Camomile’s help to drag her out of the mire she had embroiled herself in. She didn’t think she could face the shame if Blaise were to get his potions mastery before she did. With all that in mind, prostituting herself to Mr Malfoy didn’t seem that bad an idea. Surely he had to have something in his extensive library that she could use. That was if he even still wanted her to help him. It was already Wednesday night, she glanced up at the clock, Thursday morning, and she hadn’t yet heard from him. Perhaps he had changed his mind. She couldn’t imagine Lucius Malfoy needing to do much more than walk into the room in order to please a woman. If his mere physical presence wasn’t enough to have them falling at his feet then a whiff of his aftershave was sure to do it. Fancy cookery seemed like a step too far in her opinion.

‘Maybe you’re just a trollop,’ she suggested out loud. Selecting several custard creams from her biscuit tin and taking them back to bed. She sank down defiantly under the covers, fully aware that in exactly fifteen minutes she would have to get up and brush her teeth. She had hardly been able to keep her mind off Malfoy since their lunch together. That cringe worthy moment when she had actually thought he was propositioning her kept playing over and over in her mind. What a fool she had been. Malfoy was the equivalent of a thoroughbred racehorse, all flowing mane, and Roman
nose and, as such, he was conditioned to breed with similar woman. Woman with high insteps and impossibly small waists and braying accents, who didn’t have to work and certainly wouldn’t worry their pretty heads over their potions mastery. In comparison to them, Hermione was a seaside donkey. She was probably about as far from Malfoy’s idea of attractive as it was possible to get. This was all a terrible shame because Hermione listened to gossip, and gossip said that Lucius Malfoy was the hottest thing between the sheets since Casanova himself. She wouldn’t mind a bit of that. Her sex life with Ron had been rather pedestrian. People always assumed that just because she was smart and liked to study that she wasn’t interested in sex. They couldn’t be further from the truth. The two weren’t mutually exclusive, although Dean Thomas’ suggestion that she actually used textbooks as a masturbatory aide had been a little far-fetched. Hermione was sure that in a parallel universe somewhere her alter ego was at it day and night. Admittedly she was still shit scared of Malfoy. There was something predatory about him, something dark and dangerous and exotic….. oh great, now she was thinking about sex again.

With a heavy sigh she climbed out of bed and headed to the bathroom. Nothing dampened down an overwrought libido like a thorough flossing session. She was enjoying a celebratory rinse with her favourite mouthwash when she was startled by a loud tapping at the bathroom window. Her shriek of terror caused her to spit green fluid mixed with saliva down her rabbit pyjamas. Who on earth could be owling her at this time?

She rewarded the enormous eagle owl with a bit of custard cream which it accepted enthusiastically. Cross legged on her bed in her mouthwash stained pyjamas she scowled as she scanned the parchment. Sole Veronique. Lucius Bloody Malfoy had somehow managed to choose her favourite dish in order to impress another woman. She could almost believe he had done it on purpose in an attempt to aggravate her. Well that was just great wasn’t it? Not only was she a donkey, not worth dating or shagging herself but he was going to ruin her favourite meal for her, forever. She wouldn’t even be able to look at a grape after this.

Angrily flicking off the light she spent the next thirty minutes tossing and turning restlessly in the darkness before she got up, stalked through to her kitchen and piled every recipe book she owned onto the table. If she was going to do this she might as well do it properly.

Lucius apparated to the address the girl had given him. He appeared to have arrived before her and he leaned back against a low wall to await her arrival. He wondered if she would actually come. She had been decidedly skittish around him at their last meeting, well their lasting meeting she knew of. She had been positively welcoming of him when he was disguised as Camomile Jones.

He reminded himself that jealousy of his alter ego was pointless. He would be better served directing his energies into winning over Miss Granger whilst in his present body than mourning his ability to make her like him only whilst dressed in bad drag.

He gave an almost imperceptible shudder as he recalled his adventures with Polyjuice. Things had gotten rather out of hand during the early hours of Thursday morning. He had discovered that the ability of the female form to experience multiple consecutive orgasms was far beyond anything he might possibly have imagined. With retrospect, he realised he had allowed himself to become a little carried away. The sensations had been intoxicating and, coupled with the discovery that he was not quite as skilful with his fingers as he had imagined, he had been compelled to stimulate himself over and over again until he considered himself quite the expert. Eventually, he had developed mild repetitive strain injury in his right wrist. At this point, instead of going to sleep like any normal person would have, he had apparated to a particularly seedy part of Knockturn Alley and purchased an array of adjuncts which had allowed him to continue his exploration.

He had drunk his way through the entire bottle of Ivanna over the course of Thursday and, when he had finally been returned to the male form for the last time, he had found himself reaching for the
bottle which contained the essence of Camomile Jones. Luckily, whatever small sliver of common sense he still possessed stopped him in his tracks, and he had tucked the bottle away and taken a long cold shower.

Now, despite a full forty-eight hours of refracting he felt a strange ache, which was odd since he no longer possessed the piece of anatomy he had so abused. He wondered if it were like the ache of a phantom limb after an amputation. Petter Pettigrew had often complained he could still feel his missing hand. Lucius shuddered at the thought and adjusted himself slightly. His musings on matters of the female genital tract were rudely interrupted by the muted crack of apparition as Miss Granger appeared a short distance away. She leaned against the stone wall of the underpass they had apparated into, apparently taking a moment to compose herself. Lucius enjoyed the opportunity to admire her unobserved.

The scorching hot June they had so far endured had given way to an even hotter July. He had secretly hoped the girl would arrive baring various body parts and was a little disappointed to see her fairly well covered. She wore another pair of muggle jeans, although these, at least, stopped mid-way down her calves to reveal neat ankles and small feet encased in leather sandals. Her arms were bare and delicately tanned but the rest of her upper body was concealed by a loose, gray blouse in a silky fabric. Her hair cascaded down her shoulders with a degree of wildness he associated with her school years – he wondered if she had purposefully agitated it in order to try and ward him off. It would certainly be difficult to get close to her without being impaled on a Medusa-like curl.

“Miss Granger.” He nodded his head, stifling his smirk as she jumped at his voice.

“Mr Malfoy.” She drew back a little, still slightly green around the gills from her apparition. Her eyes flicked nervously from side to side as she assessed her escape routes. He fought the urge to sigh. The war had been years ago, was she going to continue this irritating charade of fear every time she was in his presence? Perhaps the girl was equally irritated by her own behaviour, she drew herself up to her full, yet still diminutive height, and squared her shoulders.

“The supermarket is this way.” She began to walk, not checking to see if he followed. They were almost out of the underpass when she stopped so quickly that Lucius almost stepped on her. She frowned up at him and drew her wand. Acting on instinct he drew his own in response and for several heartbeats, they faced each other, wands at the ready.

“I just need to cast a notice me not charm,” she said.

Lucius lowered his wand. “Why?”

The girl huffed out a short breath. “Because, for somebody who thinks that Muggles will be the downfall of the wizarding world, you’re not exactly making much of an effort to blend in!”

Lucius glanced down at himself as he processed her words. He hadn’t made a huge effort, it wouldn’t do to appear too try-hard, but he was wearing his usual wizarding robes over a silver brocade waistcoat. His cravat was elegantly tied and a jewel-eyed snake glimmered at his throat. He supposed he was a little ostentatious when compared to the girl.

“Go ahead,” he said magnanimously, opening his arms wide as if to offer her a larger target. She flicked her wand briefly and he felt a cool sensation settle over himself.

“Good.” The girl resumed walking and he fell in beside her. “I thought we’d go to Waitrose.” She looked up at him and then away. “I’m normally an ASDA kind of girl but I didn’t think you’d enjoy slumming it with the masses.”

“How kind.” In truth, he hadn’t understood half of what she had said but there was no need to admit that was there?

“Have you ever been in a muggle supermarket before?”

They had stopped outside a large, low white building with green lettering above the door. Lucius fixed her with a baleful stare and she shrugged nervously. “Well you might have pillaged one back in the day, what do I know?”

“I was a Death Eater, not a pirate.”

She was fiddling with a strange metal contraption and didn’t look up as she answered. “I’m not sure pillaging is restricted only to pirates. Anyway, you push the trolley.” She thrust a strange metal
basket on wheels toward him. He only just caught the handle before it hit him in the midriff.
“What is this?”
“It’s a shopping trolley.” We put our purchases in it as we go around.
“Can’t we just levitate them after us?”
“No.” She had set off into the shop.
Lucius followed. The trolley was surprisingly difficult to steer with a strange propensity to veer off to the right.
“Why do I have to push the damn thing?” he realised he sounded a little petulant, but really he wondered if she were attempting to humiliate him on purpose.
“Because you’re the man.” There was a thread of smugness in her voice. “Look around you.”
He looked around. They had entered what appeared to be an extremely large shed. It was filled with produce arranged in large piles and stacked on shelves with signs above to indicate the nature of the wares. Tinnny music blared out from some unseen source and blank faced Muggles moved between the aisles, completely oblivious to the ex-Death Eater in their midst. Whilst the odd single person could be seen browsing the fruit and veg, he had to admit that the majority of people present did appear to be in couples and, almost universally, the men were in charge of the shopping trollies.

Hermione produced a list and clipped it to the front of the trolley between his hands. The action brought her close to him and inhaled automatically breathing in her subtle rose fragrance. She glanced up sharply at him.

“We’ll start with the fruit and veg.” There was a slight tremor in her voice. “I’m not sure about the selection of fish here so we may need to go elsewhere for the sole, it’s the most important ingredient after all.”
Lucius nodded sagely, not really listening to anything she said but enjoying watching her soft pink lips moving.

She wandered off between the aisles with Lucius following. The shoppers seemed to sense his presence enough to avoid him but he still felt faintly invisible, although he was grateful to the girl for the charm, he realised now how out of place he would have looked in his wizarding robes. The Muggle population seemed to dress almost exclusively in jeans and shorts, he suppressed a shudder.

“Now let’s see, grapes.” She appeared to be speaking more to herself than to him. “We need Muscat if they have them.” She rifled through the shelves. “Here we go.” She held the punnet up for his perusal. “You need to check that there aren’t any brown ones.” He nodded and she placed the grapes into the trolley. “I was thinking for sides we could do Dauphinoise potatoes and some seasonal veg, what do you think?”
“Tha’sounds delightful.”

She shot him a suspicious look as if the idea that he might actually agree with her was beyond preposterous.

“Ok, so we need potatoes and garlic, off you go.” She made a chivvying motion in his direction.
Lucius bit back a retort, he had asked for this after all. Still, the experience was not quite as he had envisaged it. He caught sight of the potatoes and gratefully bent to select some. Who would have known there were so many varieties? He looked for the mudblood to ask her what sort he needed, but she was nowhere in sight and, feeling a fit of independence he read the labels of the various brands before selecting a potato which claimed to be a good all-rounder.

“Surely a string would be enough. He didn’t want to put off his fictitious lady friend after all.

Feeling rather smug he sought out Miss Granger, who was standing in front of a display of peaches. She was picking up the yellow fruits and holding them to her nose in turn as she inhaled deeply.

“Do we need peaches?” He glanced at the shopping list. Peaches were not on it.
“No, I’m just hungry.” She flushed a little. “I think I forgot to have lunch.”

Lucius wondered how a person could not be certain whether or not they had missed a meal but he
said nothing, merely leaning across her to pick up one of the warm fruits. “This one looks ripe.” Shetook it from him and he felt strangely heartened when, this time, she didn’t snatch her hand away as theirfingers brushed.

“Thank you.” She placed the peach in the trolley and added a banana. She raised an eyebrow at theother items in the basket. “Is the object of your affections a vampire?” There was a dimple on her leftcheek which appeared as she smiled.

“Of course not, why do you ask.” She gestured toward the trolley. “That’s a lot of garlic for two people.” Her smile broadened. “Or twenty people.” She pressed her fingers against her lips. Lucius scowled.

“Right!” She turned away quickly. “So, vegetables.” She stopped in front of a shelf loaded withgreen items. “Oh, Samphire.” She picked up a plastic box before pursing her lips. “But the asparaguslooks nice too, and it’s supposed to be an aphrodisiac, so maybe…” Her voice tailed off and shelooked up at him, her cheeks flaming. “Samphire is perfect.” She thrust two boxes in the trolley andstrode away. Lucius followed, admiring the swing of her hips and wondering how far down thatblush spread.

She seemed to take perverse pleasure in ordering him around. He didn’t know why it surprised him. He had seen her in action with Draco and even prior to that encounter he had heard rumours from his son and Severus of her domineering ways. What he hadn’t expected was to submit so willingly to her. She had him wandering up and down the dairy aisle for what felt like hours whilst she leaned on the trolley and tapped one of her pink-toed feet. Muggle dairy products all looked the same and he was twice sent back to the refrigerated shelves when his selections of cream and butter were deemed unacceptable for one reason or another.

After what seemed an age their trolley was remarkably full and Hermione lead the way to the fishcounter. It was cold in that part of the store and as she perused the selection of fish Lucius observed thegoosebumps that formed on the smooth skin of her upper arms and imagined he could see a peaked nipple through her thin blouse. He exchanged baleful looks with an enormous salmon and indulged in a brief fantasy of laying Hermione down amongst the crushed ice and having his way with her. He distracted himself with a squid, surmising that even his proclivities did not extend to theWaitrose fish counter. Hermione was wrinkling her nose and he hoped that she had not developed a sudden skill in legilimency.

“I don’t much like their selection of fish.” She placed her hands on her hips. “Do you mind if we look somewhere else?” Lucius shook his head. Who was he to argue with the master chef in her domain?

“Good.” She wove her fingers through the front of the trolley and towed it and Lucius behind her as she walked away. “We just need the wine then.”

“Absolutely not!”

“Why, Mr Malfoy.” She turned to look at him a teasing note in her soft brown eyes. “Have youbecome teetotal?”

“No, of course not. But I refuse to buy wine in a Muggle supermarket.”

The curve of her lower lip briefly disappeared under her front teeth. “But it’s for cooking with.”He considered this. The thought of selecting a bottle from his cellar only to have it consigned to a sauce seemed rather sacrilegious. “Very well then,” he acquiesced. “But I’m not drinking it.”

“I wouldn’t dream of asking you to stoop so low.” There was a hint of mockery in her voice as she led the way, once more, to the wine aisle.

In fact, he rather enjoyed perusing the selection. There were several New World wines he would have liked to try, but under the mocking gaze of Hermione Granger, he was forced to feign disinterest. He made a mental note to return, possibly disguised. Hermione selected a bottle of cheap white wine, the label of which made him flinch. “You honestly won’t know the difference,” she promised him, correctly interpreting the look of disdain on his face. “Would you prefer that we cook
with a bottle of twenty-year-old champagne?"
She didn’t wait for an answer, setting off in the direction of the checkouts. Lucius cast one last longing look at a particularly alluring bottle of Argentinian red before trailing after her like a lost puppy.

The checkout was a revelation. He almost leapt out of his skin when the counter started moving and he had no idea how the Muggle woman sitting behind it knew how much to charge them just from the random beeps her machine seemed to omit. He kept out of the way, neatly packing the bags as Hermione instructed. When the final sum was read out Hermione rummaged in her ubiquitous beaded bag, presumably in search of money. Lucius was one step ahead of her and handed a small piece of plastic to the Muggle woman. He rather enjoyed the gobsmacked look on his companion’s face as he was invited to enter his pin number and smoothly keyed the four digits into the proffered keypad.

They walked out of the shop in silence, Lucius carrying their numerous bags of shopping which he had not been allowed to shrink.
“How did you come to have a Muggle credit card?” She was looking at him again, a small furrow between her brows. He wanted to smooth it out with the tip of his finger.
“I took it from a Muggle I killed during the war.”
Her jaw dropped.
He rolled his eyes.
“Of course I’m competent.”
“You have investments in the Muggle world?”
She seemed incapable of moving so he began to lead the way back to the apparition point. “As I said it makes sense,” he spoke over his shoulder. Realising she was being left behind she began to follow him. “Things became very unstable during the return of the Dark Lord, I thought it was safer to transfer some of the Malfoy fortune out with his sphere of influence.”
“But you were on his side.” The pitch of her voice was climbing rapidly.
“I was on my own side, Miss Granger.” He looked hard at her, willing her to see the difference.
“Whatever my personal feelings might have been business is business, and it’s my job to protect the family legacy so there is something for Draco to inherit after I’m gone.”
“Hypocrite.” He thought he heard her mutter the word but he didn’t pick her up on it.

They didn’t speak again until they reached the cover of the underpass. Miss Granger appeared deep in thought.
“I want to take you to a fish shop in Cornwall.” She hesitated, I don’t know the exact address, it would be easier if I apparated us both.” She looked up at him doubtfully.
“You are competent in apparition?” He only asked in order to aggravate her and it was clear from the purse of her lips that he had succeeded.
“Of course I’m competent.”
“Very well then.” He held out his arm but was surprised and a little shocked when she took his hand instead. It was the most natural gesture in the world, their palms pressing smoothly together, her hand small and delicate and warm in his much larger one. He could not think of the last time he had held anybody's hand. The jar of apparition jolted him out of his reverie. They landed in an empty car park and she quickly let go of him.
“I did splinch Ron once,” she remarked breezily, once more leading the way.

It didn’t take long to reach the fish shop on the high street of the small town Hermione had brought them to, but already the handles of the bags were cutting into Lucius’ hands. His adventure in the land of Muggles was beginning to wear thin. The girl was mercifully quick in the fish shop, which smelled a lot fishier and looked a lot less glamorous than the fish counter of Waitrose. She quickly chose an entire lemon sole and was watching the shopkeeper package it up when the strap of her beaded bag abruptly broke. The bag fell to the ground with a dull thud, a series of louder thuds
echoed from inside causing Hermione to look nervously at the shopkeeper, who fortunately was occupied with wrestling the fish into a plastic bag. She and Lucius bent to pick up a few of the items that had fallen onto the ground. Lucius raised an eyebrow as he gathered up several textbooks. “Undetectable extension charm,” she answered before he could even ask.

Lucius paid for the fish and Hermione preceded him out of the shop. Lucius was just pulling the door behind him when the shop keeper shouted after him, “oh Sir, wait.” Lucius halted. “Your wife, I think she dropped this.” He held out a wooden handled hairbrush. “She’s not my…. Hermione was standing frozen in the doorway, staring between him and the shopkeeper, her cheeks stained a deep red. “Er, thank you.” He took the brush and exited the shop as quickly as possible.

They walked in silence back to the car park. “It was just because we were buying fish together, it’s rather a domestic task.” The girl was the first to speak. “Of course.” Neither of them said anything further on the matter. Lucius tightened his fingers around the handles of the plastic carriers which were now painfully biting into his flesh. “I can apparate us directly into the kitchen of the manor,” he offered. She nodded wordlessly and once again he took her hand, this time revelling in her touch. In a matter of seconds he would finally have her where he wanted her, back in his kitchen.
Lucius has his first taste of peanut butter.

In a sudden flash of blinding clarity, Hermione released Malfoy’s hand and took a step back. What on earth was she thinking? She began to berate herself over her appalling lack of judgment. Yes, the man was handsome, and suave, and was undoubtedly in possession of a plethora of rare books which might rescue her failing professional reputation. But none of these changed the fact that he was Lucius Malfoy; a man who had willingly taken the dark mark, who had unleashed a Basilisk on a school full of children and, ultimately, threatened her life in the department of mysteries. The war might be old history but was she really so ready to forget? Was she really willing to trust a man who had given her no reason to do so other than his pretty face?

“Is something the matter?” He looked ridiculous, his elegance and aristocratic bearing offset by the straining carrier bags in his left hand. She shook her head and took a further step away from him, biting her lip hard, the pain grounded her.

“I told Severus exactly what I was doing today,” her voice shook a little and she took several deep breaths to try and steady it. “He knows where I am and who I am with. Whilst he does consider me to be an insufferable know-it-all with an irritating love for the sound of my own voice, he is more than aware of my value as an employee and, should anything happen to me, he would be most displeased.”

Lucius frowned. “Thank you for that interesting insight into your relationship with your employer. Might we leave now?”

Hermione shook her head. “What I am trying to say, Mr Malfoy, is that if you hurt me I truly believe Severus Snape will kill you.”

Malfoy tilted his head to one side. For a second, just a second, Hermione thought she saw hurt in those cold grey eyes. But the emotion, whatever it had been, was gone before she could even begin to process its significance. “I think you underestimate Severus’ instincts for self-preservation. Killing me would get him into all sorts of hot water I’m sure he would rather avoid.”

Hermione was about to respond when he held up his free hand for silence and continued, “In any event, it is irrelevant what he would or would not do since I have no intention of harming you.”

“Really.” Hermione drew out the word, nervous fingers clutched tightly around her wand. “But I’m a Mudblood, an abomination, you’re supposed to want to kill me.”

Lucius placed the carrier bags on the ground and gave a long sigh. “Actually killing Mudbloods has never been part of my personal agenda.” He ignored her flinch as he said the word. “It’s true I do think you an abomination. I have never understood why magic would manifest in those not of a wizarding bloodline and I still fear the damage the integration of your kind will do to wizarding society.”

Hermione felt the bile rise in her throat at his words. It was one thing to assume what someone thought of you, it was another to hear them actually say it. She wanted to slap him, or run away, or burst into tears. Instead, she remained frozen in place as he spoke again.

“If I had my way Mud….” He caught her eye and corrected himself “…. Muggle born witches and wizards would simply be excluded from wizarding society. It would not be particularly difficult. If Hogwarts and the other wizarding schools stopped sending out letters to muggle children then the connection between the muggle and the wizarding world would quickly fade. In a couple of generations Muggle born witches and wizards would be no more than a memory.”
Hermione rubbed a hand across her forehead, not quite sure how to process this. “Let’s not even discuss how flawed your reasoning is.”

He inclined his head in response.

“But, if what you say is true, then why on earth did you follow Voldemort? Because he sure as hell didn’t want to peacefullyuncouple muggle and wizarding society, he wanted to torture, humiliate and kill.”

“Not in the beginning.” Lucius looked steadily at her as he spoke. “In the beginning, his ideals didn’t seem so different from mine. I was younger than Draco when I took the mark and the Dark Lord’s argument seemed persuasive enough.” He looked away for a moment, his face pensive. “The atrocities didn’t start immediately. It was a gradual slide into depravity. When everyone around you is doing the same thing it is easy to follow the herd and begin to accept acts you ought to be horrified by as commonplace. I believe there have been similar occurrences in Muggle history.” His eyes hardened. “You might, for example, believe it acceptable to rob a bank in the name of your cause.”

Hermione scowled. “I have never done anything as...as...depraved as you Malfoy.”

“You have no idea what I have or haven’t done, my dear.” His voice was cold now, any hint of indulgence gone. “And I am more than happy for it to remain that way.” He bent to pick up the bags once more before saying rather stiffly, “I will make no further excuses for my past behaviour, I deeply regret many of the choices I have made and their consequences, and I can assure you that my outlook has vastly changed since the war. I promise you will never come to harm at my hands but if my word is not sufficient for you then I shall wish you a good day.” He made as if to turn on his heel.

“Wait!” Hermione’s cry surprised both of them.

They stared at each other across the concrete of the deserted underpass. Malfoy wore a look of resigned defiance, as if he expected her to leave at any moment as had been her first impulse at his cruel words. He looked like Draco, she thought. The arrogant tilt of his head and grim line of his mouth reminded her of all the times she had faced off against his son across the halls of Hogwarts. For the first time she saw Lucius Malfoy not as an adult, whilst she remained forever a child, but as an equal. Try as he might to conceal it uncertainty was written across his pale, pinched face it occurred to her that in this instance, in direct contrast to all their previous encounters, she was the one who held the power. She could leave now, he would not follow, and their relationship would be ended. Or she could remain. She could go with him to manor, teach him how to cook, use his library and, more importantly, allow him to see that, in all honesty, there was little difference between a Pureblood and a Mudblood.

Whilst Lucius Malfoy might still spout his pureblood propaganda the fact that he was here, with her, spoke volumes. Their association, such as it was, had come about entirely at his behest. Whilst he had called her an abomination, and those words had hurt, he did not actually appear to be repulsed by her presence. Whether he knew it or not, Lucius Malfoy was seeking redemption, and she, if she chose, could be the one to deliver it.

The silence stretched between them like a living thing.

“Your word is sufficient,” she eventually said. “But you will never use that word again.”

“I beg your pardon but you were the one to use it first.”

She glared at him. “Do you want me to help you?”

“Yes,” he answered unhesitatingly.

She took a step closer to him. “Then you will never use that word again.” She met his cold grey eyes unflinchingly. “You will never even think it in my presence, do you understand.”

“Yes.”

“Do you agree?”

He did not even pause to think before he answered, “Yes.”

Still wondering if she was making a terrible mistake she held out her hand to him. She would have been blind not to see the relief in his eyes as his fingers closed around hers and the crush of
apparition overwhelmed them.

They landed heavily in the kitchen of Malfoy Manor and Hermione lost her balance, falling briefly against Lucius. He steadied her and set her away from him but not before she had time to register, once more, the firm planes of his body and the intoxicating scent that clung to his robes. She was briefly transported back to her dream and pulled away from him, desperately trying to clear her mind of the images of her body writhing beneath his.

In order to cover her discomfort, she took the bags from him and began to unpack them onto the kitchen table, keeping up a soliloquy as she did so.

“When preparing a meal like this you need to think about the cooking time of the different elements. Of course, it’s much easier in the wizarding world because we can use a stasis charm to keep an element hot if it’s prepared too early. However, some purists believe that food placed under stasis doesn’t taste as good as that which is freshly cooked, so I like to try and have everything ready at the same time. In this case the longest cooking element is the potatoes so we should get those started first………” She fumbled with the bag she was holding. It upended spilling potatoes all over the flagstone floor. “Shit!” She was about to drop to her knees in order to rescue them when a hand descended on her forearm.

“Miss Granger.” Lucius lazily waved the wand in his other hand, levitating the fallen potatoes back onto the table. “Why don’t you have a seat? I believe you said you had missed your lunch, perhaps you might like to eat something and I will make you some tea.”

“Th-thank you.” She sat down abruptly at the scrubbed wooden table. Now he mentioned it she did feel a little woozy. She was ninety-nine percent sure that she had forgotten lunch, she had been so wrapped up in a scroll she had found in a junk shop on Diagon Alley.

“You’re welcome.” He was already moving smoothly around the kitchen, removing a teapot and cups from one of the cupboards and scooping leaves into the strainer. Hermione dug around in one of the shopping bags for the peach she had chosen and bit into it, stifling a sigh as the sweet juice hit her tongue. Seconds later she was trying not to emit a moan of mortification as the juice began to run down her hand. She chased after the trickle with her tongue, hoping that Malfoy was still too busy with the tea to witness his guest's uncouth behaviour. Of course, she was out of luck. Her tongue was still wrapped around her wrist when he placed down a cup of weak black tea in front of her. A little of the beverage sloshed into the saucer as he quickly drew back his hand and looked away.

Seconds later a white monogrammed handkerchief was extended in her direction. She took it wordlessly and dabbed at her sticky hands. Who even carried a handkerchief in this day and age? “Would you like something else to eat?” He was looking around the kitchen, rather helplessly. “I could summon an elf perhaps.” Their uncomfortable exchange in the underpass still hung awkwardly between them.

“I don’t think I could eat a whole elf,” the rather weak joke slipped out before Hermione had time to censor it. Malfoy raised an eyebrow.

“Just a sandwich would do.” She looked away and took a sip of her tea. It was Lapsang Souchong, her favourite, and he had remembered how she took it.

Malfy was opening and closing random cupboards and she realised that he had no idea where anything, other than the tea, was in his own kitchen.

“What do you do if you want a midnight snack?” She joined him at the worktop as he unearthed a loaf of bread. He glanced down at her, his brow furrowed.

“I am not in the habit of eating in the middle of the night.”

“But if you were,” Hermione persisted. “What if you woke up at 2 am with an insatiable need for cheese on toast, what would you do?”

“I can assure you, Miss Granger, that my insatiable urges are considerably more exotic than cheese on toast,” his voice had dropped to a low purr and he was looking at her in a way which made her heart begin to pound. She gazed up at him, feeling like a moth interminably drawn into the same flame over and over and over again. Remember, she told herself, remember he thinks you’re an abomination.
“Peanut butter!” she squeaked out the word, looking over his shoulder into the open cupboard. He furrowed his brow. “A peanut butter sandwich would be perfect.” She reached up on her tiptoes and removed the nearly full jar from the cupboard. “Oh, oh and jam.” She removed a jar of strawberry jam and began to unscrew the lids.

“Peanut butter.” Malfoy picked up the first jar and gave it a curious sniff.

“Don’t you know what it is?” He shook his head.

“How odd, I wonder how it got here, maybe Draco likes it. Here you should try some.” She scooped a small bit of the condiment onto the end of a knife and held it out to him. It was only as his lips descended, rather hesitantly onto the end of the knife that she realised quite how intimate the act was. By then it was too late to pull away and she was forced to endure the sight of Lucius Malfoy’s eyelids flickering closed as his narrow lips engulfed the knife she held. His hand came up to cover hers on the handle and she was appalled at the heat that quickly sped from her hand to her groin at his innocuous touch. Then the moment was over and he straightened up, a puzzled look on his face.

“I can’t decide if that is the best or the worst thing I’ve ever tasted.”

Hermione took several deep breaths in order to compose herself. “Maybe you just need to become acclimatised to it. Shall I make you a sandwich?”

“No thank you. I am almost certain I remembered to eat lunch.”

She smiled a little at his words and quickly threw together her own sandwich. She was about to eat it leaning against the worktop but Lucius picked up her plate and carried it back to the table. He took a seat opposite and poured himself a cup of tea.

“I don’t think you’re an abomination,” the words were softly said but unmistakable. Hermione didn’t answer, she had no idea how to respond but she felt a flicker of unease as it crossed her mind that she was blushing as if he had paid her the sweetest of compliments.
His words hung in the air between them. She didn’t speak although she did smile and blush, as if he had said something much more intimate. The words evaporated as he sipped his tea and tried to make sense of his jumbled thoughts. He was more than willing to say whatever was necessary in order to seduce her. Considering the lengths to which he had already sunk, a lie counted for very little. To his surprise though, he realised he had spoken the truth. He no longer considered her an abomination. How could he now he knew her? She wielded a formidable degree of magical ability and, where once he would have felt she did not deserve that power, now he could see that she had augmented that which had been given with diligence and hard work. She was a talented witch but she was also a dedicated scholar. Few witches or wizards would have gone to the effort she had to track down and translate the scrolls and texts which she sought for her potions mastery and he found her commitment to learning, to absorb as much information as she could regarding the wizarding world, endearing.

He no longer wished to remove her from the wizarding world; far from it. Instead, he harboured a secret desire to possess and impress her, to show her everything his world had to offer in the hope that she would gaze at him with the same rapt attention she had afforded Camomile Jones. But perhaps he had already missed his chance. He had been honest with her before and he had seen the look on her face as she debated whether or not to abandon him in the Muggle underpass. He had done little in their encounters so far to do anything other than reinforce the persona he had presented to her in the past. Indeed, if he took away his belief in pureblood supremacy, his hatred of Muggles and his identity as a Death Eater, was there really anything left?

She didn’t seek to fill the silence between them although she was clearly uncomfortable. She shifted frequently in her seat and kept her soft brown eyes away from his. Despite this, she remained quiet, refusing to resort to meaningless chatter.

Try as he might he could not prevent himself from observing her as she ate and drank. She was beautiful, he thought. Not in the way that Narcissa was. Hermione’s beauty was not borne of perfect bone structure and delicate features. Her forehead was too large, her eyebrows too well defined, her lips slightly too full for her small oval face. And yet she was beautiful. Intelligence shone in her brown eyes, her mouth was quick to smile and her default expression was one of thoughtful optimism. He would dare any man to look at Hermione Granger and not become entranced by her. No sooner had the thought materialised than he wanted to smack himself over the back of the head. What on earth was he thinking? It was bad enough that he had succumbed to his desire for the girl but now he was waxing lyrical over her ethereal beauty too.

Some of his disgust must have shown in his face because she paused in her consumption of the strange sandwich and looked at him apprehensively. “Is something the matter?” “No,” he spoke more curtly than he had intended. Her expressive face took on a worried look. “I don’t have to finish this, we can get started.” “Finish your sandwich.” He instantly regretted the harshness of his tone as she flinched, looking reproachfully at him over the two slices of bread. “Forgive me.” Never had he apologised so many times in one afternoon. “I am not used to being
much in polite company these days. Please finish your sandwich.”
“I was sorry to hear about your divorce.” She took a smile bite of her sandwich, her intelligent gaze fixed on his face.
He looked away. “Why on earth would you of all people be sorry?” Merlin’s beard! Could he not say anything nice to the girl? This was not how he had envisaged their afternoon together. Much to his surprise, she showed no offence.
“Well for Draco’s sake of course,” she began, taking a sip of tea. “I was surprised at how well he took it though, he said…..” She stopped talking and took another bite of sandwich as if to cover up whatever it was she had thought better of saying.
“He said what?”
“Nothing.” She appeared unaffected by his scowl. “Whatever he said was said in confidence and I don’t plan on breaking that. Suffice to say that he’s dealing with things very well. You should be proud of him.”
“I am proud of him.” The words came automatically.
The girl snorted. “You ought to tell him that from time to time then, he still thinks he’s a massive disappointment. That’s probably why he was so insufferable at school.”
“Draco grew up with every possible advantage,” he said stiffly.
The girl smirked. “And Lord Voldemort camping out in his spare room. Lucky Draco.” She pushed aside her plate. “Come on, we’ve wasted enough time. The sooner I teach you how to cook, the sooner you can snare the next Mrs Malfoy.”

Lucius followed her across to the sink, mulling over her words. He couldn’t remember the last time somebody had spoken to him with such frankness. He didn’t think anyone else would dare, except perhaps Severus and his friend generally kept his opinions of Lucius’ character to himself. He, rather sorrowfully, wondered if there was anything about him that the girl actually liked, and reached the conclusion that there was not. So far in their acquaintance he had done nothing but insult and intimidate her, his behaviour was hardly conducive to romance.

She rinsed her plate and then washed her hands, standing aside for Lucius to do the same.
“You need to take off your robes.” She spoke in a firm no-nonsense tone. He longed to make a smooth remark, something about it being his pleasure to disrobe in front of her, but he found himself strangely unable. Irritation at the loss of his previously suave persona overwhelmed him.
“I have absolutely no intention of removing my robes,” he snapped.
“Suit yourself, but they’ll be ruined and you’ll be very hot.”
He vaguely recognised her long-suffering tone. Narcissa had spoken to Draco in a similar fashion when he’d been a toddler. He sighed and shrugged out of his robes, draping the heavy fabric over the back of a kitchen chair. He felt strangely naked, standing before her in only his shirt and trousers. Few people ever saw him dressed so informally.
She barely spared him a glance. Instead, she summoned her bag and began to rummage in it.
“Now, we need these.” She withdrew the apron he had seen her wearing before. She looped it over her head and tied it deftly behind her back before she proffered a second pile of rumpled fabric to Lucius. He took it numbly, turning it this way and that in his hands, the tapes were hopelessly tangled.

“Here.” She gave a soft sigh of amusement and exasperation as she took the garment back and shook out the fabric. It seemed to grow calm in her hands like a wayward animal responding to its master. She stood on her tiptoes and reached up towards him, her brown eyes met his, silently asking his permission, and Lucius felt himself lower his head i to allow her to place the apron ties over his head. She came around behind him and he almost let out a sigh of pleasure as her small fingers freed his hair at the back. Then she was reaching for his sides, her breasts just brushing against his back as she caught the loose hanging ties and brought them behind him. Her casual touch seemed shockingly intimate.
Then she was gone, moving back around to view him from the front, a smile lingering on those soft lips as she took in the sight of him in his apron. She dug in her pocket for an elastic band and gathered up her mass of curls, securing them haphazardly on top of her head. She passed a second band to Lucius. “I trust you can do your own hair?”

He nodded, genuinely not trusting himself to speak, his mouth felt dry and his heart was still beating nineteen to the dozen over her recent proximity. He secured his hair in a ponytail at the nape of his neck. Hermione nodded approvingly. “Good, now you just need to roll up your sleeves.” He did as she asked, removing his cufflinks and folding the fabric back on itself. Her shocked gasp took him by surprise.

“I’ve never seen one this close before,” her voice was barely more than a whisper.

He considered her words. Severus remained buttoned from ankle to collar all day every day. Lucius doubted Hermione would ever have seen the potions master in less than his full wizarding regalia. Of the death eaters in her acquaintance, he supposed that left only Draco, and Draco covered his dark mark with glamour. Lucius had considered doing the same and decided against it. It felt like cowardice to him, to deny his mistakes, to try and hide from the wrong choices he had made. He no longer wore the mark with pride, but wear it he would, as a constant reminder of his own fallibility.

Almost of its own volition, the girl's hand crept out. “May I?” she asked softly.

He nodded, although not really sure what he was agreeing to until he felt the touch of her fingertips, gossamer soft against his skin. He was unable to contain his gasp this time. Nobody touched him, but in particular, nobody had ever touched him there. It felt painfully intimate and he almost pulled his arm away as she traced the mark with her fingertip.

“It just feels like skin.” her voice was uneven and she jumped as he caught her wrist in his other hand.

“Enough.”

She turned away, her cheeks flaming, and pushed an imaginary strand of hair off her forehead.

“Ok,” she sounded strangely lost. “So…potatoes.” She picked up the bag and showed him how to peel and slice them. He caught on quickly, finding the swishing motion of his wand rather satisfying. They worked companionably together, cooking the potatoes in cream and garlic, Lucius inhaling appreciatively at the rich odour. He was forced to admit that the Mud… the girl was a good teacher, as she gently encouraged him to layer the potatoes into a larger dish and didn’t mock his ham-fisted attempts to grate the Gruyere.

Finally, the potatoes were consigned to the oven and he looked triumphantly at her. To his surprise, she laughed. “You look so smug,” she accused. “Anybody would think you had just mixed a masters level potion not a casserole dish full of potatoes.”

“I must say this is considerably easier than Draco made it look.” He lounged against the counter, his confidence somewhat restored.

“Oh really?” The girl raised an eyebrow. “Very well Mr Malfoy, if you’re feeling so confident let’s try some real cookery. Would you be so good as to bring the fish over here?”

Filleting the fish was quite the most time-consuming, painstaking and infuriating process he had ever attempted. By the time he had removed every pin-bone (without magic) beads of sweat were standing out on his forehead and he had quite exhausted his extensive vocabulary of curse words. The girl was leaning back against the worktop, arms folded across her chest grinning openly at him.

“Mr Malfoy,” her tone was one of offended maidenly virtue. “I would never have imagined you capable of such language.”
He glared at her. “I would never have imagined you capable of torture, Miss Granger.”

Her grin only widened. “I hope you’re lady friend is worth the effort.”

He bit back a retort, watching as she opened the much-maligned bottle of muggle wine and poured it and some stock around the fish.

“Now we wait.”

To his surprise, she braced her slim arms against the worktop and hoisted herself up to sit on the counter. Lucius washed his hands, several times and tried not to think about what he would like to with her on that worktop.

“So what’s she like?” Her voice broke the silence.

“What’s who like?”

“Oh mystery woman?”

“Shit! He had no idea what he should say. He hadn’t taken the time to imbue the imaginary object of his affections with any real qualities, he was hoping that Hermione would become so enamoured with him over the course of the afternoon that his mysterious (non-existent) lady friend would fade into the background in the bright light of their shared passions. Unfortunately de-boning fish didn’t seem to be a massive turn on for the girl and he didn’t feel any closer to seducing her than he had that morning.

“She’s very intelligent.” Perhaps he could make her jealous….....of herself.

“Oh.” she sounded non-plussed.

“What’s who like?”

“Yes.”

“Ah.”

“What does ‘ah’ mean?”

“Nothing.” She shook her curls off her face once more.

“It does not mean nothing, especially when said in such a pointed manner.” He drew closer. Even sitting on the counter she was considerably shorter than he.

The girl pouted, this was encouraging. “I suppose it means that really it wouldn’t matter how intelligent she is, if it wasn’t for her looks you wouldn’t be in the slightest bit interested.”

“That is a sweeping supposition.”

She fixed him with a gimlet eye. “It’s true though isn’t it?”

He looked away. The honest answer was he didn’t know. He would still be attracted to the girl if she were as ugly as Camomile Jones – no- what if she were merely plain – perhaps. “I don’t know,” he said eventually. “The fact of the matter is she is beautiful, therefore there is no point in imagining what I would do should I require a peanut butter and jam sandwich at 2 am.”

“Hmm.” She seemed to consider his words for a few moments before she hopped off the counter.

“But we do know what you would do in that instance now Mr Malfoy.” She smiled up at him in a most disarming manner. “Now you know where the ingredients are you can make yourself a sandwich whenever you want. Don’t you feel empowered?” She shot the last question over her shoulder as she bent down in front of the oven to examine the fish.

Lucius, faced with the full allure of her rounded backside, was only able to weakly answer, “Not really.”

Time seemed to pass in a whirl. They had not developed the easy camaraderie he had so envied between her and Draco. He was much too aware of her physically to relax and, although she occasionally dropped her guard and shot him one of her dazzling smiles, the girl continued to be nervous around him. All in all, he found being in her presence exhausting.

And intoxicating. She smelt delicious, she smiled easily and her entire focus was upon him. He lapped up her attention like a child who had been left to play alone for too long and when she finally proclaimed the meal ready it seemed like the most natural thing in the world to invite her to eat with him.
“After all,” he adopted a reasonable tone. “You can’t expect to spend the evening in the library without some form of sustenance.”
“I suppose not.” She sat down at the newly set table and reached for the half empty bottle of wine they had purchased for cooking. “We might as well drink…..”
Lucius vanished the bottle right out of her hand with a well-aimed Evanesco.
“I told you I refuse to drink that swill.”
The girl rolled her eyes. “Well, I was rather looking forward to drinking it. What a waste of perfectly good wine.”
Lucius summoned a bottle from his cellar and uncorked it with a flourish. “That wine was a crime against nature. Now, this is perfectly good wine.” He filled her glass and watched intently as she took a sip.
“It’s fine,” she said indifferently.
Lucius felt his hackles rise. “I’ll have you know that’s a very rare bottle of 2001 Elf made…..”
“I’m only teasing you, it’s delicious.” She flashed her dimple at him and took another sip of the wine.
“Thank you, Mr Malfoy.”

Just like that, his ire evaporated. He took a sip of his own wine and a mouthful of the delicious dish he had helped to create. She may not be writhing beneath him in paroxysms of pleasure, but she was sitting across the table from him, happily sharing meal and a bottle of wine. For the first time in a long time, all seemed well in the world.
Hermione outstays her welcome.

The afternoon had turned to evening and taken on a strangely dreamlike quality. They had lingered over their food for far longer than Hermione had planned. After all, she was only here to see the library. Instead, she had found herself caught up in the moment, savouring the food and wine... and the company. If she was not very much mistaken Lucius Malfoy was flirting with her... with her, Hermione Granger. She must be mistaken.

Regretfully she placed a hand over her glass as before he could refill it.

“Thank you, it really is delicious but I’ve had enough. I’m not used to drinking.” She could feel the flush that alcohol always brought to her cheeks.

“In that case, I should take you upstairs.”

She blushed even harder at that, all sorts of images of running unbidden through her mind.

“Oh, you mean to see the library.” Had she really just said that out loud? The wine had made her sluggish.

Malfoy smirked. “Why Miss Granger, whatever did you think I meant?”

“Nothing, nothing.” She took the hand he offered and allowed him to pull her to her feet.

She staggered slightly, from the wine or her own inherent clumsiness she didn’t know, but she found herself briefly pressed against him. For a moment her palm rested against his chest. He had not replaced his robes when they had finished cooking and she could feel the heat of his body through the thin cotton of his shirt. She fought the urge to slip her fingers into the space between the buttons or to run her hand down the firm breadth of his chest and across his abdomen.

She stepped back abruptly, running a hand through her hair and avoiding his gaze.

She was incredibly grateful when he didn’t speak but preceded her from the room, holding the kitchen door open for her to pass through. Their bodies brushed together once more in the narrow hallway and she inhaled eagerly, as if she could take some of the essence of him into herself, to be enjoyed at a later date.

He politely gestured for her to take the lead down the hallway and she was certain she could feel his hot silver gaze burning into her back as he strode silently behind her. She was grateful when they entered the library. Not just because she desperately needed to widen her resources if she wanted to have any hope of succeeding with her mastery but because the sight of so many books and scrolls effectively distracted her from the almost overwhelming attraction she was currently feeling toward her host.

The library was vast, larger even than the facility at Hogwarts and infinitely more luxurious. Scattered between the shelves were overstuffed armchairs, gilded chaise lounges, and battered Chesterfield sofas. It was completely different to what she had seen of the rest of the manor. Those rooms were fastidiously decorated around a given theme, the library was a hodgepodge of the comfortable and the beautiful, clearly designed more for the former than the latter. She loved it.

“I took the liberty of isolating any texts I thought you would find useful.” Malfoy moved further into the room, apparently unaware of her response to her surroundings or to him. He strolled through the stacks, only pausing to look back at her when she failed to follow. “It is rather magnificent I suppose,” he said, without any hint of false modesty.
“You have no idea how lucky you are,” Hermione gently trailed her fingers over the spines of the books as she passed them.

“Luck has nothing to do with it Miss Granger, it’s all down to hard work and careful curation.”

She stared up at him, her mouth dropping open in surprise. “You mean....you?” She looked around her again. There were thousands of books, tens of thousands. “You, created this?”

He nodded. “There was a small library here when I inherited the manor, of course, but I have added significantly to it over the years. It became something of an obsession.” His face softened as he looked around him and Hermione caught her breath wondering if he would ever look like her in that manner and what her response might be if he did.

“The Trollish texts are here.” He had moved again and indicated a large stack of books set on an ornate writing desk beneath one of the many windows.

Hermione almost ran to the pile and began to sort through them excitedly, giving off the occasional squeak of pleasure as she found a particularly coveted title. “Can I....” she gestured toward the table, “I mean, may I?”

“Be my guest.” Malfoy pulled out the seat for her. “Do you require anything else, some tea perhaps?”

“Maybe later,” Hermione spoke absently, her nose already buried in the book that had been topmost on the pile. Malfoy gave a soft sigh which she barely registered.

It was hours later she looked up realising that her back and wrists were aching from being bent too long over the table. She glanced around guiltily. She had become so engrossed in her work that she had no idea as to the whereabouts of her host. She spotted him easily enough; he was seated on a comfortable looking sofa, only a few feet away from her desk, and appeared to be engrossed in the book that was open on his lap. His legs were elegantly crossed and to her surprise, a small pair of silver-rimmed glasses rested on his nose. She tried and failed to hold back a chuckle at the sight of Lucius Malfoy in such a domestic setting.

He was intensely focused on the book in front of him. She couldn't help but wonder if that was how she looked when she was wholly absorbed in her own reading. She silently acknowledged that she probably didn't look half as beautiful, or as regal. Malfoy's eyes were slightly narrowed, his lips pursed and a long-fingered hand toyed absently with a lock of flaxen hair. As if he felt her eyes upon him he looked up.

“Ah, Miss Granger, you have returned.” He smiled faintly.

“Sorry.” She tried to discretely stretch her back. “Once I start reading I tend to get a little lost.”

“I know the feeling.” He placed a finger between the pages and folded his book closed. “Would you like some tea?”

“Yes please, if it’s no trouble, and it’s not too late.” She looked around for a clock; it was already after 9 pm.

“I'm something of a night owl anyway.” He raised his voice, “Arty.”

There was a loud crack and a house elf appeared in front of him.

“Good evening Master, Miss.” The house elf bowed politely at Malfoy, then Hermione. She was surprised to see that he was dressed in a crisply ironed pillowcase.

“Would you be so kind as to bring us some tea, Arty?”

“Of course Master, right away Master.” The elf snapped out of sight and Hermione stared at Lucius for a long moment.

“Is there something the matter?” He asked eventually.

“Since when,” the words were spoken before she could even consider repressing them, “have you been so polite to your elves?”

He smiled a little at her question, and marked his book properly, placing it to one side. “In all honesty, since Narcissa decided that backing the house elf rights campaign you were such an avid supporter of would do our reputation good. She insisted that we pay them and provide them with semi-decent clothing. She lost interest in the cause after a while, but I must admit by that point it had
They respond just as well to good manners as they do to threats.”

“Indeed.” Hermione found herself channelling her inner Severus. A thought occurred to her as she watched him watching her. “Might I ask you something else, Mr Malfoy?”

“Of course.” He made an expansive gesture. “I am at your disposal.”

She sniffed a little at his largesse. “Supposing you were to do something nice, motivated by genuine good will.”

“I find such a scenario hard to imagine.” Hermione banged her hand down on the desk with such force that a few drops of ink flew from the inkwell and marred the parchment she had been writing on. “You’re so intent on acting the villain that you won’t even admit when you actually do something good. Don’t you feel better treating the house elves like real people? Doesn’t it make you feel good to entertain a Mudblood as a guest in your home?”

“Not when she uses language like that.” Malfoy looked away, and moments later they were interrupted by the elf, bearing a tray loaded with tea things and small cakes.

“Won’t you join me, Miss Granger?” He gestured politely to the space next to him on the sofa.

Hermione sank into it cautiously, terribly aware of his large body, now only inches from her own. They reached in tandem for the handle of the teapot and Hermione felt his warm fingers close around hers.

“Please,” he gestured toward the teapot, apparently unaffected by their touch, “as I said, I am not used to polite company these days.”

“I’m not much used to polite company ever,” she muttered as she poured tea for them both and handed him his cup. “With Harry and Ron, it’s more of an every man for himself scramble for the kettle.”

He smiled again, and they sipped in silence for a few moments before Malfoy said, “You are correct in some aspects Miss Granger. It eases my conscience considerably to treat my servants well and it is infinitely more pleasant having you here as my guest as opposed to you being my prisoner. But I cannot claim that my motives in any of these things are entirely altruistic, if I gain pleasure from an act then I cannot be claiming to do it for the greater good can it?”

Hermione tilted her head to one side. “But if we all thought in the same way then no action would ever be considered truly altruistic.”

Malfoy shrugged. “Perhaps that is because true selflessness does not really exist.” He looked away then and Hermione wondered if he had revealed more than he intended. “I have kept you too long from your work, please do not allow me to disturb you further.”

It felt like a dismissal and she heeded the unspoken warning as she reached for the text she had abandoned earlier. She contemplated returning to the writing desk but elected to remain beside him on the sofa, telling herself firmly that it was purely for reasons of comfort, not because she enjoyed his physical presence and the almost touch of his long thigh only inches away from her own.

When she next looked up it was two am and Malfoy was asleep next to her on the couch. She carefully placed her book on the floor and gazed across at him. It was a luxury to be able to look at him without those watchful grey eyes staring back. Even passed out on a sofa he was elegant. His head rested on the heel of his hand which was propped on the arm of the couch. His hair spilled in delicate strands across his splayed fingers and caressed his exposed cheek. His lips were slightly parted but he didn’t drool or snore, as Hermione undoubtedly would, were their situations reversed. Instead, he was surprisingly, preternaturally still.

She knew she should leave. The man was obviously tired and it was the height of bad manners to so outstay her welcome that the host had actually fallen asleep waiting for her to leave. Although Hermione thought, now that he was asleep there didn’t really seem to be much harm in leaving him to slumber on. If she could just get a look at the text on mosses of the Karelides mountain range and
perhaps that scroll that seemed to pertain to antidotes to common poisons. . . . . Being careful not to jostle the sleeping wizard next to her she reached for her beaded bag and extracted a vial of Pepper-up potion. Much to her chagrin, it was out of date, what sort of potions apprentice was she? Never mind, she thought, it should still work. She downed the potion in one, wincing as steam blew from her ears and nose. Minutes later she returned to her studies feeling rejuvenated.

A ray of early morning sun shone directly into her eyes and woke her from the fitful sleep she had fallen into. She blinked irritably, trying to gather together her thoughts, wondering exactly where she was. A library….well, it wouldn’t be the first time she had fallen asleep in one of those. Her head was pillowed on something warm and lumpy which gave a sudden twitch beneath her. Only an innate sense of self-preservation prevented her from shrieking in surprise. Instead, she forced herself to lie still and to remember where she was.

It all came flooding back. She was in Malfoy Manor. She had taken a Pepper-up potion in order to pull an all-nighter. Now she seemed to be lying on a sofa with her head pillowed on Malfoy’s lap. She replayed that thought. Bloody hell, her head was pillowed on Malfoy’s lap, and if she wasn’t very much mistaken Lucius Malfoy was no more immune than the next man to the curse of morning wood.

As if to reward her for her quick thinking his cock twitched impatiently against her cheek. Well, this was unexpected. Hermione swallowed nervously. Obviously, she should leap to her feet and get the hell out of there before Malfoy woke up and the situation developed to its full cataclysmic potential. Yet she found herself strangely immobile. She wasn’t particularly in the habit of measuring penis size with her face but, inexperienced as she was, she was still pretty certain that Malfoy packed a fair punch in the trouser department. She ought to have been horrified and disgusted but instead, she was intrigued. What she wanted, more than anything was to run her fingers over the hot bulge which was currently digging into her cheek. Or to unbutton his fly and wrap her lips around….Hermione Granger, you did not just think that. What on earth had come over her? In her previous relationships, she had, at best, been an unwilling dispenser of fellatio. Now she was practically drooling over Malfoy’s cock. She just couldn’t help but think that somebody who smelled so good surely must taste even better. Would it really be so wrong just to undo a couple of buttons…..? He twitched again, gave a soft groan and thrust his hips against her face, his hand tightening momentarily against the smooth skin of her ribcage. Hermione’s lascivious thoughts were momentarily side-tracked. At what point had his hand insinuated its way under her blouse? Well, it didn’t really matter. What mattered was getting out of Malfoy Manor as quickly and quietly as possible before Lucius Malfoy woke up and realised he had spent the night entwined around a Muggle-born, or she did something with his sleeping body that would undoubtedly have him calling the Aurors.

With more stealth than she would ever have thought herself capable of she rolled off of the sofa and onto the floor. Clutching her beaded bag against her chest she fled from the library as if the very hounds of hell were behind her.

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Lucius fidgeted uncomfortably at his small table. He reminded himself that Malfoy’s didn’t fidget. Then he remembered that he currently inhabited the body of Camomile Jones and she was clearly a wriggler. He had some sympathy for her irritating tics. If he were in constant pain from as many different ailments as his female counterpart appeared to suffer he would probably not be able to maintain the legendary Malfoy poise either. He groaned and rubbed his back. Next time he was going to a specialist shop to get a proper bra fitted.

He had genuinely thought he had inhabited the hag’s body for the last time. Things had been going so well with Miss Granger. Right up until the point where he had passed out on his couch like some sort of geriatric uncle who’d had one sherry too many after Sunday dinner. What must she have thought of him? Whatever it was, it had been bad enough to send her fleeing without as much as a ‘thank you for the use of your wonderful library Mr Malfoy, and while we’re at it would you like to
When he had woken up on Sunday morning with a crick in his neck, a foul taste in his mouth and an erection which would have made the Eifel tower look shy, he had been ready to throw in the towel. He had given the girl his best shot and she had thwarted him at every turn. He had finally been willing to admit he’d met his match. Then he had remembered the way her fingers had lingered on his chest the evening before, the curve of her backside as she bent down to open the oven, the brush of her hand against his as they both reached for the teapot. And there was more; a half-remembered feeling of warmth as she pressed her soft body against his. The silky softness of her skin as he draped an arm across her abdomen, had he imagined it or had she really dozed off against him on the couch?

Whatever had happened, he was not quite ready to give in yet. He would give Camomile one more chance to crack the enigma that was Hermione Granger and if she failed this time then he would move on to an easier conquest. At least his pursuit of the girl had caused him to acquire a number of new skills which any discerning woman would appreciate.

He didn’t even try to hide his smile as the girl bounded into the café her eyes wide with youthful enthusiasm.

“Camomile, you’re here, it’s so good to see you.”
He had braced himself for her greeting this time and took the opportunity to bestow an, albeit rather whiskery, kiss upon her cheek as she embraced him.

“I have something for you.” She beamed across the table at him as she took her seat and proffered a large plastic box. Lucius took it rather dubiously.

“What is it?”

“Homemade chocolate brownies.” She reached across and peeled back a corner of the lid, releasing the rich dark aroma of chocolate. “I thought you might need a little snack in the evenings along with your tea.” She bit her lip and blushed. Lucius narrowed his eyes, wondering if she had seen his surreptitious bite of her sandwich and entirely misinterpreted his motives.

“Thank you, my dear, they smell delicious.” He was telling the truth, he tucked the box away under his chair. “As a matter of fact, I have something for you too.”

“You do?” Hermione had clutched her hands together in a gesture of childish anticipation but sadly Lucius’ big reveal was impeded by the arrival of a waiter at their table.

“What would you like, Camomile? It’s my treat.” The girl looked expectantly across at him. Lucius stifled a sigh, she definitely thought him a charity case.

“Just tea will be fine thank you.”

“Absolutely not.” She spoke quietly to the waiter and pointed at one of the jars of tea above the counter, after a moment he nodded and left. Hermione turned back to Lucius who was gritting his teeth whilst trying to maintain a façade of old lady whimsy.

“As I was saying my dear, I have something for.” He reached into his robes.

“I came across this whilst clearing out my attic and thought it might be of use to you.” He handed her an old and faded scroll. A scroll which had, in fact, cost him several hundred galleons and six months of scouring antiquarian bookshops in Albania, but that was beside the point.

The look of absolute rapture as she studied the runes on the outside was worth every sickle.

“Oh Camomile, thank you.” She came round the table to kiss his cheek once more. “I can’t accept this, it’s too much, really.” Privately Lucius agreed, trinkets and fripperies were easily replaceable but primary sources were priceless in his book, on the other hand, if it helped him to achieve his goal it would be a loss worth taking.

Hermione had gently unfurled the parchment and was now frowning as she studied the runes. Lucius wiped what he knew to be a rather smug smile from his lips as she looked across at him.

“I can’t read this.” If he hadn’t been planning this exact moment for the last 48 hours he might almost have felt sorry for her.

“What do you mean dearie?”

“The scroll, it looks like Trollish, but almost all the runes are unfamiliar………look.” She gently
Lucius didn’t have to look, he knew exactly what those runes looked like, he’d spent weeks deciphering them. He furrowed his brow in feigned ignorance. “Oh I’m terribly sorry my dear, I only read the title you see. I’m afraid this is Old Trollish.”

“Old Trollish?” Hermione had oscillated from disappointment to reverence. “I didn’t know there were any Old Trollish texts remaining, Camomile this is probably worth a fortune.”

“Oh, never you mind that dearie.” Lucius gave an airy wave of his hand. “It’s of no value gathering dust in my attic I want you to have it. I’m sure you’ll be able to put it to good use.”

“You’re so kind.” Hermione reached out to cover his hand with her own. “But I won’t be able to put it to any use if you don’t help me read it.”

Lucius thoroughly enjoyed arranging his face into a façade of sorrow. “I’m terribly sorry my dear, but I don’t read Old Trollish.”

Once again they were interrupted by the waiter who placed a pot of tea and two cups down on the table along with two toasted sandwiches. Hermione pushed one of the plates across the table to Lucius and sadly rolled up the scroll before pouring their tea. Lucius reached for his cup and automatically took a sip, his attention too much on his companion and his excellent plan to notice what he was drinking. A bitter taste assailed his senses and he almost spat out the drink.

“What on earth is that?” He wheezed, wondering if she had discovered his perfidy and was trying to poison him.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I should have warned you.” Hermione took a delicate sip of the beverage. “It’s Willow bark tea, rather an acquired taste I suppose, but terribly good for that time of the month.” She placed a hand across her abdomen and gave him a knowing look. Lucius swallowed. Despite having been married for a good twenty years his knowledge of the female menstrual cycle didn’t stretch far beyond being irritated when it interfered with his sex life.

“I see.” He attempted to sound casually interested. “Well I’m afraid that ship has already sailed for me, I can’t remember the last time Mother Nature came to call.”

“Oh.” The girl nodded knowingly and Lucius breathed an internal sigh of relief. He had no idea how old a witch had to be for her menses to stop but apparently, he had reached that age.

“Well, it is also good for arthritis and has numerous other health benefits.” She topped up his cup, even though he had barely touched the drink.

Suddenly he felt slightly less smug.

They ate in silence for a couple of minutes before Lucius decided to ramp up the tension a little further.

“My dear, I’ve just realised I have an acquaintance who might be able to help you with that scroll.”

“You do?” She looked across at him, her eyes shining once more.

“Yes.” He prepared to twist the knife. “Lucius Malfoy, do you know him?”

Hermione’s mouth dropped open and she stared across the table at him her teacup frozen several inches from her lips.

“Mr Malfoy?” He was slightly offended at her tone of incredulity.

“Yes, tall man, blonde hair, rather well known, surely you must have come across him before?”

“Yes, I know him.” She returned her cup to its saucer with a clatter. “Well I thought I knew him, at least…….I’m friends with his son.”

“Well that’s perfect then, you can ask him to translate the scroll. I don’t know him well but I understand he’s terribly obliging and very kind to small animals.” Lucius clapped his hands together aiming for a look of beauteous satisfaction.

“I’m not really sure it’s that simple.” Hermione toyed with the crust of her sandwich.

“Why ever not?” He flinched, was the old adage about eavesdroppers and never hearing anything good about to be proven?

“Well, you see.” She stared into the middle distance, clearly seeking inspiration. Finally, she squared her jaw. “The thing is, Camomile, I didn’t tell you this before, it just didn’t occur to me you see, and
I hope you won’t hold it against me.”

“Hold what against you?” Lucius was genuinely confused.

“I’m Muggle-born.”

“Oh.” He attempted to raise an eyebrow realised he couldn’t do it and settled for an enquiring smile instead. “And what difference does that make?”

Hermione sighed. “Well, you see, people like Mr Malfoy, they don’t really like people like me.”

“Ah.” Lucius sat back, wondering how to deal with this unexpected spanner in the works of his otherwise flawless plan.

“And do you like Mr Malfoy?” His heart pounded in his chest.

The girl bit her lip before giving a defiant nod. “Yes, I do. I like him a lot actually. But don’t you see Camomile, that just makes things more awkward. I like him, he tolerates me, probably out of deference to Draco, I can’t just ask him for a favour.”

“Of course you can.” Lucius gave her a wolfish smile. “You just have to offer something in return. You must have something he wants.” He almost winced at his own bluntness, he had practically suggested that she sleep with him in exchange for his translating skills. He waited with baited breath for her response.

“Well, there is one thing.” She fiddled with her uneaten sandwich once again.

“Yes.”

“He’s asked me before, to teach him to cook.”

“Really?” Lucius strove for a surprised tone.

“Yes, I know, it seems strange. Apparently, he wants to use his newly acquired skills to seduce a woman.” She rolled her eyes. “As if a man like that needs to do anything other than snap his fingers, he probably has woman coming out of his ears.”

“You’d be surprised,” Lucius muttered before he could stop himself, quickly covering his slip with a cough. “Well then,” he continued quickly, you have something he wants, no matter how odd it might seem, why don’t you offer to cook him something else?”

She frowned. “Maybe, I did think it was a little odd that he didn’t ask me for a desert recipe last time.” She picked up her sandwich. “I’ll think about it,” she asserted before taking a determined bite.

That evening Lucius sat down at his desk with a cup of Darjeeling and one of the best chocolate brownies he had ever tasted. He took up his quill, feeling the overwhelming sense of satisfaction which can only accompany a well-executed plan.

My Dear Miss Granger,

It has come to my attention that my repertoire remains incomplete. I must implore you to furnish me with the means to produce a desert to rival the excellent main course we perfected together. I am willing to accord you the same terms as for our previous engagement, although I hope that next time you use my library you will at least do me the courtesy of wishing me farewell prior to your departure.

Kind Regards
Lucius Malfoy

Dear Mr Malfoy

I apologise for my hasty departure. I must confess I was a little embarrassed at having overstayed my welcome. I thought it best to leave without disturbing you.

Whilst I would be delighted to assist you further, I am not sure that any Pureblood witch worth her salt will allow herself to indulge in a desert.

Yours Hermione

Hermione,

You may be correct. I, however, am not a pureblood witch and I very much like to indulge.

Chocolate fondant is my favourite.

Lucius
p.s. I was extremely disturbed by your absence when I awoke.

Lucius,
Please consider yourself lucky that I am also not a pureblood witch, I make a mean chocolate fondant. I am free next Saturday, same time and place?
Hermione

I look forward to it.
L.M.
Dessert

Chapter Summary

It shouldn't come as a surprise to you, they're going to make dessert.

Not since the day of his wedding had Lucius taken such care over his morning toilette. Always fastidious in his personal grooming; that Saturday he took things to a new level. He wasn’t nervous exactly. Hermione’s declaration that she liked him rather a lot had done a great deal to calm the nerves which seemed to overwhelm him whenever he was in her presence. For the first time since he had encountered her in his kitchen, he felt as if he might actually be in control of the situation. She was like a ripe fruit, ready to be plucked and he was adamant that, if any plucking were to be done, he would be the main executor.

He just had to look perfect.

If his tailor had been surprised at Lucius’ peremptory demand for a Muggle suit he had known better than to show it. Instead, he had rapidly got to work and, days later, delivered the outfit Lucius was apprehensively donning. There was something deeply offensive at being disillusioned by the woman one was trying to impress. He absolutely refused to allow her to hide him again, and if that meant he had to blend in with the Muggles, then so be it. After turning himself into two different women in his pursuit of the girl, trousers and a jacket didn’t seem like too much of an imposition.

In fact, he thought, contorting himself into various poses in order to view his new apparel from all angles, his Muggle suit was rather becoming. The trousers were not so different from those he normally wore under his robes and the white shirt was cut in his usual style. He had left off the waistcoat in deference to the baking heat of the day. Whilst the cooling charms which permeated the fabric would keep him from overheating, he supposed that few Muggle men would be out in and about in a three-piece suit, and his goal was to blend in. The jacket was a symphony of tasteful design, beautifully cut in a dark grey pinstripe it brought out the lighter colour of his eyes and highlighted his, still impressively flat, stomach. Lucius Malfoy was not a man who would allow himself to go to seed.

The grey silk necktie had caused him some consternation, but the unfamiliar item had come with an incantation which animated the garment to tie itself, and he now sported a neat Windsor knot. It was undoubtably the most infuriating piece of clothing he had ever encountered. It was much more constraining than a cravat, and the urge to tug at the knot was overwhelming despite his repeated repetition of the mantra Malfoys do not fidget. He reminded himself, for the hundredth time, that all of his efforts would eventually be worthwhile.

His face and hair were flawless as ever. Lucius knew himself to be vain, but he was also aware that, in his case, vanity was perfectly justified. Draco was the only wizard who could possibly hold a candle to him in terms of looks and, much to his relief, his son’s attention was not focussed on Miss Granger.

He had planned to reach the underpass early, as he had done before, in order to watch Hermione arriving. But, this time, she had played him at his own game and was also at the appointed meeting place well ahead of time.

Lucius was instantly aware of his advantage. Any nerves he might have harboured following their
night spent together in his library had dissipated during their companionable lunch date on Tuesday; for him at least. Hermione, of course, unaware that they had already seen each other, was clearly still on edge. Her face colouring as soon as she caught sight of him.

“Miss Granger.” He lifted her hand smoothly to his lips and pressed them against her skin. She smelled like apples and her fingers actually trembled in his.

“Mr Malfoy,” the tremor was reflected in her voice. “I’m sorry for my abrupt exit last weekend.” So much heat was emanating from her face, he was glad of his cooling charms. “I was embarrassed and I acted rudely because of it, I hope you’ll forgive me.”

“Think nothing of it, my dear.” He could afford to be magnanimous; after all, she liked him very much. “I have already forgotten the entire incident.” He held his arm out in her direction and, after a moment's hesitation she slipped her fingers around his forearm.

“Mr Malfoy,” the tremor was reflected in her voice. “I’m sorry for my abrupt exit last weekend.” So much heat was emanating from her face, he was glad of his cooling charms. “I was embarrassed and I acted rudely because of it, I hope you’ll forgive me.”

“Think nothing of it, my dear.” He could afford to be magnanimous; after all, she liked him very much. “I have already forgotten the entire incident.” He held his arm out in her direction and, after a moment's hesitation she slipped her fingers around his forearm. Her touch burned almost like a summons from the Dark Lord and he schooled himself to maintain his façade of unaffected calm.

“You look very smart, Mr Malfoy.” She eyed him sideways as they made their way, arm, in arm, back towards the supermarket.

“I hoped to avoid being disillusioned today.” Lucius drew a pound coin from his suit pocket and inserted it into the slot on the handle of the nearest trolley. The chain slipped free and he suavely maneuvered the vehicle toward the shop front. He caught a flicker of admiration in her eyes.

“It would be a shame to disillusion such a lovely suit.” The dimple appeared in her cheek once more.

“Did you purchase it specially?”

“Of course not,” he scoffed. “It makes sense to be able to walk undetected amongst Muggles from time to time.”

“I suppose.” She followed him into the shop. “Although if you want to be truly incognito then I think you might do better with a pair of shorts and a polo shirt.”

Lucius winced at the thought of ever leaving the house in anything so ghastly. He might admire Hermione’s Muggle clothing, and the short grey skirt and white blouse she wore today were another example of her excellent taste, but in general, he still abhorred the way Muggles dressed. Did none of them take any pride in their appearance?

To his surprise, and slight disappointment, Hermione whisked him through the shop with an air of brisk efficiency. They didn’t even pause in the fruit aisle.

“Did you remember to eat your lunch today?” He asked rather plaintively. The sight of her small pink tongue lapping the peach juice from her wrist had fuelled his nocturnal entertainment for several nights in a row. The mere memory of it was causing him to grow rather hot and bothered and it was a relief when they paused next to a refrigerated unit to collect double cream and butter.

Relatively few other ingredients found their way into the trolley; which Lucius handled masterfully, and before he knew it, Hermione was leading them once more to the checkouts.

“Erm,” he cleared his throat awkwardly. “Don’t you need any wine?”

“No.” She shook her head, a slight smile on her lips. “Don’t worry, I wasn’t planning on inflicting the wine section on you again.”

“Well, it wouldn’t hurt just to look.” Lucius studiously avoided looking at her, but he was aware of her glancing sideways at him as she obligingly lead them back towards the alcohol section.

The Argentinian red which had haunted his dreams almost as effectively as Miss Granger herself, plus several bottles of very reasonably priced vintage Bordeaux, a dessert wine and a rather intriguing port made their way into the trolley. Hermione looked on, bemused.

“Are you planning a party?” she finally asked as he deliberated over the Malt Whisky.

“Of course not, I abhor parties.” He held a bottle of Glenmorangie up to the light to admire its colour.

“I thought you loved them.”

“What?” Should he buy the sherry cask or the oak cask?

“Parties,” she sounded exasperated and he turned to face her, a bottle in each hand, trying to fathom
what on earth she was talking about.
“I thought you loved parties,” she repeated, frowning at him.
“Why would you think that?” He placed both bottles in the trolley, she might not bring him here
again and he wasn’t sure he could face the place on his own.
“Because your wife is always throwing them!”
“Ex-wife.” He waited for the familiar weight of failure to settle over his shoulders at the thought of
Narcissa, but for once, he remained unburdened. Perhaps it was because he would never again have
to attend one of her interminable charity events.
“Don’t tell me; she’s your ex-wife because she threw too many parties and you couldn’t stand it
anymore?”
“Amongst other reasons.” Lucius gripped the handle of the trolley and headed for the checkout with
the girl trailing behind. He found her interest in his marriage rather gratifying; further evidence of her
attraction to him, surely.
The girl sighed loudly behind him. “So if you’re not throwing a party you must be an alcoholic.”
“I don’t think so,” Lucius responded mildly.
Perhaps he had sailed a little close to the wind in terms
of his indulgence during the final year of the war, but he had nipped that little habit in the bud as
soon as it had started to affect his waistline. The only liquid he had a problem with now was tea, was
it possible to overindulge in Earl Grey? He hoped not.
“Then what are you going to do with all that booze?” The girl could really become rather shrill when
her insatiable curiosity was not instantly gratified.
Lucius stopped walking and she ran into his backing with a soft “Ooft.”
They were briefly tangled together against the shopping trolley, a sudden surge of shoppers in the
narrow aisle preventing them from immediately separating.
“I like to collect things.” He had somehow managed to insinuate an arm around her narrow waist and
her ludicrous hair appeared to be wrapping itself around him like the fronds of a Venomous
Tentacula. “Books, artefacts, art, wines; anything I find beautiful I long to possess.”
She gazed up at him, both of them frozen in the moment as the other shoppers moved around them.
Her brown eyes were wide, her lips slightly parted and, in that moment, even without her previous
admission, her feelings were clear. She likes me very much, he thought, as he gently released her and
resumed his journey to the checkout.
They made their way back to the apparition point in silence. Lucius had bought a cardboard wine
carrier at the checkout, along with a sturdy bag with a fabric handle. As a result of these astute
purchases, he was able to convey all their goods with ease, and Hermione had once more slipped her
hand into the crook of his elbow.
They paused for only a moment before she tightened her grip and
he apparated them both into the kitchen at Malfoy Manor.

Lucius wondered if she was aware of how much flesh she was revealing as she rummaged in one of
the lower kitchen cupboards. At first, he had averted his eyes in a gentlemanly fashion. It was, after
all, not good form to peek at the underwear of a female houseguest. He had rapidly decided that it
was only bad form if one were caught looking and had begun to crane his neck in order to improve
his view of her delicate cheeks.
After his horrific experience in the apothecary, he had steeled himself for ugly knickers. He had
accepted that there would be a period of time after they became intimate, but during which their
relationship would be too new for him to take over the management of her underwear drawer, where
he would have to endure her abominable taste in undergarments. He had girded his loins for vast
swathes of white cotton and perhaps even, he repressed a shudder, fraying elastic. Lucius had never
been one for praying but if there was a deity in heaven it appeared to be looking down on him.
Because emerging from beneath the hem of Hermione Granger’s too short skirt, were the most
beautifully rounded buttocks he could ever have imagined, and, bisecting those smooth, round,
perfect orbs, was a sliver of tasteful black lace. Lucius had never considered himself weak, but if he
were to admit to an Achilles heel, he would have to say that it came in the shape of a well-fitted boy-
short adhered to the backside of a beautiful woman. He swallowed heavily and forced himself to
look away, grateful for the apron which concealed the tenting of his Muggle trousers.

Hermione emerged pink cheeked (her face this time) and victorious with six silver moulds clutched against her chest. She set them out on the counter and instructed Lucius to brush them with melted butter.

“Normally we would put them in the fridge and wait for them to cool,” she explained. Her face broke into a smile. “But we have magic!” She flourished her wand and applied a quick cooling charm before instructing Lucius to paint a further layer over the already chilled one. Her smile was infectious and he couldn’t help but steal glances at her as she set out the other ingredients. Her movements were quick, deft and precise. He was struck by an urge to watch her preparing potions ingredients; he could see why Severus valued her so highly.

“So how are things going with the mystery woman,” her voice was casual as they broke the chocolate into a bowl, but Lucius detected the undercurrent of tension.

He gave a casual shrug.

“Slowly,” he admitted. “I believe she is intimidated by me.”

Hermione didn’t speak for a moment and he focused on breaking off the last few chunks and clearing aside the discarded wrappers.

“You can be rather overwhelming at first.” She looked shyly at him before turning away to send a stream of boiling water into a pot on the stove. “But I’m sure once she gets to know you she will find that you are not so frightening after all. Put the bowl with the chocolate in it over the water and turn the temperature right down, we want the chocolate to melt without seizing.” Lucius followed her instructions and stood over the bowl diligently stirring the slowly melting chocolate. The smell combined with her presence was intoxicating. He imagined spreading the warm viscous material over the curves of her backside. She would squeal at the heat and he would soothe her with his tongue. Merlin, he had to stop this.

The apron provided something of a barrier but it was not an impenetrable shield. Besides his penis was rubbing painfully against the fly of his trousers, if he didn’t tone things down his most precious organ would perish from diminished blood supply long before it got anywhere near Hermione.

She still hadn’t mentioned the scroll. No doubt she had it, secreted away, in that unattractive bag she insisted on carrying around. He wondered when she would introduce it into the conversation and how he could turn that to his advantage. He could understand her reticence. Sexual awareness shimmered in the air between them and he felt in no way inclined to discuss academia at present. He could only assume that she felt the same way.

“I think it’s melted.” He ran the wooden spoon through the silky smooth liquid. Hermione peeked over his shoulder.

“Yes, that’s perfect, put it to one side please.” Her voice was strict and peremptory but he could still feel the rising awareness between them, like a pressure cooker coming to a head.

“Next we beat the sugar and butter.” She watched as he measured the items into a bowl. He expected her to cast some sort of charm but instead, she handed him what looked like an oval metal cage on the end of a stick.

“What is this?”

“It’s a whisk.”

He held it up between them. “What am I supposed to do with it?”

She took it from him with a brief eye roll and demonstrated the action, her arm moving vigorously back and forth across the bowl. Lucius raised an eyebrow.

“Surely there is a charm that will do this for us.” He replicated her action, beginning to tire almost as soon as he began.

“There is.” Again the smile ghosted across her face. “But we get better results doing it by hand. Come on Malfoy, put your back into it, just imagine how worthwhile this will all be when she’s moaning in ecstasy.”

The whisk clattered against the side of the bowl as he stared at her in surprise, she was not usually nearly so forward.

“I meant when she tasted the pudding.” She pressed her hands against her flaming cheeks and
abruptly turned her back pretending to fiddle with the ingredients on the table behind them. “Of course.” Lucius returned to his whisking, hoping to goodness he was going to get into her knickers because he would certainly be in no state to take care of himself after this marathon.

Finally, the concoction of sugar and butter reached some point, discernible only to Hermione, at which she deemed it required no further whisking. Lucius beat in the eggs, then the flour. Hermione carried across the bowl of chocolate. “Now we add this.” She placed the bowl on the worktop. “But we need to make sure that the chocolate isn’t too hot, or it will scramble the eggs.” She dipped her finger into the mixture. Lucius stared at her. There was a smear of chocolate on her lower lip where she had licked her finger clean. Every instinct he possessed told him to lean forwards and lick it away. The air crackled between them, ripe with anticipation. For the hundredth time that afternoon, he resisted. He knew the girl by now, they were in the middle of a process; even if she succumbed to him, she would be distracted by the half-finished chocolate fondants – he had to be patient for just a short while longer.

Instead of kissing her he reached out and swiped his thumb across the soft flesh, removing the chocolate. He brought it to his own mouth, holding her eyes as he licked himself clean. She gazed up at him, as if mesmerised, her lips slightly parted. Lucius broke the heated moment by picking up the bowl and pouring the warm chocolate into the mixture. “Now you stir it in gently, using a figure of eight motion,” her voice was ragged and he smiled to himself as he began to stir. “No, not like that.”

He barely registered her exasperated tone. She had come up behind him and placed one hand on the small of his back, the other came around to cover his on the spoon. The warmth and scent of her seemed to engulf him, but it was more than that. She was touching him. She was touching him the way she had touched Draco, with a casual familiarity that spoke volumes. She had become so comfortable in his company that she had voluntarily moved into his personal space and laid her hands upon his body. He felt strangely giddy as she guided his hand in a figure of eight motion, not with sexual desire, although that was there too, shimmering beneath the surface, but with pure iridescent happiness.

She stepped away and he gradually came back down to earth. What was this witch doing to him, he wondered. When had the opinion of anyone, let alone a Muggle born witch half his age, come to matter to him so much. He finished his folding and, under Hermione’s instruction, poured the mixture into the prepared moulds. Hermione smiled up at him once more, oh how he loved to make her smile. “And that’s them done really.” She applied another cooling charm. “You can prepare them in advance and keep them cool under a stasis charm until you’re ready to put them in the oven. The real skill is in the baking.”

“I see.” Lucius feigned concern, whilst acknowledging internally that this would be the first and last time he ever made a chocolate fondant if the aching in his arm was anything to go by. “Don’t worry.” Her small hand came to rest on his forearm, she appeared oblivious to the dark mark which writhed beneath her fingers. “It’s actually very simple and all about the timing. Put them in the oven and you’ll see.”

Reluctantly, he turned to pick up the moulds, her hand naturally falling away, leaving him bereft. He placed the tray in the oven, turning quickly to see if he could catch her observing him as he had oogled her the week before. If she had been looking at his arse she had done it subtly enough that he didn’t catch her in the act. She cast a modified Tempus charm and together they stared at the luminous numbers which hung in the air above the oven.

“Would you like a drink?” Lucius’ mouth was curiously dry. “Yes please.” She answered almost before he had finished speaking. He gestured for her to take a seat and found two glasses in the cabinet in the corner. The girl raised
an eyebrow when he placed the bottle of Muggle dessert wine on the table.
“Gloating is a singularly unattractive pastime, Miss Granger.”
She seemed undaunted by his condemnatory tone. “I do apologise, Mr Malfoy, but you have to admit, it is a little amusing. What did you call Muggle wine last time we were together...........disgusting swill?”
He poured them both a generous measure of the yellow liquid. “Yes, well, perhaps my tastes have changed.” He held her eyes as he raised his glass to his lips. “To all things Muggle.”
“To all things Muggle,” she repeated softly, lifting her own glass. “Merlin that’s sweet!” She gave a slight cough as she set the glass down.
Lucius smiled.
“It will taste better when offset by the sweetness of the dessert.” He glanced around at the hovering countdown. Only three minutes remained. Without being instructed he set out two plates with a small ramekin of whipped cream on the side. Hermione looked on approvingly.
“Mr Malfoy, I do believe we shall make a chef of you yet.”

Her wand let out a soft peal and they both jumped a little and laughed. Lucius opened the oven door and removed the tray of deserts. Instantly the rich scent of chocolate intensified in the air around them, he was aware of Hermione, behind him, inhaling deeply.
Remembering her earlier instructions he placed a stasis charm over four of the desserts and, only cursing once as he burned himself, he gently upended the first mould over Hermione’s plate. He held his breath as the pudding slipped out, and gave a satisfied sigh as it sat, intact, on the plate. The second followed suit and he sprinkled coco powder over the two plates before he carried them back to the table and presented them to Hermione with a flourish.
She beamed up at him. “These look wonderful.” Despite her protestations over its sweetness he noticed that her wine was almost finished, her cheeks flushed, from the heat or the alcohol he wasn’t certain. He topped up her glass before he sat down then held her eyes, his spoon poised above the gently steaming dome of chocolate sponge.
“Are you ready?”
She lifted her own spoon. “Ready.”
Together they plunged their spoons down into the dessert, both emitting identical sighs of pleasure when the sponge split open to reveal a slow flowing river of molten chocolate. Lucius savoured the rich flavour on the back of his palate. The pudding was not only delicious but perfectly executed too. The girl really was skilled in the kitchen.
He sipped his wine and watched through his lashes as her small pink tongue licked the sticky chocolate from the spoon. He could imagine all too clearly that soft tongue swirling around the head of his cock, and this time he did nothing to dispel his fantasies or his arousal. It was time to close the deal.
“Thank you, Miss Granger, you have outdone yourself.” He placed his spoon down on the empty plate and topped up her wine glass again. She didn’t complain and mirrored his action, although not before sweeping her finger across the chocolate on her plate and placing it between her lips. It was an artless gesture, but not one that was lost on Lucius, he parted his legs slightly under the table, allowing his burgeoning erection room to grow.

“So what happens next?”
He was surprised when the girl broke the comfortable silence between them. She toyed with the stem of her wine glass, her eyes, as dark as the chocolate they had just eaten, fixed on his face.
“What do you want to happen next?”
Her response surprised him. “I don’t know, Mr Malfoy, it’s your seduction. Do you need me for anything else?”
With a start, he realised they were rather at cross purposes. She was still focussed on his fictional seduction of an imaginary woman. Still, he took her interest as a positive sign.
“I’m sure I could make use of you.” He allowed the double entendre to sit in the space between them. He had never met anyone who seemed so impervious to innuendo. If he hadn’t heard her admit to liking him with his own ears he might actually think her disinterested. “Tell me, Miss
Granger,” – he took a sip of his wine and kept his eyes fixed on hers – “why are you so interested in my love life? Surely you must have a beau of your own to keep you out of trouble.”

She stiffened slightly and drained her glass, he upended the bottle into it.

“I’m not seeing anybody at the moment,” her voice was soft and, he fancied, filled with regret. “Really? And what happened to you and Mr Weasley, loves’ young dream?”

She sighed. “It was just that, a dream.” He didn’t interrupt and she appeared to interpret his silence as permission to keep speaking. “He fell in love with someone else. Don’t you condemn him too.” She held up a hand as if to stop him from speaking. “He didn’t do anything wrong. He was perfectly honest with me and ended things before anything happened with the other woman.” She sighed again. “She’s a Quidditch player too. She has very muscular thighs according to The Prophet.” She glanced down at her own legs, as if disappointed their slenderness. Lucius hoped she didn’t investigate things beneath the table too thoroughly, just across from her, his erection was showing no signs of subsiding.

“He’s an idiot,” Lucius responded, unconsciously echoing the words of his son and privately thinking that Weasley’s love didn’t count for much if his behaviour the other night in the club had been anything to go by. “You must miss him though.” He was surprised, and impressed, at how sympathetic he sounded.

Hermione gave a wan smile. “I miss having someone around I suppose, it gets lonely cooped up in my flat all day with only Crookshanks for company. Crookshanks is my cat,” she clarified seeing the confusion in his eyes. “But sometimes I feel grateful for the peace, I can get so much more done without Ron under my feet.” She looked almost guilty at the admission.

“But what about the physical side of things, you must miss that surely?” Lucius felt like a hunter circling his prey.

Her cheeks pinked a little more and her tongue nervously darted out to wet her lips. “Oh I don’t really miss it that much.” She fiddled with her hair which was haphazardly secured on top of her head. “I don’t think I’m a particularly sexual person really.” She said the last part almost defiantly and looked angry when Lucius let out a snort of laughter.

“That, my dear, simply means that you have yet to experience the true pleasures of the flesh.”

“On the contrary,” she stared him down. “I have experienced plenty of pleasure, Mr Malfoy. It is simply the case that my mind is on a higher plane.”

“Really?” Lucius rose smoothly from his chair and circled the table to loom over her. She looked up at him, fearfully. “You’ve experienced pleasure with Weasley have you?”

“Of course.” She seemed determined not to be intimidated by him despite the fact that he now towered over her.

“And how would you respond if I told you Weasley was an idiot, no more able to pleasure a woman than he is able to make the first team?” He kept his voice smooth, watching the agitated rise and fall of her breasts beneath her thin blouse.

“Then I’d say you have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about and are a conceited, pompous, arrogant prig to boot!”

He didn’t even flinch at her words. They were the final death throes of a wounded animal, about to succumb to the inevitable.

“Strong words Miss Granger.” He ran the tips of his fingers along the line of her jaw and watched with satisfaction as she trembled slightly at his touch. “But I don’t think you have any idea what you’re talking about.” He removed his hand. “I’m willing to bet I could give you more pleasure right now, with one hand tied behind my back than Weasley did in all the years you were together.”

“Really?” She scoffed. “Your arrogance is astounding. What exactly would you be willing to wager on such a thing?”

Lucius smiled as he prepared to close the net. “A month’s unrestricted access to my library, perhaps.” He said the words airily as if he cared little if she even heard his response. Her sharp intake of breath indicated she had.

“Let me get this quite clear, Mr Malfoy.” She sounded as if she were in the courtroom. “You are
wagering that you, with one hand tied behind your back, would use the other to, ahem” – she paused and reddened slightly – “stimulate me. Should I not experience greater pleasure than I ever have before at your, no doubt masterful, touch then you will give me unrestricted access to your library for the next month. Am I correct?"

He hesitated. He had spoken in haste; he hadn’t intended to make such a crass gesture as a bet. He had planned to woo her to his bed, not finger her in his kitchen. Yet he was not a man who willingly ignored an opportunity and this one was surely too good to pass up on. He ignored the mocking tone in her voice. “You are quite correct, Miss Granger, do you accept the wager?”
Hermione took several deep cleansing breaths. She felt hot and dizzy and not herself. Her skin was too tight, she wanted to strip it off and run naked through the kitchen. Ever since he had appeared in the underpass dressed in that blasted suit she had been in trouble. No, that wasn’t true. She had been in trouble long before that. Lucius Malfoy was like a dangerous and potent drug which had somehow entered her system without her knowing. She had no idea how to purge herself of him and even less desire to do so.

She had to play him at his own game. He was still towering over her, using his height to intimidate her. She wouldn’t allow it. She rose to her own feet and closed the distance between them.

“I think I might need a little more from you, Mr Malfoy.” She placed her hand against his chest, trying not to let the heat of his body overwhelm her.

“And what is that?” He was looking down at her, amusement in those clear grey eyes.

“Well, should I be the victor, and I can assure you I shall, I will need more than just access to your library.”

“Is that so?” He sounded intrigued. “What else will you require access to?”

She moved around him, her fingers trailing across the waistband at the top of his trousers, and leaned back against the table, feigning a relaxed and casual posture. “You,” She replied succinctly. She watched his response carefully. His pupils dilated a little and he flicked a tongue across his lips. Hermione could not deny it any longer, all the signs were there. He desired her.

“And what exactly would you do with me, once you had unrestricted access.” He had followed her and braced his arms against the table on either side of her body, effectively trapping her between himself and the table.

“I would use you.” She toyed with the button at the top of his shirt, he had removed the ridiculously sexy grey tie earlier, and undone the top button, her fingers teased the second. His breathing quickened in response to her touch. “I would use you, as my research assistant.” She looked up in time to catch the flash of admiration in his eyes.

“Would you now?” His lips were millimetres from hers. His chocolate scented breath slipped smoothly over her skin. “You seem very sure of yourself, Miss Granger. Don’t you wish to know what you will forfeit if I am successful.”

“You won’t be.” She said the words with absolute conviction. It wasn’t as if she had never been touched there before. It was fine, a pleasant prelude to sex, but not something she particularly enjoyed and certainly not something that would even bring her close to orgasm. “Make your terms, Mr Malfoy.”

He smiled. “Well.” His hand came to rest on her waist, gently stroking the skin just beneath her blouse. “Should I be successful, I should very much like you to cook and serve dinner for me.”

“That seems reasonable.” Hermione was a little breathless at his touch, who knew her flank was an erogenous zone?

“Three courses.”

“I can manage that.”

“Naked.”

“What?” She jumped away from him, her burgeoning arousal briefly forgotten. “You want me to cook naked?”
He shrugged. “I thought you said it would never happen.”
“It won’t.” She gazed up at him. “Very well Mr Malfoy, I accept your terms.”

For a moment, just a moment, he looked non-plussed. Then he smiled, a slow dangerous smile that made Hermione’s toes curl and her belly swoop.
“Very well then, if you would be so kind.” He turned his back to her and folded his left hand behind him. Hermione frowned before she realised his intention, the she drew her wand and cast Incarcerous binding his hand firmly behind him.
“Thank you.” He flexed his fingers as if testing the strength of his binding before he turned to face her once more. “Now if you would remove your clothing.”

Hermione gaped at him. “That wasn’t part of the deal, Mr Malfoy.” She eventually managed to say. She was surprised at how smooth her voice sounded. “You are supposed to be bringing me pleasure beyond measure and I’m supposed to be enjoying it. You didn’t say anything about having to remove my own clothes.”

A muscle flickered in his cheek. “Very well then.” He approached her once more and stepped confidently into her personal space. Hermione backed away until her backside bumped against the kitchen table. Lucius lifted his free hand and very gently brushed a stray curl from her forehead. “I’m going to enjoy this” – his fingers trailed down her cheek and the curve of her neck to rest between her collar bones, his lips were almost touching hers – “almost as much as you are.”
She wanted to say something witty, to puncture him like a balloon and take the wind out of his sails but she was rendered mute purely by his proximity. Heat radiated from his body and she felt it prickling over her skin. It was almost a relief when he slowly began to undo the small pearl buttons on the front of her blouse.

Almost.

She quickly realised that she should have undressed herself. Lucius’ large hand brushed the sides of her breasts as he worked each button free. He was doing it achingly slowly, far more so than was necessary, even taking into account his handicap, and, as he gradually unbuttoned her, his arrogant smiling mouth hovered just above hers.

She tilted her head back, her lips parting in silent invitation. She longed for him to kiss her but he refrained, concentrating on the buttons beneath his nimble fingers.

Two buttons away from having her shirt removed it occurred to Hermione that she was on the brink of yet another underwear related trainwreck. She had not anticipated this turn of events. Any excitement she had felt over seeing Malfoy had purely been related to his ability to translate her scroll. She certainly hadn’t expected him to be seeing her in her unmentionables. This was unfortunate as, when she had been unable to locate a clean white bra that morning, she had simply put on her bikini top instead. Why, oh why, had she done that? Why hadn’t she chosen a different blouse and perhaps teamed it with the beautiful pink lacy set that she had bought in an attempt to patch things up with Ron? Or at least put on the serviceable black bra that matched her lacy knickers?

Lucius eased apart the sides of her blouse and gazed at her, his face expressionless.

“Were you planning a swim, Miss Granger?”

She avoided his gaze. “No….I….It’s…”

“Don’t tell me” – his fingers caressed the back of her neck – “it’s washing day?”

“Something like that.” She gave a small gasp as he found the knot that secured her top in place and gave it a swift tug. The two triangles of white fabric sagged over her small breasts but remained stalwartly in place, protecting her dignity for a few more moments. Undeterred Lucius slid his fingers up her spine to find the knot behind her back, he made quick work of it. Still, the bikini held tenaciously, aided by Hermione’s rock hard nipples which appeared to be doing an excellent job as a pair of coat hooks. Lucius hooked his index finger underneath the string between the two triangles and gave it a gentle tug. The intrepid garment gave in to the inevitable and slid off her body and onto the floor.

Hermione stood motionless and watched Lucius looking at her breasts. His gaze was intense and
hungry and she shivered under the scrutiny, almost letting out a cry of surprise when he dropped gracefully to his knees.

His warm fingers curved around the back of her ankle, caressing her softly as they made their way slowly up her leg. He paused to explore the inside of her knee. Hermione hadn’t even known this was an erogenous zone, but she moaned with pleasure as his thumb moved over the delicate flesh. Then he was moving higher, his fingers explored the curve of her buttocks, his thumb her inner thigh. He was so close she could feel his breath against her crotch. Her sex felt hot and heavy and full and she unwittingly parted her legs further, longing for him to touch her. He didn’t. Instead, his long fingers skimmed over her knickers, hooking into the waistband and working their way around, gradually pulling down the fabric in tiny, tiny increments. Hermione moaned again. She could smell her own arousal, scenting the air with its rich musk, it only added to her excitement.

Her knickers joined her bikini top on the floor and Lucius lifted the front of her skirt bringing himself face to face with her genitals. Hermione stared down at him, her lower lip caught between her teeth. He was an arresting sight, his blond hair still caught back away from his face, his own narrow lips slightly parted as he leaned even closer and inhaled deeply. Slowly, deliberately he reached up and tucked the front of her skirt into the waistband leaving her completely exposed.

He came once more to his feet without the creaking and groaning one might have expected from a man of his age. Again he hovered over her, his lips just a hair's breadth from her own. Hermione leaned in toward him, her eyelids fluttering shut, her lips parting. She ached for the feel of his lips on hers.

“I’m not going to kiss you.”

She felt his fingers, stroking her lips.

“Why not?” Was that breathy, husky voice hers? She barely recognised herself.

“Kissing wasn’t part of the deal.” He whispered the words across her cheek. “I can’t have you complaining that I won under false pretences, can I?”

“No,” Hermione gasped, not quite sure what she was denying, but bitterly disappointed not to feel his arrogant mouth on hers.

The heat was overwhelming her now, she felt a trickle of sweat bead up from between her breasts and begin to tumble down her abdomen. Lucius’ finger chased it and he brought the moist droplet to his lips.

“You want me to touch you don’t you?”

“Yes.” There was no point in denying it. Her body was on fire.

“Here?” His fingers traced the undersides of her breasts.

“Yes.” Her voice was little more than a whisper.

Suddenly his hand was gone. Her eyes snapped open. He was regarding her with an almost puzzled expression. Finally, he gave a snort and took a step back.

“Turn around.”

Whilst her first instinct was to argue it was rapidly quashed by her desperation to have him touch her again, and she quickly obeyed. Lucius caught her around the waist. He pulled her back flush against his front and leaned himself comfortably against the table, his legs splaying hers wide. Hermione instantly went limp in his arms, her head lolling back against his shoulder as his fingers began to trace the lower slopes of her breasts once more.

“You like that don’t you?” His voice was low and amused in her ear.

“Yes, oh yes, more please.”

His fingers moved a little higher, circling the areola as he refused to touch her aching nipples. She arched her back, thrusting her breasts forward and unintentionally grinding her buttocks against his crotch. They were met by a sizeable erection and she concentrated on that for a moment, circling her backside against his hardness, allowing herself to indulge in the fantasy of what it might feel like if he were to slip inside her.

Finally, his thumb grazed her nipple and she couldn’t contain her moans of pleasure as he rolled the tight bud between thumb and forefinger. Her hand crept back between their bodies to seek out his cock and she cupped it through his trousers, her fingers sliding along the impressive length. Lucius
pinched her nipple painfully, applying so much pressure she was forced away from his body in order to follow the unpleasant tugging sensation.

“That wasn’t part of our deal either, Miss Granger.” His breath in her ear made her shiver. “Unhand me.”

She gave a petulant whimper but removed her hand from him, allowing it to fall to her side. He released her nipple and cupped his warm hand over her entire breast as the blood flowed painfully back into the tip. She felt him smile again as she whimpered and writhed and he applied the same, almost bruising pressure, to her other nipple. Hermione would never have admitted before to enjoying pain but there seemed to be a direct conduit between her nipples and her crotch and, the more he abused the former, the more the latter lubricated itself for him.

He continued to play with her breasts for so long that Hermione thought she might actually orgasm from that sweet torture alone. Her entire body was stimulated by the lean length of him supporting her weight. She was engulfed by the scent and heat of him. Her sex throbbed with arousal as she mindlessly squirmed against him.

His fingers began to creep south. She moaned at the loss of contact with her breasts, although he had left them so stimulated as to be almost painful, and she could still feel his fingers teasing her sensitised nipples. He stroked across her abdomen, tracing the slight protrusion of her hip bones and pausing to circle the indent of her navel as he had done her areola. I was glorious torture. Slowly, slowly, he moved his hand lower and stroked her inner thighs which he found slick with her arousal. He gathered some of the moisture on his fingers and held them up where they could both see his glistening digits.

“You’re so wet.” His sibilant voice in her ear caused a further gush of fluid. “Don’t you wonder what it would be like to have my cock inside you?” He rubbed his fingers against her lower lip, painting her with her own arousal. Hesitantly at first Hermione’s tongue slipped out to taste it. Lucius took her open mouth as an invitation and plunged two fingers between her lips. Instinctively she began to suck them, her tongue laving insistently against him as she lapped up the taste of her own juices. She was gratified to hear Lucius groan and his hips moved behind her, his cock twitching against her ass. With another groan, this time of regret he pulled his fingers away.

“Next time” - his hand rested on her hip drawing her back against him – “I will have both hands, and this” he punctuated his sentence with another thrust against her buttocks – “and I will fuck you so hard you won’t be able to walk for days.” Hermione couldn’t help it she whimpered with longing, pushing herself helplessly back against him. She wanted to beg him to forget their stupid bet. To take her here and now on the kitchen table, but then Lucius’ clever fingers were between her legs and she forgot everything.

At first, he stroked, whisper soft, against her outer lips. She was already open for him, her labia filled with blood and almost painfully swollen. He teased around the outside, his thumb grazing the sides of her clit, never applying the pressure she desired. When she had become practically boneless with want he slid two fingers inside her. He gave a few shallow, lazy thrusts and Hermione pushed back against his hand, longing for him to plunge himself deeply inside her. She almost screamed when he withdrew his fingers, then instantly stilled as they slid higher, coating her clit in her abundant lubrication. It was almost embarrassing how little it took to make her come. Her body was so primed for his touch that as soon as he began to circle those two fingers over her swollen clit, which stood out from its hood like a tiny and very erect cock, she felt herself begin to slip. Her orgasm built and built, tingles racing up her inner thighs and down her belly, her breasts aching and sore. She arched against him, her body rigid and her mind curiously empty as her pussy pulsed over and over again.

“That’s it” – Lucius’ fingers continued to massage her clit, prolonging her, already cataclysmic orgasm – “come for me. Don’t be shy.”

Oh, the sound of his voice was almost enough to make her come again.

“Let me hear how much you want me.”

“I do want you, oh please, please.” She didn’t even really know what she was begging for, whether she wanted him to stop or continue, her whole lower body had become an erogenous zone, millions of tiny nerve endings awoken from a long slumber and she could no longer bear for him to touch her
clit. As if they had a psychic link he removed his fingers from the swollen bud and sheathed them fully inside her.
She did scream then, with pleasure and surprise at his sudden incursion.
“Did you think we were finished?” He sounded amused. “My dear girl, we are only just getting started.”

Oh, Merlin, she was going to die.
He added a third finger and began to fuck her hard, the wet sucking sounds made by his hand and her dripping sex ought to have embarrassed her but they simply added another dimension to her experience. Then he hooked his fingers slightly forward and she almost hit the roof. He had found a spot inside of her that nobody had ever touched before. He slowed his frantic pace, responding to the sounds she made and apparently to some secret langue her body was using to communicate only with him.

“You like that don’t you?”
“Mnhmm.”
“Words Miss Granger, I want to hear your voice.”
“Yes, I like it.”

“Has anybody ever touched you like this before?”
How did he know what she was thinking? “No!” It was an agonised shriek, talking was so difficult when he was stroking over that sweet spot, over and over again.

“Oh, Merlin!” She was about to come again, she could feel it building, as if all her tired muscles were rallying themselves to go once more into the breach. She found herself genuinely afraid of the tide of sensation about to break over her at any moment. “I can’t take it,” she whimpered piteously. “Of course you can.” Just the tip of his tongue touched the shell of her ear and that, combined with the continued pressure of his fingers, pushed her over the edge again. To her relief, her orgasm was not the cataclysm she had feared. Instead, it rolled over her, wave after wave of pleasure, gentle contractions that set her stomach fluttering and her pussy twitching against his fingers which still pumped tirelessly inside her. It lasted forever. She lost all track of time as she leaned her head back against his shoulder, turning her face to bring her lips into contact with the column of his neck. She didn’t dare kiss him, he had made himself very clear regarding her touching him, but she pressed her lips against his warm flesh and inhaled deeply, wanting to breathe him in, her orgasm a multi-sensory extravaganza.

Slowly she came down from the climactic peak. Her body was weak and shaking, her abdominal muscles ached and her legs felt like jelly. Lucius seemed to understand her exhaustion. He withdrew his fingers and gently stroked her outer lips and inner thighs as her heart rate began to slow once more. Gradually his fingers crept backwards; she tensed as he explored her perineum, and gave a squeak of shock as he gently traced her tight puckered hole.

“Let me guess.” His voice caressed her. “Nobody has ever touched you there either.”
“No,” she sighed the word as he continued to circle her anus, not seeking entrance, simply teasing the area. The tiny part of her that retained any independent thought wanted to tell him that she had never desire to be touched there before, and up until that moment she hadn’t. But now? Now he could touch her anywhere, she surrendered herself completely, her brain curiously shut down as he played with her.

“I’m going to make you come again.” His voice was low, almost conversational.
“No.” Hermione answered sleepily. “I can’t.”

“Yes” – his fingers slipped inside her dripping pussy once more – “you can. This time you’re going to scream, you’re going to scream so loudly the house elves will think I’m killing you.”

“I don’t think so.” She allowed her head to loll against him, she was boneless, drifting on waves of residual pleasure, her whole body relaxed.
He grazed her clit with his thumb and she was instantly fully awake, the oversensitized bundle of nerves complaining at his audacity, while the rest of her longed for him to touch it again. His fingers were moving once more inside her and his thumb was gently, ever so gently stroking the sides of her clit, moving up to cover the hood, carefully avoiding her most sensitive spots.
Hermione heard herself moaning as if from a long way away as his thrusts grew more insistent and his fingers hooked forward to stimulate that spot inside her once more. But this time he was rubbing her clit too, and it felt as if he were trying to pinch the most sensitive part of her between his thumb and forefinger. It hurt and it didn’t hurt and she wanted him to stop but she also wanted him to continue forever. And then it was coming; her orgasm was bearing down on her like a runaway train and she flinched in terror because it was too big, too intense for her to even contemplate and she did scream as it hit her. She screamed herself hoarse as her whole body contorted beneath his fingers. Dimly she was aware of Lucius fastening his teeth against her neck and biting hard on the sensitive skin there. She was on fire, she was dying, she was actually going to die, right here in the kitchen. Finally, it subsided. She hung limp against him, wrung out like a damp cloth, sweat pouring down her body, her hair, escaped from its confines and sticking to her face. He was still moving inside her she realised. His fingers gently slipping back and forth, stimulating the small aftershocks which still wracked her body.

Her fingers clutched his forearm; she felt the shift of muscles and tendons beneath the skin as he moved inside her.

“Please, Mr Malfoy….Lucius, please stop.”

“Say it.” He kept up his insistent rhythm, his tongue lapped at the sweat on her neck. She knew exactly what he wanted. “You win,” she admitted weakly.

His fingers stilled and then very gradually he withdrew. She felt bereft without them but also strangely relieved. His arm around her hips had been the only thing holding her up and, without his support, she pitched forwards and fell to her knees on the cool flagstone floor.
Lucius gazed down at the girl on her knees before him. He had never seen her look so subservient before and it excited him, even whilst he immediately rejected the idea of being aroused by having a Muggle girl kneel at his feet. It reminded him too closely of a past he no longer wished to remember. This was not how he had planned things. He hadn’t thought to dominate her, although she had undoubtedly enjoyed what had transpired between them it was hardly the sensual exploration Lucius might have imagined.

His cock pulsed angrily in his trousers, reminding him in no uncertain terms that, whilst the girl might have begged for mercy, his own release had been completely denied. She was leaning forwards, her hands resting on the floor, her spine curved as she drew in great shaking breaths of air. Her blouse was sticking to the skin of her back and tight little curls adhered to the nape of her neck. Her dishevelled state rendered her even more desirable than she had seemed before.

Lucius couldn’t help himself. His fingers found their way to his fly which he swiftly unbuttoned. His cock tumbled out to greet him as soon as the buttons were out of the way, and he wrapped his hand around the aching length, glad to be free of the confines of his trousers.

At first he was content just to stroke himself whilst he gazed down at the girl in front of him. She showed no sign of moving from her position on the floor.

“Stand up, Miss Granger.”

She flinched a little at his words, but obediently scrambled to her feet, still not looking at him, Lucius wasn’t sure if she was avoiding his eyes through shyness, modesty or something else…anger perhaps.

“Hands on the table.”

She glanced over her shoulder then and her eyes widened as she couldn’t fail to witness his hand gently stroking up and down his cock. She tore her eyes away from him and quickly complied, placing both hands flat on the scrubbed surface of the kitchen table.

Lucius stood behind her and purposefully ground against her backside. His cock, this time, nestling
between the cheeks of her buttocks. He leaned forward, covering her body with his own and reached for her wand which lay discarded on the table. He placed it beneath her fingers.

“Release me.”

Her hand clenched around the wood. Her *finite incantatum* was whispered so quietly that he wasn’t sure he actually heard it, but the bonds dropped away, freeing his left hand and he gratefully stretched out his arm the muscles protesting over their prolonged confinement. He brought his hands to her hips, digging his fingers into the soft flesh there. She pressed her buttocks back against him, he smiled and leaned over her once more, bracing one arm on the table beside hers.

“I need your assurance, Miss Granger, that our wager is over, I am the victor, am I not?”

“You are,” her voice was hoarse from screaming.

“Good.” He rocked himself against her again and she caught her breath. “Now, was there anything else you wanted from me?” He kept his voice light, deliberately taunting.

“I...I don’t understand,” she stammered.

He leaned forward, forcing her body down onto the table with his weight, pressing his lips against her ear.

“Wasn’t there something you needed my help with?”

She squirmed until she could turn her head towards him. “How did you know about that?”

“Let’s just say” – he ran his hand over her hip again, not daring to touch between her legs where he suspected she was still a jangling mass of raw nerves – “there are few secrets in the academic community. If there’s something you want, all you have to do is ask.”

“I have a scroll.”

He rather admired her fortitude, it was obvious that she was finding rational speech difficult but she forced the words out anyway.

“I have a scroll that needs translating, my friend told me that you could help.”

“Show me.”

“What?” She raised her head slightly off the table to try and look at him, he did not release her.

“Show me the scroll.”

“I’m a little incapacitated at present.” There was a hint of her usual fire in her voice.

Lucius bit her neck, eliciting a whimper. “You’re a witch are you not? Summon the scroll.” He tapped her fingers which still lay over her wand. He also pulled back a little. She remained bent over the table as his pelvis continued to grind against hers, but she could at least get her elbows underneath herself. She summoned the ugly purple bag while Lucius continued to stroke her hips, rubbing his cock back and forth against her backside just enough to keep himself stimulated.

She drew the scroll out and pushed the bag aside.

“Here.” She handed it up to him.

He leaned forwards again, pinning her beneath him once more as he unfurled it on the table.

“This is exceedingly complex, Miss Granger.” It was, it had taken him weeks to translate.

“Can you read it?”

“Yes, but it’s a lot to ask.” There was a note of sorrow in his voice.

“I’d be very grateful if you could help me.” She sounded desperate, he wasn’t sure if it was from academic fervour, growing arousal or a combination of the two.

“You would?” He feigned disinterest and adjusted his cock so it now slid between her thighs to rub against her, still soaking, pussy. “What might you offer me in return for my assistance?”

She moaned as he began to drag himself backwards and forwards against her open lips.

“What do you want?” Her words were barely more than a whisper.

“I think you know quite well what I want.” He leaned forward once more, flattening her out, allowing himself a taste of the skin at the back of her neck. “I want you to want me.”

“I do want you.” She sounded almost surprised at the admission.

“Then ask me to fuck you.” He was already lining himself up with her channel, ready to drive into her.

“Please fuck me, Mr Malfoy.”
Mr Malfoy, it was on the tip of his tongue to correct her. He’d never had a lover address him so formally before, but there was something exciting and illicit in her continued use of the honorific, it made him feel powerful, even more so than the position in which he held her. He poised, waiting to thrust into her, wanting to savour this first taste of possession.

“Wait!” She tensed slightly beneath him. “Please be gentle.” Her small hand reached out to grasp his wrist, where his hand was braced on the table. Her thumb lay just below the end of his dark mark. He hesitated. Nobody had ever asked him to be gentle before. Perhaps, without meaning to, he sought out this commonality in his lovers. They did not seek tenderness. Pleasure, sensuality and skill; certainly these might be expected of him. But gentleness? He wasn’t sure he even knew how. He began to ease into her, painstakingly slowly. In truth, there would have been no other way to take her. She was so tight and swollen, presumably from her previous orgasms and from his vigorous ministrations, that her vagina was almost too narrow for him to navigate. As it was he was forced to pause several times to allow her to adjust to his size. She whimpered as he filled her. At first he feared that he was causing her pain, but during one of his pauses she thrust back against him in such a manner that suggested she had no desire for him to stop.

Finally, he was sheathed fully within her with the soft swell of her buttocks pressed against his lower belly. It felt divine. She was hot and tight and delightfully welcoming. Lucius was painfully reminded that he had not had sex since before the beginning of the second Wizarding war and if he were not very careful this delicious encounter was going to be over before it even properly began. He gazed at the range and mentally began to recite the ingredients of chocolate fondant.

“Are you alright?” Her voice was constricted, presumably by his crushing weight holding her against the table.

“I’m fine.” He took several deep breaths, hoping that she would not question him further. She remained silent but she did wriggle her hips invitingly against him. He shifted his weight to pin her even more firmly against the table.

She huffed out a sigh. “Mr Malfoy?”

“Yes.” He was beginning to regain his equilibrium and allowed himself to press a kiss against her neck.

“You’re being too gentle.” She shifted again and this time he allowed it. Gradually he began to withdraw, still leaning over her, still pressing teasing kisses onto her flushed skin. When he had pulled out almost completely he eased himself back in once more. She sighed again, this time with pleasure. He continued to stroke in and out of her, his confidence increasing as she adapted to his girth. She kept up a barrage of tiny sounds all of which indicated her extreme approval of his actions and, almost unconsciously, he began to move more rapidly inside her. He was so hard now; harder than he’d ever been in his life. His cock felt like it might explode at any moment. He could feel his balls drawing up and the base of his spine beginning to tingle in anticipation of his impending orgasm. It wasn’t enough though, he wanted her to come with him. Already she was writhing in ecstasy beneath him, mindlessly chanting his name and begging for more but he wanted to feel her contracting around him as she lost control fully.

He pushed two fingers, still coated with her, now dried, secretions against her lips. She opened them willingly and sucked hard, her tongue flickering over his fingers as she had done before. He wondered if she had guessed what he intended or if she simply enjoyed sucking on his fingers. Either way, when he withdrew them from her mouth they were slick with her saliva and he lowered them to between her legs where he unerringly found her clitoris.

She gave a little wail as he began to rub at the swollen bud but, judging from the continued gyrations of her hips, she was enjoying his actions even if she were still oversensitised from earlier. He hadn’t been certain she would be capable of coming again. He had left her for too long and her final orgasm had been so immense he had almost thought she was going to pass out. Already though he could feel
the, now familiar, fluttering in her pussy, infinitely more pleasurable around his cock than they had been around his fingers. Her breathing too was beginning to give her away, her moans becoming more ragged as she let out short, rapid pants.

“Harder.”
Lucius almost stopped his thrusting. “I beg your pardon?” Had she not been extolling him to be gentle only a short while ago?

“Please, Mr Malfoy, fuck me harder, I’m going to come.”

He wanted to tease her, he really did, but he was close to the end of his tether and the urge to pound into her willing flesh as hard as he could was simply too strong. He shifted his weight, one hand gripping her hip and the other pinning her to the table by the back of her neck. He snapped his hips back and forth, enjoying the slick sounds of her pussy swallowing his cock and his balls slapping against her thighs. She felt divine, her hot wet sheath clenched around him like a warm welcoming fist. He ignored the ache in his lower back and the cramp in his thighs, focussing on nothing but slamming into her as hard as physically could.

Then she was screaming. Eclipsing even the sounds she had made during her previous orgasm as she began to clench around him, the force of her orgasm almost bruising in its intensity. Lucius had fond ideas of riding her raw for the rest of the night, unfortunately these were thwarted by the relentless pulsing of her vagina, coupled with her wails of pleasure and the helpless backward thrusting of her hips. Before he could stop himself he exploded inside her, ramming his cock right up against her cervix as what felt like an implausible amount of his seed gushed out to coat her tight walls.

They remained locked together for an indeterminate length of time. Lucius felt physically incapable of moving. His entire body was limp and exhausted and hers beneath him felt so soft and warm and welcoming.

“I can’t breathe,” she whispered apologetically.

He raised himself slightly off her, pressing his lips against the back of her neck which was once more damp with sweat. Reluctantly, he straightened up and tucked himself away, doing up his trousers and retucking his shirt.

Hermione turned to face him uncertainly, her own hands going immediately to the front of her blouse which she began to button with more haste than accuracy.

“That was erm…” She untucked the front of her skirt from its waistband and reached behind her for her wand. “…very educational, thank you, Mr Malfoy. I apologise for taking up so much of your time.” She raised a trembling hand to her hair which looked wilder even than Bella’s ever had. “I had better be going.” She refused to meet his eye, summoning the ugly purple bag and walking backwards towards the door, her wand held slightly in front of her as if she feared she might need to ward off his further advances.

“It was no trouble, I can assure you.” He finally found his voice. He wanted to reach out to her, to suggest that they retire to the library for a while and after that to his bed, or to the sofa, he didn’t particularly care. Somehow he found himself unable to articulate the words. She seemed so desperate to leave that he suddenly lacked the confidence to convince her to stay. “I shall owl you when I’m finished.”

She looked blankly at him and he gestured to the scroll which still lay, forgotten, on the table. “The translation,” he reminded her.

“Yes, of course. Thank you, I can’t tell you how grateful I am. Really. I’m sorry I must go, I have an appointment with my….erm chiropractor.” She turned then and fled, actually fled. Lucius stared after her, too surprised to mount his pursuit.

Slowly he lowered himself to sit once more at the kitchen table, staring incredulously at the spot where, moments before he had brought Hermione Granger to her fourth orgasm of the afternoon. After a moment he wandlessly summoned the remaining chocolate fondants and began to eat one
straight out of the mould. He still couldn’t quite believe she had left like that. Lucius Malfoy was not the sort of man woman walked out on. He mindlessly began to eat another dessert. Maybe he was losing his touch – surely not. He had made her come four times, no woman could ask for more. Hermione Granger was an ungrateful wretch, her surmised; she would not be allowed to escape so easily. He simply needed another plan.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the back to back smut! I promise we’ll get back to the plot (such as it is) next chapter.
Indigestion

Chapter Summary

Because even the most satisfying dish can leave you with a nasty taste in your mouth.

Hermione cursed under her breath as the fluid she was measuring overflowed the cylinder onto her fingers. She’d smell of Armadillo bile for days now. She cursed again when she realised that her subconscious had immediately segued into wondering if Lucius Malfoy would be offended by the odour. Malfoy senior had appeared, unbidden, in her thoughts all too frequently over the last few days. She had never been one for daydreaming, but Lucius seemed to inveigle his way into her synapses with alarming alacrity.

It didn’t matter what she was doing; preparing ingredients, serving customers or ostensibly working on her thesis, any activity was subject to immediate disruption by thoughts of Malfoy, and not just any thoughts. Oh no! She replayed their encounter in the kitchen at Malfoy Manor endlessly. Over and over he pinched her aching nipples until she screamed, or bent her over the table and impaled her on his oversized penis. Or, most embarrassingly, traced the outline of her anus, quite correctly surmising that nobody had ever done such a thing before. She began to think she was suffering from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. Sudden erotic flashbacks would intrude into every mundane activity.

If only the whole thing hadn’t been so oppressively, achingly wonderful. Of course, it was overlaid by a sticky coat of humiliation. He had taken her belief that she was an experienced woman and quite thoroughly turned it on its head. She had come undone so completely under his ministrations that there was absolutely no denying how mind blowing the encounter had been. She felt like a gauche school girl, and if there was one thing Hermione did not like, it was being made to feel foolish. When she allowed herself to consider their interaction fully she worried that it had not been pleasurable for Lucius. She had come four times. Four times! There had been months with Ron in which she had orgasmed less. Lucius had only climaxed once and, whilst she realised that men and woman had very different physiology, she keenly felt the imbalance. Furthermore, he had demonstrated a whole battery of advanced sexual skills. She, in comparison, had been nothing more than a willing recipient; if she had been awarding herself a NEWT grade she would have been an Acceptable at best.

She couldn’t doubt that Lucius had wanted her. She supposed that the whole bet could have arisen from a desire to humiliate and denigrate her, but he had clearly wanted the sex that had followed. He had even used his abilities as a translator to coerce her into the act, although his coercion had been completely unnecessary. She would have allowed him to take any number of liberties with her body at that particular point in time and sexual favours in exchange for his translation skills had been nothing more than a convenient excuse. In fact, she wondered if she could ask him for further assistance with her thesis in exchange for more sex. It seemed a grossly unfair trade to her. She would have access to his impressive intellect and his even more impressive body, not to mention his obviously extensive arsenal of bedroom techniques; in return, he would get an in-experienced and slightly shy bookworm with an encyclopaedic knowledge of potions ingredients, whose first time having sex anywhere other than in a bed had been with him. It seemed an unfairly weighted exchange to Hermione.
And yet, she was comforted by the idea that Lucius had obviously manipulated her into sleeping with him. She was under no illusions as to the fact that she had been expertly set up. She suspected that the entire dessert episode had been engineered in order for Lucius to seduce her. She felt rather smug at her deductions, at least in their future interactions she would be one step ahead of him.

She began to cut her ginger roots and gave a tiny shudder as she considered her next encounter with Lucius. What on earth had she been thinking to make a bet like that with a Slytherin? The answer was that she hadn’t been thinking at all. She had been drunk, not just on the wine but on his intoxicating personality. She had wanted him to touch her and it had led her into a foolish bet which she hadn’t expected to lose. Now she would have to face the consequences like the brave Gryffindor she purported herself to be. Although running away after he shagged her hadn’t been very brave. She’d legged it as soon as she was able to stand independently; she wasn’t proud of her behaviour but she’d been so toe-curlingly embarrassed by the whole sordid affair and so overwhelmed by the entire experience that escape had seemed like the best option. Unfortunately, her escape would be short lived. She scraped the ginger root into the cauldron and began to rapidly stir the potion in an anti-clockwise direction, all the while trying not to think what it would be like to cook naked in the kitchen of Malfoy Manor.

Did he really mean for her to do it? She still found it hard to believe that a man such as Lucius desired her physically. Maybe he had just wanted to embarrass her but had got a little carried away during the process. Or maybe, for some bizarre reason, he really did fancy her. Either way, she was still going to end up cooking dinner in her short and curlies, she cringed at the thought even as her belly curled with desire.

She glanced down in horror as the potion before her gave an ugly sounding belch. She had only just realised it was a sludgy brown and not the clear blue she was expecting. With a sigh, she vanished the contents. It wasn’t like her to wool-gather but this was the second batch of Wit-Sharpening potion she had cocked up that morning.

She was about to start a third when she heard a commotion in the shop above her and the sound of voices wafted across the quite room. “I shouldn’t have to remind you that these are business premises, Potter, not some sort of social enterprise for emotionally stunted renegades.” “Nice to see you too Professor, I won’t keep her long.” The door to the lab opened and the skinny, bespectacled figure of Harry Potter appeared in her peripheral vision. “Harry.” Hermione placed the vial of Armadillo bile on the bench and flung her arms around her friend. “Where have you been?” It had been almost two weeks since she had last seen him, an age by their standards. Harry tapped the side of his nose mysteriously. “If I told you I’d have to kill you.” At Hermione’s less than impressed face he gave a long sigh. “Ministry business, political unrest in Hungary, nothing particularly exciting but we said we’d lend a hand policing their general election.” “Oh.” It didn’t sound very interesting. Hermione had no wish to involve herself in any more political turmoil, she’d had enough of that to last her a lifetime. “We ended up leaving very suddenly though.” Harry took a seat on the stool in front of her cauldron and looked inside. “What’s this supposed to be?” “It is the base for a Wit-Sharpening potion,” she told him primly, ignoring, for the moment that yet again it didn’t appear quite right. “Fair enough.” Harry’s potions OWL did not equip him to argue with her. “Well anyway, as I was saying we ended up leaving in a bit of a hurry, which is a shame because I wanted to talk to you about something.” Hermione fixed him with a grim stare. “Harry, if this is about me and Ron you need to let it go, we’ve both told you it’s over.”
“It’s not about you and Ron.” Harry held up his hands placatingly. “It couldn’t be further from that, honest. It’s about you and Malfoy.”

Hermione felt the colour drain from her face. How could he possibly know? The only thing Harry was worse at than Occlumency was Legilimency, there was no way he could have seen her thoughts, and surely Lucius wouldn’t want to boast about the fact that he’d shagged a Mudblood. “What about me and Malfoy?” She kept her voice as steady as possible. “I had a really weird conversation with Malfoy senior.”

Fuck! “When?”

“Just before I left” – Hermione let out a sigh of relief. That was long before she had sexual relations with the man – “I wanted to come and speak to you straight away but, as I said, I got tied up with work.”

“Speak to me about what?” He doesn’t know, she chanted internally, he doesn’t know, don’t give anything away.

“I think Malfoy senior wants to set you up with Draco.” The blade of Hermione’s knife sliced into her finger. She wailed with pain and there was a flurry of activity as Harry produced a scrunched paper handkerchief with which to stem the bleeding before Hermione cast a quick healing charm. When everything was calm again she decided against doing any more chopping and fixed her entire attention on her friend. “What makes you think that, Harry?”

“He told me.”

“I find that very hard to believe, Draco’s with Astoria, Mr Malfoy knows that.”

Harry shrugged. “I can only tell you what he said to me, he was definitely sounding you out as a future partner for Draco. He even said he wanted to take the two of you out for dinner together, to show his approval or something like that.”

“But Mr Malfoy hates me, I’m a Mudblood.”

Harry’s green eyes flashed with anger. “Don’t call yourself that. Even Malfoy wouldn’t dare to these days. You have to admit, Hermione, it makes sense.”

“Does it?”

He nodded fervently. “Of course it does. Astoria’s a lovely girl but she’s a pureblood, marrying her won’t do anything for the Malfoy name. If Draco marries you, and Lucius and Narcissa get behind it, it shows the world that the Malfoy’s have renounced their previous views. It would go a long way toward their rehabilitation.”

Hermione pressed her hand against her forehead. “But I don’t want to marry Draco and I don’t think he wants to marry me either.”

“Well, of course, you don’t.” Harry rolled his eyes. “I admit Draco’s almost a decent human being these days but he’ll always be a slimy little ferret as far as I’m concerned.”

Hermione sighed. Now was not the time to defend Draco to Harry. “I’m not your problem, Malfoy is.” Harry hopped off his stool. “If he’s made up his mind to set you up with Draco it’s going to be pretty difficult to dissuade him.”

Hermione was about to respond when the door to the lab flew open, crashing against the wall, and Severus Snape entered in full potion master’s billow.

“Mr Potter,” his voice dripped with insincerity. “I do apologise for interrupting your undoubtedly scintillating discussion, but might I remind you once more that this is Miss Granger’s place of work and not the Gryffindor common room?”

“I do apologise Professor.” If anything Harry’s voice was even less sincere than Snape’s. “I was just leaving anyway. Hermione I’ll see you for dinner at the Burrow on Sunday, right?”

“Of course.” Hermione pecked Harry on the cheek, unperturbed by Snape’s glower. She had lost her fear of him somewhere around the time she had watched him die.

Harry retreated from the room leaving Hermione alone with her employer.
“How is the Wit-Sharpening potion coming along, Miss Granger?”
Hermione winced. He only called her that when he was in a particularly foul mood.
“It’s coming along, Sir.” There was no point in antagonising him further.
He glanced into the cauldron and gave her a filthy look. “This is not up to your usual standard, do I need to send Mr Zabini to assist you?”
“Absolutely not, Sir.” Hermione straightened her spine. “I’ve had a few problems this morning but I’ll have the batch finished before lunchtime I promise.”
“See that you do.” Snape gave a disparaging sniff as he turned to sweep out of the lab once more.
He paused at the foot of the stairs. “And since you’ve been entertaining gentlemen down here during working hours I’m sure you won’t be taking your lunch break anyway.”
“Heard that,” his voice echoed on the stairwell.
Hermione sighed loudly and tried to focus on the Wit-Sharpening potion. She felt badly in need of a dose. Harry’s words had further befuddled her. What on earth was Lucius playing at? He had come to see Harry prior to his seduction of her and announced his desire for Draco to court her? It didn’t make sense. If he wanted her for his son why had he slept with her? Could it be some sort of weird pureblood ritual where the father tested out the son’s bride on his behalf? Hermione had never heard of such a thing and it made her feel slightly nauseated. Was Draco going to be present to witness the naked dinner cooking too? She hoped not. She was fond of the ferret but she had no desire to bump uglies with him.

Her thoughts flitted frantically from one idea to another whilst her nerve endings tingled with the sensual thrill which had been present since her encounter with Lucius. Before she knew what was happening she had spoiled yet another potion.

Lucius was feeling uninspired. It had been three days since he’d had the girl and Merlin’s beard he wanted her again, badly. He tried to keep himself busy but whenever he paused in any action he was assaulted by her memory. He was haunted by the silky texture of her skin beneath his fingers, the ripples of her belly that preceded each orgasm, the clench of her sex around his cock as she wailed his name.

Despite his rich and varied sexual history, it had been the singularly most pleasing encounter of his entire life.

But it was not enough, not nearly. He craved her again, like a drug and try as he might he could not fathom how he was going to have her.

Obviously, she had left him the perfect in. She had lost their bet and was, therefore, duty bound to cook naked for him at a time of their mutual agreement. This was all very well, and Lucius had spent several pleasurable hours in the shower stroking himself to completion over the image of the girl teetering around his kitchen naked but for a pair of obscenely high heels. However, he suspected Miss Granger would not view the situation with quite the same lascivious pleasure as he. He had gleaned enough of her personality to realise that she was sexually inexperienced and not particularly confident in her own skin. Of course, she had become spectacularly disinhibited on his kitchen table, but he suspected that she would be embarrassed to recollect those moments and not easily able to recapture the freedom that had allowed her to beg him for what she wanted. He feared that her nudity would, in fact, be a barrier to their continued relations rather than a conduit.

Why could he not simply declare his intentions as he would with any other woman? He could write her a letter perhaps; detailing his fantasies, or surprise her at work and whisper lewd suggestions in her ear whilst Severus wasn’t looking. No! He couldn’t do it. He couldn’t risk her rejection. Was it because she was Muggleborn? Would being turned down by a Mudblood be worse than any other witch? He mentally shied away from the thought that it was not her blood status that fed his fear; that it was being rejected by Hermione that he dreaded.

He wandered the empty halls of his ancestral home constantly pondering his dilemma. Time and time
again he found himself in the kitchen, running his fingers over the surface of the table as if the wood might be ingrained with the girl’s essence. Eventually, he opened one of the books he had had his house elves procure and carefully laid out the necessary ingredients on the table before him. He secured his hair at the nape of his neck, removed his robes and rolled up his shirtsleeves. All of the actions somehow made him feel closer to the girl, the memory of her presence like a balm upon his jangling nerves. Hesitantly at first, but with growing confidence, he began to measure and combine the ingredients and almost before he knew what he was doing he was kneading bread dough, lost in the soothing, mindless task.

He winced as he felt the wards of the manor shift. There were only two wizards who could brush the ancient magic aside as if it were merely a cobweb. Both had died; it just so happened that one had remained a little less dead than the other. It was excruciatingly painful for Lucius, the head of the house, to feel the protective spells disregarded in such a way and he knew, without a doubt, that the interloper would be fully cognisant of his discomfort. He resumed his kneading and waited patiently for Severus Snape to make his presence known.

Eventually, the dark wizard billowed into the kitchen, his habitual sneer deteriorating into a scowl when he caught sight of Lucius.

“What on earth are you doing?”

Lucius glanced down at his flour covered hands and gave a nonchalant shrug. “I’m making pizza dough.”

“Since when did you even know what pizza is?” Snape stood a safe distance away from the worktop, his arms folded across his chest.

Lucius shrugged again. “Since you mentioned it to me. I had my house elf procure me this instructive manual.” He motioned with his elbow in the direction of the cookbook he had propped on the worktop.

Snape shook his head his expression a mixture of pity and disgust. “Oh how the mighty have fallen,” he muttered half under his breath. “Miss Granger is here I presume?”

“No!” Lucius felt rather affronted at the suggestion.

“I am perfectly capable of cooking without her assistance.” He held up the dough pulling the fibres gently apart to see if it had become transparent. “Indeed.”

Severus fell silent but Lucius could feel his disapproving gaze upon him as he rolled out the dough onto a tray and covered it with Clingfilm.

“Perhaps we might retire to a more comfortable location now?”

Lucius wondered how Snape could make a request seem more like a command even when the man was a guest in his house.

“Of course.” He quickly washed his hands and gestured for his friend to precede him out of the kitchen. He might love Severus like a brother but that didn’t mean he trusted the man with his exposed back.

They entered Lucius’ study, where Severus immediately made a beeline for the most expensive Cognac and poured himself a healthy measure.

“I’ll just help myself then shall I?” Lucius said churlishly, as Severus pointed his wand at the fireplace despite the heat of the day. “Please do make yourself at home,” he added.

“I have come to discuss Miss Granger.” Severus seated himself by the, now roaring, fire and took a hefty swallow of his purloined drink. He fixed Lucius with a gimlet eye.

“What about her?” Lucius allowed himself a small measure and elected to remain standing.

“I specifically remember warning you that I would not tolerate your interference with my apprentice.”

“I don’t remember anything of the sort.”

Severus snorted, inelegantly. “I threatened you with untold horrors if you were to reduce her productivity.”

“Ah yes.” Lucius examined his nails. “Well, I don’t see how I could possibly have done so, I’ve
barely seen the chit since we last spoke, and when I have it’s been to provide her with assistance with her research.”

“I would suggest you’ve done a lot more than look at her.” Severus took a mouthful of Cognac.

“And the only research you’ve helped her with regards the contents of your trousers. The girl is absolutely useless. She’s mooning around like some sort of lovesick hen. At this point, you would probably make a better apprentice than she.”

Lucius tried and failed to contain a smug grin. “Severus, how can you possibly accuse me so? You said yourself that Miss Granger was much too intelligent to fall for my questionable charms. Are you now refuting your own assertions?”

“You know I am,” Severus snapped.

Lucius flicked his hair over his shoulder. “Well then, either Miss Granger is considerably less intelligent than you thought her to be or I am considerably more charming, which is it?”

“Neither, or perhaps both, I hardly care.” Severus rose to his feet and began to pace in an agitated manner. “Lucius I would ask you to be serious for a moment.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow.

“I realise you view the girl as another conquest; an itch which you desire to scratch, but I must ask that you desist in your pursuit of her.”

“But why, Severus? Surely you don’t want her?”

“Of course not.” Severus actually shuddered at the suggestion. “I can assure you any interest I have in Miss Granger is purely platonic. However, I must admit to having grown… fond of the girl. She is not the sort of woman with whom you usually associate and I fear that any liaison with you will only end in misery for her.”

“I can assure you that our last meeting was not in any way miserable for her,” Lucius said with a hint of smugness. “Quite the opposite in fact.”

“This is exactly what I am talking about, Lucius, Miss Granger does not do things by half, she does not engage in casual assignations. She will not be able to simply walk away from whatever there is between you, you run the risk of doing her permanent damage.”

Lucius took several deep slow breaths, a technique Narcissa had once suggested as an alternative to kicking the house elves. It settled him a little. “I’m afraid my relationship with Miss Granger is nothing to do with you, Severus. I shall proceed towards her as I see fit.”

“But –”

“I shan’t discuss it any further,” he spoke in his most autocratic tone and raised his hand as he did so. “You are my oldest friend and I am deeply grateful for the lengths you went to in order to protect my son during the war, nonetheless, it is you who owes me the life debt and not the other way around, you have no right to ask anything of me.”

“Very well then.” His friend readied himself to leave in a flurry of billowing black robes. “But do not come crying to me when this affair blows up in your face. I beg you to consider what I have said today and to remember that Miss Granger is deeply loved by our nation as a whole. An insult to her will be considered an insult to the Wizarding World in general.”

Lucius was left alone as Severus demonstrated his utter contempt for the wards of the Manor and Apparated directly out of the study. He made his way back to the kitchen where he was delighted to see that his pizza base had risen well in the proving drawer.

He tried to pretend that his feelings were not hurt and that Severus’ complete lack of faith in his character had not cut him to the quick. Was he really such a reprehensible human being that even his best friend didn’t trust him to treat a woman properly? He was unwilling to admit, even to himself that his intentions towards the witch were not exactly honourable. Up until this point, he had been a slave to his own desires and had manipulated his relationship with the girl entirely to his own ends. He supposed that he could desist in his pursuit, leave her alone and let some fine upstanding ministry employee taken his place. He rejected the thought as soon as it flitted into his consciousness. He had
lived the last four years almost entirely in black and white. Miss Granger’s presence in his kitchen had flipped a switch inside his head bathing his subconscious with colour. He felt energised and motivated, even if it was simply by lust. He felt as if he had recaptured something of the essence of his previous self, and he feared that, without Miss Granger and his bizarre, convoluted courtship of her, he would once more sink into apathy and depression.

He shook his head firmly, he needed this, whatever it was and he would not agonise any further over his actions. Instead, he followed the recipe in front of him. He reduced tomatoes and onions over a low heat and spread the resultant mixture over the dough base with a variety of vegetables, cured meats and cheeses. The process was strangely soothing and by the time he had slipped the pizza into the oven he had already decided on his future course of action. He summoned a quill and parchment and sat down at the kitchen table to compose a letter.
Pique-nique

Chapter Summary

In which the inimitable Camomile Jones does Lucius' dirty work for him.

Hermione’s fingers trembled as she untied the heavy packet of parchment from the owl’s leg. Such was the magnificence of the delivery bird that it could only have come from Lucius; she was awash with anticipation and trepidation regarding the contents of his letter.

She absentmindedly fed the owl a digestive biscuit as she sorted through and smoothed out the parchments. She purposefully set aside the accompanying letter, choosing instead to skip straight to the translation. Lucius’s ostentatious writing covered the sheets, a scrawl of green ink which, despite its outward appearance of beauty, was almost unintelligible in places. Fortunately, Hermione had endured years of deciphering Severus’ dreadful writing and she quickly acclimatised to Lucius’ less angry looking efforts.

Hours later, she straightened up, rubbing her hands against the base of her spine and flexing her cramped fingers. She had filled page after page with detailed notes and still she needed to read the entire thing again in order to fully understand the information contained there. The extent of the knowledge of the Trollish race was truly humbling. It wasn’t just the unique plants which grew in the almost impenetrable mountain ranges of Finland and Austria; the trolls were incredibly knowledgeable regarding potions ingredients used in Wizarding society too. Hermione felt both elated and disappointed at the same time. Whilst the translation had moved her research forward several steps it had raised more questions than it had answered. The overflowing notebook beside her was filled with hypotheses and speculations which she had absolutely no way of proving.

Such had been her preoccupation with her research that Hermione had managed to almost completely forget about Lucius’ letter. At least that was what she had told herself each time her eyes strayed in the direction of the heavy parchment sealed with the Malfoy crest. Did everything about the man have to be so overdone? She wondered as she slid a finger beneath the green wax. She dropped the parchment as if it had burnt her, she couldn’t read what it said without the crutch of a strong cup of tea.

English Breakfast at her elbow (it was simply too stressful a situation for anything other than a strong builder’s brew) she unfolded the letter.

My Dear,
I hope you are satisfied with the enclosed translation. It was extremely challenging and I worked around the clock to complete it in a timely manner. Please excuse any errors you may have spotted.
I’m sure I need not remind you of the terms of our bet. I am looking forward with much anticipation to sampling your fare and, if you do not have a prior engagement, I suggest that we might continue with our Saturday afternoon tradition.
Lucius

Hermione took a fortifying sip of tea as she considered his words. Did he have to make everything sound so lascivious? He had obviously not forgotten the terms of their bet and was not going to do the gentlemanly thing and release her from her obligation to him. At least he hadn’t made any overt allusion to their tryst, but she could hardly expect him to remain silent on the matter forever, and nor
did she want him too. Her libido had been thoroughly stirred up by her afternoon at Malfoy Manor and her small range of battery operated implements were barely able to keep up with her new found passions.

She only wished that she did not feel so uncertain about the whole thing. She longed for the sexual confidence of Ginny who would probably take great pleasure in stripping off her clothes and sashaying around the kitchen. For Hermione, whilst the thought of Lucius’ hot gaze roaming her naked body, caused her to tingle in all the right places, it also, unfortunately caused her to tremble in fear.

She drank some more tea absent mindedly tracing the Malfoy crest with her finger tip. She wished she could speak to somebody about Lucius, Ginny in particular would be able to offer some sound advice, but it was impossible; none of her friends would approve of her dalliance with the man. They all, save for Draco, hated him, and she could hardly see Draco looking favourably upon their relationship either. Gods! Was she having a relationship with Lucius Malfoy?

Her gaze lit on the Trollish scroll which lay forgotten and half buried beneath Lucius’ translation. It reminded Hermione that she did have one friend who appeared to at least respect Lucius, and who knew him well enough to have approached him regarding the translation….

Feeling suddenly hopeful, she reached for her quill and began to scribble a hasty note.

Lucius had waited with little patience and very poor humour for the girl to respond. He had expected an answer by return of his owl, and had been most disappointed when the bird returned empty clawed. He had quickly realised the error of his ways. Of course, the little swot would wish to peruse the academic work before she would deign to answer his personal communication. Even so was there any need to keep him waiting quite so long?

Eventually, he schooled himself to return to the library where he was sorting through his herbology and potions texts. He hoped to find a suitable gift for the girl – something rare and essential to her studies but not overwhelmingly expensive, he didn’t want to frighten her off. He was disturbed in his task by a small grey owl tapping against the library window. He let it in with unseemly haste and almost ripped the letter from its leg ignoring the reproachful look it gave him. Then he swore loudly and dropped the letter to the floor in disgust. It was not addressed to Lucius Malfoy but to Camomile Jones!

He could not believe he was doing this again. He was beginning to wonder if the girl were some sort of Succubus to have cast such a spell on him. Here he was, in broad daylight, dressed in woman’s clothing, inhabiting, once more, the body of an aging crone, waiting for Hermione, in a Muggle park of all places. He shifted uncomfortably on the wooden bench, he felt horribly exposed, as if he might be discovered at any moment.

“Camomile!”
His head snapped around at the sound of her voice.
“Thank you so much for coming.” He was engulfed by her scent as she wrapped her arms around him pressing her breasts against his. Her wild hair was unconstrained, billowing bushy curls cascaded down her shoulders, several strands tickled his cheek as he hugged her back.
“It was no problem, my dear, once you get to my age you don’t have many social engagements.” He feared he had overplayed the lonely old woman card as she shot him a sympathetic look, but she didn’t say anything. Instead, she looked furtively around and started removing items from her handbag.

He watched in awe as she spread out a large tartan picnic blanket on the warm grass. This was followed by several cushions upon which she gestured for him to sit. Lucius sank down onto them,
grateful for the chance to take the weight off his aging legs and for the fact that she was standing between him and the sun which was rendering her white dress almost entirely translucent. Seemingly unaware of the unintentional peep show she set up a low table with an ornate tea set.

“Just because we’re having a picnic doesn’t mean we can’t be civilized,” she told him, as she settled down, cross legged, on her own cushion pile. Lucius watched with approval as she set the tea to steep, filling up the pot with a graceful flick of her wand. He was disappointed that the long silhouette of her legs and the V at the top of her thighs was now hidden from his view but he surmised that it was probably for the best, he wasn’t sure Camomile’s body could take too much arousal in one go, he wouldn’t want to give himself a heart attack.

Hermione was now uncovering a plate of biscuits and Lucius suddenly remembered his own triumph.

“I’ve brought something too,” he tried to keep the air of smugness from his voice and hastily removed a shrunken box from his own pocket, it automatically resized itself as he set it on the table.

“What is it?” Hermione leaned forwards to open the box; she smiled as she caught sight of the contents. “Pizza, my favourite, did you make this yourself?”

He nodded, watching, near mesmerised, as she withdrew a slice and bit into it, giving a soft moan of pleasure as she tasted his cooking.

“This is delicious, Camomile, you must give me the recipe, the crust is wonderfully soft.” Even with a string of cheese adorning her lower lip she was still beautiful.

He took a dainty bite of his own slice of pizza and accepted a cup of tea.

“Now, what was it you wanted to talk to me about?” He hoped he achieved a motherly tone.

Hermione picked at a slice of mushroom on her pizza. “It’s about men,” she said uncertainly.

Lucius felt his heart drop; he really really did not want to talk to Hermione about men.

“Don’t you think you might be better discussing your romantic life with somebody a little younger?” He suggested kindly. “I’m afraid I’m so dry and wizened up I can’t even remember what it’s like to feel the warm flutterings of love.” He was rather pleased with his poetic turn of phrase and was disappointed when Hermione ignored his protestations.

“I can’t really talk to anyone else.” She looked imploringly at him. “I only have a couple of close female friends and, to be frank, I know they won’t approve of the particular man I want to discuss, so I thought I could talk to you since you’re neutral.”

Excellent, he thought. If her friends didn’t approve of this man it shouldn’t be too difficult to persuade Hermione to cut him out completely.

“I’m sure your friends wouldn’t take against him without good reason,” he said.

“No.” Hermione looked pensive. “No, they have every reason to hate him; one of them he kept locked in his cellar for several months and the other he gave a diary which contained a fragment of Voldemort’s soul so I can see why they might both hold a grudge against him. Are you alright Camomile?”

Lucius was choking rather badly on a mouthful of tea. Hermione helpfully patted his back until he was able to breathe again.

“I assume we are talking about Mr Malfoy?” He wheezed, his eyes streaming.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, but you like him, don’t you? At least enough that you asked him to translate that scroll.”

“I have known Mr Malfoy for a long time.” Lucius hedged his bets, wondering what it was best to say. “While I have never discussed the matters you mention with him I do believe that he probably regrets the incidents you describe.”

“I’m sure does.” Hermione selected a Florentine and bit into it. “But that doesn’t mean that Ginny and Luna would be happy if I told them I’d slept with him, she whispered the last part in a conspiratorial fashion, blushing hard as she did so.

“You’ve slept with him?” Lucius whispered back wondering why he sounded so surprised, perhaps it was because he hadn’t expected the girl to tell anyone about what had happened between them. He had thought she would be too ashamed.
Hermione nodded in response, her biscuit forgotten on her plate.

“Well, how was it?” He couldn’t help but ask.

Hermione’s countenance became dreamy. “Honestly?” she asked. “It was the most wonderful experience of my entire life.”

Lucius felt his chest puff out with pride; he had to sharply remind himself that he currently inhabited the body of an infirm eighty-year-old female. The urge to fling the table aside and pin Hermione to the ground, as he demonstrated that it had not been beginners’ luck which had made the experience so wonderful, was strong, but he knew that in his current guise he would not be welcomed. He sipped his tea instead.

“Well then, my dear, I really don’t see what the problem is. You’ve told me before that you like him, and the two of you are obviously sexually compatible, surely at your next meeting you can simply allow nature to take its course.”

He was surprised when Hermione let forth a peal of laughter.

“Oh Camomile,” she exclaimed, “You sound just like a man.”

“What?” Lucius wondered if the Poly Juice was wearing off early.

“That’s such a man thing to say. Just because I like him and we had amazing sex once, which he might not even have thought was that amazing; it doesn’t mean that we can necessarily do it again.”

“Why ever not?” Lucius asked plaintively.

“Well for lots of reasons.” Hermione began to tick them off on her fingers. “He might not have enjoyed it. He might have enjoyed it but not enough to do it again. He might have decided that sleeping with a Muggleborn was a mistake—“

“How can you be certain of that?” Lucius interrupted gently, “Is there any reason you don’t want to sleep with him again?”

Very slowly she shook her head.

“Then it’s not really your problem is it?” She frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“Think about it, my dear. Lucius Malfoy is not a man who hesitates to take what he wants, is he?”

“No.”

“Then, if he desires you again, which I am almost certain he does—“

“How can you be certain of that?”

“Because, Hermione, if I recall correctly, sexual encounters of the sort you describe are rarely one sided.”

“Oh.”

“In which case Mr Malfoy undoubtedly desires you as much as you desire him, all you have to do is wait for him to make the first move.”

“Oh,” she said it this time with an air of enlightenment.

“Unless of course, you wish to make the first move, I imagine he would appreciate that.”

“I couldn’t do that.” She blushed again. “I’m not very confident about these sorts of things, I’m afraid.”

Lucius felt a sudden wave of compassion. Throughout their entire, complicated dance, he had never truly stopped to consider her feelings. It was strange to see her so open and exposed. Around him she usually wore a façade of brittle confidence. It seemed so obvious now that it was simply that; a glamour that she created in order to conceal her true insecurities. Hermione granger was a woman feted for her intelligence and magical ability; it seemed that nobody had ever shown her that she also deserved to be admired as a woman. He reached out and awkwardly placed his hand over hers.

“I am sure he will take the initiative.”

“I hope so.” She squeezed his hand gratefully. “It’s bad enough that I have to cook for him naked, but if he doesn’t try and seduce me while I’m doing it I’ll know I’ve spent so long reading about them that I’ve actually turned into a Troll.”

“You have to cook naked for him?” Lucius was rather proud of his, thus far, unknown acting abilities.

Hermione nodded again. “Yes, I lost a bet and those were his terms.”
Lucius stifled a smirk. “And you really doubt that he’s attracted to you after he made such a bet?”
“It does seem a bit silly when you put it like that.” Hermione smiled at him, then came around the table to hug him once more. “Thank you so much Camomile, I simply don’t know what I’d do without you.”
Lucius wrapped his arms around her slim body, he felt strangely moved by their conversation.
“Oh, Merlin!” Hermione wriggled out of his arms. “Is that the time? I must go, Severus will have my guts for garters if I’m late back from lunch, he’s been in a foul mood this week.” She began to flick her wand this way and that, minimising the picnic set and secreting it in her handbag. “Are you coming back to Diagon Alley?” she asked.
Lucius shook his head. “No, I think I’ll walk in the park for a little longer.” He got heavily to his feet, leaning on his cane which he had transfigured into a twisted walking stick.
“Alright then, will I see you for lunch next week, as usual?”
“Oh, Hermione!” She turned to look over her shoulder at him.
“It’s just a hunch but I believe Mr Malfoy might be rather partial to a well-turned ankle.”
“Perhaps you might want to consider wearing high heels for your assignation.”
“Thank you Miss Granger,” he murmured under his breath once she was safely out of earshot. Her unexpected and unsolicited revelations had provided him with a fascinating insight into her psyche. When it came to their ongoing sexual conflict she had inadvertently provided him with enough ammunition to win not just the battle but the whole bloody war!
Hermione had never willingly approached Malfoy Manor before. Lucius and Draco had always Apparated her straight into the building and, on her unfortunate visit to their home during the war, she had been dragged down the drive in chains. Unsurprisingly, she was a little apprehensive as the gates swung open to allow her access. There was nothing to be afraid of, she told herself as she crunched through the white gravel. She avoided the occasional peacock, feeling relieved that she had cast a number of useful cushioning charms on her vertiginously high heels. Indeed, the Manor was beautiful, if a little imposing; bathed in the late afternoon sun it looked both elegant and austere, the beautifully manicured topiary and rolling lawns providing the perfect backdrop. It was the picture of English aristocratic architectural achievement; nobody would ever have guessed that generations of Muggle-hating wizards had lived inside. It was the sort of house that Mr Darcy might easily have inhabited.

Hermione firmly pulled her thoughts away from such romantic twaddle and instead ran through her cooking itinerary. She was pleased with her selection of dishes, but had to admit that she had taken the opportunity to show off a little, Lucius had no idea what she was capable of.

Her courage almost failed her as she reached the imposing front door and the ugly knocker, some sort of hideous gargoyle, literally turned its nose up at her.

“What do you want, Mudblood?” it snarled around its ring.

“Erm, I’m invited,” she stammered. Never having dealt with an aggressive doorbell in the Muggle world she wasn’t quite sure how to proceed. Perhaps she should send Lucius her Patronus, she certainly wasn’t going to risk touching the knocker, it looked as if it might bite. She was just reaching for her wand when the door was pulled open and Lucius appeared looking slightly flustered.

“Miss Granger, I apologise, for my in-hospitality, I should have realised the knocker might give you some trouble.” He stood back to allow her into the house.

After a moment’s hesitation, Hermione swept past him saying haughtily, “yes he was rather rude, if he were on my front door I would have him melted down and made into a toilet seat!”

“I’d never deign to grace your door, Mudblood,” the knocker shouted after her as Lucius hastily slammed it behind her.

“I’m not sure a metal toilet seat would be terribly practical.” He raised her fingers to his mouth and pressed his warm lips against them. Despite her ruffled feathers, Hermione stifled a groan. “The magic keeping him attached to the door is particularly complex. It would be extremely difficult to remove him, but, if you particularly wish to have him made into an item of bathroom furniture, I
could try?” He looked enquiringly at her and Hermione wondered if he really would desecrate his family home just for her.

“It’s fine, she said airily, “I’m sure he would get on fabulously with the portrait of Walburga Black In Grimmauld Place, she calls me all sorts of things. Your knocker is positively pedestrian by comparison.”

“I’ve relieved to hear it.” Lucius smiled and ran his eyes over her body, reminding her rather of a farmer choosing livestock at an auction. “Now if you would like to follow me to the kitchen you can remove your clothes.”

“Why thank you, Mr Malfoy, what a gentlemanly offer.” Hermione took his proffered arm and meekly followed him towards the stairs, was she flirting with him? Apparently so.

Hermione’s talk with Camomile had gone a long way to soothe her nerves regarding her coming ordeal. The old woman was surprisingly insightful; Hermione wondered what she had been like in her younger day. She had helped Hermione to realise that the situation in which she found herself was entirely of Lucius’ making. In which case it was up to him to manage his own expectation and to make it clear to her exactly what he wanted of her. Hermione felt surprisingly serene. For once in her busy, complicated life, she would allow somebody else to be in charge; there would be no haranguing, no bossing around and no drawing up of homework timetables. Even the occasional urges she felt to assist with personal grooming (these urges were usually inspired by Severus) were conspicuously absent today; nobody was more picture perfect than Lucius, she was already enjoying the lack of responsibility.

Her serenity lasted until shortly after they had entered the kitchen. She removed several shopping bags from her handbag and resized them on the table. Meanwhile, Lucius had taken a seat opposite her, after a few moments of her arranging and rearranging the food he loudly cleared his throat.

“Miss Granger, wouldn’t you say that you have now begun the process of cooking?”

“Well not really,” she demurred, “I’d say I’m still in the preparatory stages.” Lucius tsksed loudly and she shot him a nervous glance. She hadn’t really looked properly at him since she had arrived and it was only now that she realised he looked even more pristine than usual. His robes, always elaborate were now frankly magnificent with silver dragons embroidered over the shoulders and curling across his chest. If possible, he wore, even more, rings than usual and she would swear that the jewelled snake at his throat was larger than before. Unless she was very much mistaken Lucius Malfoy had purposefully donned his finery in order to make her feel even more insecure in her own, less than adequate skin. It didn’t matter that he looked amazing, that his hair shone, his eyes sparkled and every other cliché under the sun could be applied to him too. It didn’t matter that her body was ticking over with lust at the sight of him. What mattered, as far as she was concerned, was that he was an arrogant arse!

An arrogant arse who was continuing to stare at her, one perfectly groomed eyebrow elegantly arched as he waited for her to disrobe. She placed down a bottle of Worcester sauce with an audible clunk. She would not give him the satisfaction of seeing how nervous she was. She nonchalantly moved away from the table, purposefully allowing him an unobstructed view as she began to unbutton her blouse.

She had spent Friday afternoon and Saturday morning in a flurry of activity. As a result, her body was now almost entirely hairless; she had been considerably more adventurous with delapidatory charms than ever before. She was also thoroughly buffed, polished and painted (her toenails at least) and, in her humble opinion, looked the best she ever had. She had spent far more money than she could justify on the underwear to which she was about to be reduced. Since she was finally in a position to dictate what he would see her in, she had decided that no expense would be spared in the procuring of a Malfoy-worthy bra and pants set. Even if it had meant that she wouldn’t be able to afford the first edition of Most Potente Potions she’d been saving up for.
The look on Lucius’ face, as her blouse slithered down her arms and onto the floor, made that sacrifice seem entirely worthwhile. His eyes were fixed on her breasts which were encased in the most delicate sliver of grey silk (why was it that the more underwear cost, the less of it there was?) and his tongue slipped out to moisten his parted lips. Hermione was struck by an image of those lips fastened around her rapidly hardening nipples and she forced herself to look away from him, her fingers straying to the waist band of her skirt.

She had dressed deliberately, knowing what was to come. Hell, she’d even practiced in the mirror. If she was going to strip naked in front of Lucius Malfoy she was at least going to make a decent job of it. She ran down the zip of her skirt and gave a slight swivel of her hips, it was enough to dislodge the loose fitting cotton and the skirt followed her blouse to the ground, pooling at her feet. Hermione delicately stepped out its puddle, deliberately drawing his attention to her sandals. Her Moste Potente Potions fund had been further raided to allow the purchase of the most impractical pair of shoes she would ever own. Even calling them shoes seemed to rather overestimate their worth. They were comprised of a few strands of thin white leather which were wholly encrusted with jewels, leaving her feet almost entirely exposed and pushed into an absolutely ridiculous position. It was only with the judicious use of anti-slip and cushioning charms that Hermione was able to walk at all and, she was terrified at the prospect of dropping a knife on her exposed toes. Again, she suddenly stopped caring about the impracticality of her garment, when she saw Lucius’ appreciative gaze lingering on her silver painted nails.

She waited, patiently for his attention to once more make its way up her body. His eyes lingered over the tiny triangle of silk which concealed her even tinier triangle of pubic hair before they met hers once more. He was openly smirking now.

“And the rest, Miss Granger,” his voice held a smokey quality she’d never noticed before.

“Of course, Mr Malfoy.” She reached behind her to undo her bra, catching the cups before they could fall and then, deliberately turning her back. It was her turn to smirk as she heard his sharp intake of breath. She guessed he must appreciate the almost non-existent rear section of her knickers. She dropped her bra on top of her skirt and blouse. She was as good as naked now anyway and she felt strangely freed at being so exposed in the kitchen of all places. She didn’t even walk naked around her own kitchen. She hooked her thumbs into the elastic at the sides of her knickers and, praying that men really did find this as attractive as the website she had found said, bent over as she slid them slowly down her thighs. She stepped delicately out of them and straightened up, allowing the underwear to dangle on her outstretched finger for a few seconds before she dropped her pants to the floor. She turned slowly to face him, striking a coquettish pose.

He was staring at her as if she were dinner and he was ravenous.

“Bravo, Miss Granger.”

She was surprised when he applauded slowly and she bit her lip, wishing that she couldn’t feel the blush spreading across her face and chest. Slowly she began to move toward him. He shifted in his chair, a look of surprise flickering across his face as he looked up at her with heavy lidded eyes. Hermione allowed herself a little smirk of her own as she paused just out of arm’s reach. She opened her handbag and, from it, she withdrew an apron which she placed over her head. It was so large that, when she fastened the tapes around her waist, it completely covered both her front and back. It was also decorated with a picture of a naked body. A naked male body. Defiantly, she met Lucius’ eyes.

He was shaking his head, although she was sure she could see a glimpse of humour in his frosty eyes.

“Now now, Miss Granger, you were doing so well,” his voice was full of disappointment. “That garment is hardly in the spirit of our bargain, is it?”

Hermione smiled winsomely. “But Mr Malfoy, surely you wouldn’t want to risk me burning myself while I’m cooking.” She actually fluttered her eyelashes at him.
“Ah.” He rose smoothly from his chair and came toward her with the elegant grace of a stalking tiger. “So this—” he fingered the apron tape at her waist “—is purely for practical purposes?” His lips were mere inches from hers, much closer than when she wasn’t wearing these ridiculous shoes.


“Well then—” Lucius reached for his wand “—you won’t mind if I make a few minor alterations, will you?”

Before she could even consider her answer he had pointed his wand in her direction and she felt the brush of magic against her skin. She glanced down at her apron and gave a sigh of defeat. The front of the garment had narrowed and now barely covered her breasts and ended at mid-thigh, the whole thing was pristine white and decorated with a ridiculous frill around the bottom. Scowling, she felt behind her back, as she had suspected the straps of the apron now crossed over before tying in a large bow just above her completely exposed backside. She just needed a little hat and she would look exactly like a French maid in a porn film.

Lucius must have read her mind. He was grinning openly by this point and, as he flicked his wand again, she felt the weight of something settle in her hair.

“No! Absolutely not!” She removed the hat and flung it at him, flouncing off across the kitchen before she remembered that all she was doing was giving him a perfect view of her arse.

She would just pretend he wasn’t there. That’s what she would do, how hard could it be? That was pretty much how she had managed to get through six years of school without killing Draco. Just focus on the task at hand and forget that there’s an incredibly sexy man objectifying you in the corner. She cracked a couple of eggs and began to whisk them, trying hard not to wonder if her buttocks were wobbling as she was doing so. Then she set the thin omelette to cook on the stove top whilst she rolled out the pastry.

“What are you doing?” His voice came from right behind her and she gave a tiny shriek of surprise, almost dropping the rolling pin.

“Mr Malfoy,” she said in her primmest of tones, “this is not a lesson. You asked me to cook dinner and I am obliging, please desist from sneaking up on me.”

“Very well then, if you won’t tell me what you’re doing, I’ll just have to stand very close so I can get a good view.” His voice was right in her ear. Hermione shivered, could she actually feel the heat coming off his body? Her stupid nipples hardened. Bugger it, she could see them down the front of her apron, and if she could see down there, so could he. Perhaps distraction was a better technique.

“I’m making an pancake.” She used her best know-it-all voice. I’ll wrap it around the beef to keep it moist before it goes in the oven. She breathed a sigh of relief as he moved a short distance away to examine the other ingredients.

“You’re making Beef Wellington?”

She nodded. “Could you pass me another pan please; I need to sear the beef?”

He folded his arms across his chest. “I’m afraid not Miss Granger, this isn’t a lesson but a demonstration.”

They locked eyes for a moment, she was the first to look away. They both knew he wouldn’t hand her the pan because he wanted to see her bend down to get it.

Ignoring him once more, Hermione moved to the appropriate cupboard and squatted awkwardly on her haunches, managing to secure the necessary utensil without revealing more than a little side boob. He remained quiet as she seared the beef and fried liver for the pate. She was utilising her blending spell to mix the livers with garlic, mushrooms, and cream when he spoke again.

“Miss Granger?” he sounded oddly hesitant.

“Yes.”

“I was wondering why you left so abruptly last week?”

She glanced across at him. He was studiously not looking at her, his fingers tracing a pattern in the flour she hadn’t yet wiped up from the worktop. His reticence was so unlike him, so human;
dangerously human. "I was embarrassed." She felt heat flare in her cheeks once more.

"Embarrassed?" He turned the word over in his mouth as if he had never heard it before.

"Yes, you know; ashamed, humiliated, chagrined-"

"I know what the word means; I just don’t understand why you were embarrassed."

"Really?" she asked sceptically, shooting him a sideways look.

He returned it, his face, for once devoid of its habitual blank mask, genuinely curious and perhaps a little hurt. He didn’t answer and she took a moment spreading the pate across the seared beef before she spoke. "I suppose I’m used to being in control, and last week…. With you….I wasn’t. Could you pass me the pancake please?" He looked around, presumably considering whether doing so would deprive him of the opportunity to ogle her a bit more, evidently, he decided it wouldn’t, he passed her the pan. "Thank you." She began to wrap the meat in the pancake. "I suppose leaving was the only way I could think of to be in control again." She looked up to meet his eyes, but could discern nothing from his gaze. "So I left," she finished abruptly, turning to place the meat in the oven ignoring the fact that she was once more exposing her perfectly framed backside to his scrutiny.

Lucius didn’t say anything for quite some time and Hermione dumped the dirty pans in the sink, flicking a quick washing up charm in their direction. She moved back to the stove, melting butter and carefully mixing in minute amounts of flour.

"I thought perhaps I’d done something to offend you." He had returned to the kitchen table and was sitting watching her, his hands clasped in front of him.

She leaned over the pan, adding a little milk, grateful for the distraction.

"No, you didn’t offend me, if you’d done that I would have punched you." He snorted.

"I thought I might have hurt you," he said this so quietly she almost didn’t catch his words.

The smell of baking biscuits filled the room as her roux began to cook.

"I’ve endured far worse pain in this house," she pointed out, stirring vigorously.

He winced.

Hermione bit her lip, looking away from him. He hadn’t deserved her last jibe. What had happened between them the previous week had borne no resemblance to her previous visit to the Manor. She sighed.

"I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have brought that up."

He shrugged. "You were tortured here in my home, Miss Granger, it is your right to bring it up whenever you chose."

She wanted to touch him, to reassure him that their relationship had moved somewhere far beyond their previous experiences, but she couldn’t leave the roux and besides, she was still painfully shy when it came to this man.

"I had my hand on my wand the entire time, Mr Malfoy. If you had hurt me I would have hexed your balls off."

He laughed a genuine laugh that instantly lightened the mood and she turned back to her pan a smile creasing her face.

The vegetables were charmed to prepare themselves and the beef was cooking nicely. Hermione set the choux pastry aside to cool before she piped it and gave a squeak of dismay when she realised the pans in the sink were washing themselves so efficiently that water was pouring onto the flagstone floor. She hurried over, forgetting her state of dress as she fell to her knees, mopping at the water on the floor with a kitchen towel. She had finally got the deluge under control when she heard a low chuckle from behind her.

She spun to find Lucius, watching her with hooded eyes.

"You sometimes forget you’re a witch?" He offered a fresh towel which she used to wipe her face and hands. She glanced down in horror at her body; the wet apron had glued itself to her breasts and thighs, now serving only to highlight, rather than conceal her attributes.

"Sometimes."

"I sometimes wonder if you’re human," she shot back darkly and he threw her a sardonic smile, before piercing her with his gaze once more.
The heat in his eyes was unmistakable. He stepped closer, removing the towel from her nerveless fingers and dropping it on the floor.

“I was worried too.” Why was she so breathless?

“Were you?” His hands rested on her waist now, his thumbs lightly circling the exposed flesh above the apron’s waist band.

“Yes.” She closed her eyes briefly, her whole body was swimming in sensation. “I was worried I hadn’t pleased you.” She couldn’t look at him, not just because she was afraid of revealing the burning desire she felt for him, but because she had just voiced her insecurities to Lucius Malfoy of all people.

“You pleased me very much.” He pulled her a little closer, tilting his hips so she could feel his hardness against her belly, brushing his nose along the curve of her jaw. She inhaled involuntarily, he smelled so good. “I’ve been able to think of little else.” His teeth grazed her earlobe. “I’ve gone to sleep each night in agony at the thought of being inside you.” He ground his erection harder against her belly and Hermione whimpered. Desire bloomed through her whole body, her inner walls pulsed just at his words. She was desperate for him.

“But, if you really wish to please me—” Lucius took a step back from her and waved a casual hand in the direction of his body “—be my guest.”

They stood motionless, staring at each other. Lucius’ face wore its customary mask, but his eyes were heavy lidded with desire and the front of his trousers bulged obscenely. Hermione felt a stab of satisfaction that she could affect this man in such a way. She locked her eyes with his and slowly removed her wand from her hair.

He didn’t flinch when she aimed it, although she wondered if she detected a flicker of concern in those pavement grey eyes. With a flick, she transfigured the towel at their feet into a plush cushion.

Then, with all the grace she could muster, she dropped to her knees before him.

Lucius let out a low groan as she palmed his erect cock through the soft wool of his trousers. His hands came towards her and then were resolutely returned to his sides, his fists clenched. Hermione smiled to herself, running the flat of her palm up and down his erection, enjoying the juxtaposition of the soft wool with the iron hardness beneath. Lucius remained still until she allowed her palm to slip over the head of his cock, then he twitched against her, another groan rending the air.

Feeling faintly ridiculous, but acting on pure instinct, she rubbed her cheek against his erection. She reminded herself of Crookshanks on the mornings when he felt particularly amorous. Her fingers crept up to the buckle of his belt where they met his own. She batted his hands away and fumbled with the ornate clasp, eventually managing to remove the stiff leather from its metal loop. The buttons of his fly were equally difficult to deal with. They were pulled tight by his swollen cock and she struggled to pop them through their eyelets without hurting him. One by one they yielded and she pulled down the front of his trousers and his underwear in one, stifling a giggle as his penis tumbled free and slapped her in the face.

Despite their previous intimacy, she hadn’t had a chance to really see him before. There had been a brief glimpse, during their previous encounter, of him fisting his cock but his hand had obscured most of the view. Now, she took the opportunity to sit back on her heels and really study him.

Even his cock was beautiful. For a moment, she railed at the unfairness of that. Of course, he was the epitome of Pureblood privilege, he probably considered it his god given right that his appearance should be the embodiment of physical perfection. Of course he wouldn’t have a small penis or one that jutted awkwardly to one side when he was erect, or an ugly foreskin or uneven testicles. Of course, he was just as perfect here as he was everywhere else. He was large, but not obscenely so. The skin was silky smooth, stretched taut over his length, marred only by the veins which traced their way across its surface. His foreskin was pulled back by the swell of his erection and the head, slightly purplish, released a single tear under her scrutiny. She licked her lips.
“Are you just going to look at it?” Lucius’ voice was more uneven than she’d ever heard it before. She felt that jolt again, that feeling of power. She threw him a half-smile before she leaned forward and wiped the tip of her tongue against that tempting drop of fluid. He gave a very uncharacteristic yelp and, from the corner of her eye, she saw his fingers clench and unclench at his sides. Feeling slightly guilty at her ongoing teasing she pressed her lips against the base of his cock in a wet, open mouthed kiss. It grew even harder beneath her ministrations as she kissed her way along its length, allowing her tongue to lave the warm skin. He tasted good, as she had known he would. Nobody could smell as delicious as he did and not taste equally appetising, she thought. With that thought at the forefront of her mind she grasped the base of him in her fist and took us much of his cock as she could into her mouth.

She had never been turned on by giving head before. She had done it purely to please others but now, in arousing him, she was arousing herself too. She parted her thighs slightly as she began to move her lips up and down his shaft, her tongue swirling around the head. Her sex felt swollen and hot, the lips of her vulva filled with blood and a trickle of fluid made its way down her inner thigh. Merlin! She was literally dripping.

She dropped her head, trying to fit as much of him in her mouth as possible, the tip of his cock nudged up against her tonsils and she fought the urge to gag, briefly squeezing her eyes shut. Lucius groaned again and, as if he had finally given up a losing battle, his hands settled in her hair, fisting amongst the wayward curls. She had expected that he might try to take control then, hold her head steady and fuck her mouth, but he didn’t. His fingers lightly caressed her scalp and gently tugged at her hair, but the movement, the continuing slide of her lips against his hard length, was all directed by her.

She redoubled her efforts. She wanted more than anything to please him, to satisfy him, to undo him, just as he had undone her in this very room the week before. She quickened her strokes, uncaring that she was almost choking on him with every mouthful. She moved a hand between his legs to cup his balls, stroking gently at the lightly haired skin. They tightened and shrank beneath her fingers. She desperately wanted him somewhere other than her mouth. Her belly ached with desire, a slow pulsing throb that only he could soothe, but this wasn’t for her. At least not in the physical sense, this was about giving him pleasure.

And suddenly she knew he was close, desperately close. He began to thrust into her mouth and she took him even deeper, ignoring the choking sensation, sucking hard, her tongue flickering wildly. “Miss Granger - Hermione I’m –” She didn’t let him finish. She grabbed his buttock with her left hand and pulled him closer, preventing his bizarre ideas of chivalry from manifesting in his pulling out from her mouth before he came. His thighs shook, his cock pulsed against her lips and then a stream of ejaculate hit the back of her throat with choking force. She gagged momentarily and then swallowed several times, breathing in deeply through her nose. The taste was strong, bitter and salty, but not unpleasant. She smiled around her mouthful at the thought that even his come tasted good, he really did lead a charmed life.

She slowly released him from her mouth and sat back on her heels, looking shyly up at him. Their eyes met; his expression completely unfathomable. His chest rose and fell rapidly and his blonde mane was slightly dishevelled, but elegantly so of course. He reached down and grasped her upper arms, pulling her to her feet, supporting her when her numb legs almost refused to hold her.

His lips crashed down on hers. She briefly considered the fact that this was their first kiss, not that it felt like one. There was nothing tentative in his mouths’ exploration of hers. His tongue thrust between her lips and she almost pulled away, surely he didn’t want to taste himself in her mouth. If the ferocity with which his lips ravished hers was anything to go by, quite the opposite was true. Their mingled flavours appeared to excite him and he pulled her body flush against his own, grinding
his crotch against hers. Hermione was no innocent bystander; she kissed him back just as ardently, whimpering with desire, desperate to feel his hands over her body. Finally, he broke the kiss, leaving them both gasping for air. He pressed his forehead against hers and spoke quietly, breathlessly.
“I would very much like to reward your generosity, Miss Granger, but unfortunately my son has just Apparated into the entrance hallway.”

A/N Ah Draco the well placed cock-blocker – this chapter was getting much too long anyway!!
Lucius loved his son. Ever since he had first held the tiny, helpless bundle of humanity in his arms he had adored him with a fierce protectiveness of which he had never imagined himself capable. He may not always have been the best father, and in fact, he feared he may have been the worst at times, but he had never wished for any harm to befall Draco. He was therefore surprised by the overwhelming urge to strangle his first, and only, born child with his bare hands.

Hermione had frozen in his arms, her eyes wide and horrified. She was no longer grinding her practically naked self against him in the wonderfully wanton way he had been so enjoying. Her mewls of pleasure had been abruptly shut off, as if someone had placed a silencing charm over them both.

“I need to leave.” She made to pull away from him and, without thinking, Lucius fastened his fingers around her wrist. She was absolutely not running out on him again. Vain as he was, even he couldn’t take that much desertion. He was post-orgasmic and vulnerable, he wanted to curl up somewhere warm and comfortable and confess his innermost feelings, whilst he waited for his aging body to be ready for round two. He did not want to spend another two weeks in an agony of indecision wondering what her rapid departure had signified on this occasion.

“Absolutely not.” He tightened his fingers, ignoring the flash of fear in her wide brown eyes. “We had a bet, remember? You are only mid-way through your preparations.”

She looked around, frantically. “I’m not cooking naked in front of Draco!”

(Of course not.)

She tugged against his restraining hold. “Then let me go, Lucius, I need to get dressed.”

“I like it when you call me Lucius.” He bent his head and nipped at her neck, pulling away in surprise when she whacked him hard on the chest.

“Stop that, this is serious.”

He looked down at her again. He could feel Draco through the wards of the manor; he was currently two floors away, clearly searching for him, but nowhere near finding him at present.

“I know,” he reassured her, allowing his free hand to roam down her back and settle on her ripe arse, “but we are not in any immediate danger of discovery.”

“All the more reason for me to put my clothes on and get out of here before he finds us.”

Lucius felt a flash of hurt. Was she really so ashamed of their…well, whatever this was, that she couldn’t even bear for Draco to know of it? Of all her acquaintances he was probably the one most likely to be understanding. Suddenly a horrible thought struck him, did she secretly harbour a tendre for his son?

“Lucius, do you want me to have sex with Draco?”

“What?” His fingers fell away from her wrist. She was looking at him, her expression a mixture of fearfulness and determination, he had never wished harder for the gift of Legilimency.

“No of course not, I want you to have sex with me, without being interrupted or leaving as soon as we’re finished.”

“Oh.”

Relieved. She looked relieved. What on earth was she thinking? He felt the wards shift again.
“Draco is on the stairs.”
She looked around wildly, then pulled her wand from her hair and vanished the pile of clothes she had left on the floor. Then she scuttled across the room and threw herself through the door of the pantry, just before a bemused looking Draco entered the kitchen.

“What on earth are you doing down here, Father?”
Lucius thanked Merlin that he had done up his flies during his argument with Hermione.
“I’m cooking,” he tried for a disinterested drawl.
“Cooking?” Draco parroted, lifting a well-groomed eyebrow in a gesture which, Lucius was sure, must have taken hours of practicing in the mirror to perfect.
“Yes, I believe you are familiar with the practice.” Lucius moved some utensils around on the worktop, hoping to convey an air of nonchalant competence.
“But why are you cooking, Father? Has mother taken all the house elves away again?” Draco sounded mildly concerned.
Lucius rolled his eyes. “No, Draco. If you cast your mind back to our encounter in this very room only a few short weeks ago, I am sure you will remember that our roles were reversed.”
Draco frowned, before a look of comprehension slowly dawned. “You’re cooking to impress a woman?”
“Indeed.”

Draco bent down and examined the contents of the oven. The pastry surrounding the beef had turned a rich golden brown and the air was permeated with the delicious scent of roasting meat.
“It smells delicious.” He looked curiously around him. “Somebody must be teaching you.”
Lucius folded his arms. “Unlike you Draco,” he lied smoothly, “I am not so impatient in the procurement of knowledge that I must have everything handed to me on a plate. I have learned the art of cookery from a book.”
“Good for you.” Draco didn’t rise to the bait and Lucius instantly felt small. He had bullied and demeaned his son right through his childhood and adolescence. He had promised himself that such unpleasant treatment would end with Voldemort, yet still, he couldn’t resist sniping at the young man. Even when Draco was guilty of nothing more than some inadvertent cock blocking.
“So who’s the mystery woman?” Draco seemed immune to his father’s inner turmoil and stuck his finger in the gravy.
“I have no desire to disclose that information.”
“Why not?” Draco instantly looked more interested. “If it’s because of mother please don’t worry, she’s been seen out with at least five men since you two divorced, I’m pleased you’re getting back in the saddle.”
Lucius felt like even more of a heel. How on earth had he and Narcissa managed to raise such a caring individual?
“It has nothing to do with your mother,” he forced himself not to snap. “I simply do not wish to discuss things at this—“he hesitated “—delicate stage in our relationship.”
“Fair enough.” Draco licked his finger and leaned back against the worktop, giving his father an assessing look. Lucius felt himself squirm. He hoped that Draco would assume that his bedraggled appearance was due to cooking and not from receiving the most enthusiastic, if not the most technically brilliant, blow job of his entire life.

Draco squared his shoulders and Lucius winced a little. Whatever his son had to say he could sense he wasn’t going to like it.
“I had a very interesting chat with Potter yesterday.”
Lucius looked away and busied himself with the kettle. “Would you like some tea, Draco?”
“Stop avoiding the point, Father,” Draco’s voice had risen half an octave. “You know what he wanted to talk to me about, I’m sure.”
“I haven’t the foggiest.” Lucius warmed a teapot. “My relationship with Potter is purely
“So professional that you told him you wanted your son to marry his best friend?”
Lucius almost dropped the teapot. “If this is your way of telling me you are gay, Draco then rest assured that I still love you. If however, you have taken up with Ronald Weasley, then consider yourself disinherited.”

“Stop being so bloody flippant!” Draco smacked his hand on the worktop. “We both know that you told Harry you wanted to set me up with Hermione, stop pretending otherwise.”

Fuck, Lucius thought. He had not expected this. It hadn’t crossed his mind that his son and Potter might actually communicate. Of course he hadn’t really done much of his thinking with his mind since meeting the girl. This particular lie was going to be difficult to slither out of.

“I don’t know why you’re so offended, Draco.” He decided to brazen things out. “Miss Granger is an admirable woman; surely any man worth his salt would be delighted at being set up with her.”

Draco palmed his forehead. “But I’m with Astoria.”

“Of course you are,” Lucius said placatingly. “And I’m sure Astoria is a lovely girl, she certainly comes from a very good family, but you must consider carefully the advantages of a union with someone such as Miss Granger.”

“I don’t care about the advantages,” Draco almost shouted. “I care about the advantages of marrying a Muggle-born witch as much as I cared about being a Death Eater – which is not at all in case you’re interested.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” Lucius held up his hands as if to ward off a charging bull. “I had not realised you felt so strongly towards Miss Greengrass. I merely wished you to know that you had options: that your mother and I would support you whoever you chose to marry – except Weasley,” he couldn’t resist the codicil.

Draco took a long look around the kitchen, tapping his finger against his lips as he did so. Finally, he turned back to his father, a strange gleam in his eye.

“You know, Father, perhaps I’ve been too hasty.”

“You have?” Lucius was wrong-footed.

“Maybe. I’ve never really thought of Hermione in that way, do you really think she and I would do well together?”

Lucius swallowed what felt like a mouthful of sawdust. “She’s an admirable woman; I think any man would be lucky to have her.”

Draco smirked. “Then perhaps I should let you take us out for dinner.”

“Really Draco, that’s not necessary now you have explained your feelings on the matter.”

“No Father, you are right, I need to make sure I am choosing the right woman. We should invite Astoria too.”

“You want to go out for dinner with Miss Greengrass and Miss Granger?”

“And you.”

Lucius resisted the urge to rub his forehead. “Draco, I fear that neither lady will take well to such a suggestion.”

Draco waved a hand airily. “Don’t worry about that Father, I’ll just turn on the old Malfoy charm. I’ll tell Hermione I need moral support because you’re such an ogre, and I’ll tell Astoria Hermione is on a date with you, job done.”

Lucius almost felt faint. He clutched the handle of the teapot as if he was drowning and it was the last spar of wood in the entire ocean. “You wish me to masquerade as Miss Granger’s suitor?”

“Just until I’ve made up my mind, I don’t want to put off Astoria until I know I’m going to ditch her, do I?”

“No, I suppose not.” He felt terribly naive, and terribly old.

Draco, seemingly unaware of his father’s discomfort, had pulled a slim leather bound diary from his pocket. He flipped through the pages. “Ah yes, Wednesday night should be fine. You reserve the restaurant and I’ll invite the ladies. This should be fun, Father.” He clapped Lucius on the shoulder. “I’ll let you get back to your cooking.” He turned toward the door, hesitating on the threshold. “You
could invite your mystery lady along too if you like?”
“No thank you Draco, I shall leave her out of your machinations, thank you.”
“Fair enough.” Draco smirked at him over his shoulder and Lucius couldn’t help but feel he had been out manoeuvered. “See you on Wednesday.”
The kitchen door swung closed behind him.

Lucius realised he should tell Hermione that the coast was clear, but really, he didn’t have the energy. He sat down at the kitchen table and buried his head in his hands. He could not remember a time when his scheming had gone so badly awry. He didn’t count the whole becoming a death eater debacle. Not that that hadn’t been a disaster from start to finish, but once he had taken the dark mark he had pretty much stopped being responsible for his own decisions. This mess was entirely of his own making.

How on earth was he supposed to compete against his own son? Especially when he had practically pushed Draco in Hermione’s direction in the first place. He certainly couldn’t count on Astoria Greengrass to hold Draco’s attention; she couldn’t hold a candle to Hermione. And, whilst the girl might be interested in him on some level, she and Draco had history, they were friends, and Draco was every bit as handsome as Lucius, perhaps even more so.

He tapped his fingers against the table, gazing unseeingly at the messy kitchen, inhaling the scent of the cooking beef. What was the Muggle phrase? Something about birds in the hand being a good thing. He squared his shoulders. Miss Granger was here now, in his kitchen and had been, not half an hour ago, enthusiastically sucking his cock. That had to count for something. He had to play his advantage, and ensure that she enjoyed herself so much with him that evening that nothing Draco could possibly do on Wednesday would ever live up to it. He looked around the kitchen once more and began to think…. 
The Chocolatier

Chapter Summary

Things get sticky in the kitchen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucius reminded himself firmly that, as far as the girl was concerned, nothing had changed. For all she knew, he had been having a benign chat with his son whilst she hid in the cupboard. She was completely ignorant to the fact that Draco was now a rival for her affections. Furthermore, he Lucius, as her partner in what she had described as the most amazing experience of her life, had carte blanche to win her over completely. All he had to do was keep his head.

He came close to losing his head as he pulled open the cupboard door and caught sight of her. For a brief moment, he had feared she had gone. He would not put it past a witch as capable as Hermione Granger to find some way to apparate directly out of the Manor, if she so wished it. Then his eyes acclimatised to the dimly lit room and settled on her, seated on a low shelf at the back of the large pantry, engrossed in a book.

She had transfigured the apron, well he was hardly surprised. The cupboard was designed to keep fresh foodstuffs cool; it was definitely on the chilly side. But the silky robe she had transfigured it into was hardly less alluring than the revealing apron. It ended at mid-thigh and, although it was belted tightly around her narrow waist, the fabric was thin enough that he was still treated to the sight of her pert nipples pressing against it as she lowered the book to look at him. Most striking was her choice of colour. The material was a rich emerald green which, to his surprise, brought out the bronze highlights in her hair and eyes. She looked strangely ethereal, like a fairy princess. Lucius almost had to pinch himself in order to remember that his entire ability to keep this girl hinged on this rather precarious seduction. Internally waxing lyrical, at this point, was not going to get him anywhere.

She smiled, slightly shyly, at him and hopped down from the shelf. He was disappointed when the robe swung shut, concealing the smooth expanse of upper thigh he had briefly glimpsed. Gods he would like to see her completely naked again, all these tantalising glimpses of flesh were titillating, but not enough. He wanted to worship her entire body with his tongue.… Focus. He told himself.

“Has Draco gone?” She came closer, her finger wedged between two pages of the book. Lucius nodded.
“‘What did he want?” “Just to clarify plans for a social engagement.” He stepped back to allow her to exit the pantry. “Oh, did he notice any of this?” She waved her arm to encompass the room in general. “Yes, I told him I was cooking for a lady friend.” She raised an eyebrow with considerably less panache than Draco. “And he didn’t want to know who, that doesn’t sound like Draco.” “He did want to know who; I simply refused to tell him. What are you reading?” He directed her attention to the book in her hands.
She held it up so he could see the title and he flinched slightly. The Artisanal Pizza. “Is this yours? There are some fantastic variations on doughs.” The look she gave him was without guile but Lucius kept his expression completely blank.

“It must belong to the house elves,” he lied. “I’ve never seen it before. You’re welcome to borrow it.”

Her face lit up. “Thank you, Mr Malfoy, you’re very kind.” She walked over to the table and placed the book into her magically extended handbag. Lucius felt slightly bereft that he had once more been relegated to ‘Mr Malfoy’ but he was distracted from feeling too miserable by the enticing sway of her buttocks beneath her robe.

She turned back toward him and stood, hands on hips, surveying the room. “Now, where was I?” He wanted to remind her that she’d been pressed against him, her hands buried in his hair and her breasts crushed against his chest, but he had a fairly good idea that it was not to their clinch she was referring.

“You had just made some sort of pastry and set it aside to cool.” He reminded her, gratified when she beamed at him.

“Of course, well done. It should be ready to pipe now.” She began to spoon the pastry into a conical bag, immediately becoming engrossed in the task. Lucius watched, interested in spite of himself as she piped the mixture out onto a baking sheet.

“What are these?” He came up beside her in order to examine the rather unattractive blobs.

“They will be chocolate eclairs.” She concentrated on her piping. “I know they don’t look like much now but once they swell up in the oven they’re much more appealing. They’re made of the same pastry as profiteroles.” He nodded briefly and watched as she piped another one, her small hands carefully squeezing the bag. It looked….fun.

“May I try?” She looked up at him, a glint of humour in her eyes. “I thought this was a demonstration, not a lesson, Mr Malfoy.”

He flicked the sash of her robe. “Since you are no longer naked, Miss Granger, I feel the parameters of the experience have somewhat changed, besides, I’m intrigued.”

She smiled fully, it was slightly crooked and very charming.

“Fine but don’t mess it up, I’ve had enough delays already.” She gave a soft gasp as he came to stand behind her and reached around to place his hands over hers on the piping bag.

“I’m pretty sure I should be standing behind you.” Her voice was gratifyingly breathless as she adjusted their hands so hers covered his.

“This is much more practical.” He shifted his hips so she could feel the press of his burgeoning erection between her buttocks. She whimpered and moved slightly against him.

“Just apply gentle pressure as you move the bag down in a straight line.” Her words were as uneven as his piping; it was more difficult than it appeared. He tried again. Ignoring the fact that she was actively and perhaps unconsciously grinding her backside against him. Finally, the tray was filled with the unappealing looking sausages.

“Could you put them in the oven please.” Her voice was breathy and Lucius definitely caught her looking at his backside when he turned from his task.

She avoided his eyes, a blush staining her high cheekbones as she padded across the flag stoned floor in her bare feet. He wondered what had happened to the shoes and if she could be persuaded to put them back on again. On the other hand, there was something very appealing about having her barefoot in his kitchen. His thoughts were interrupted as she thrust a bowl of cream into his hands.

“You’re very good at whipping things, as I recall.” She turned away before he could look at her and assess whether the double entendre had been intended or accidental. She was breaking off chunks of chocolate and dropping them into a bowl which was balanced over a steaming pot of water. Lucius stood watching, vigorously whipping the
cream as she stirred at the melting chocolate. Steam rose from the boiling water, turning the curls which framed her face into tiny corkscrews and beading her upper lip.

“I think this is ready.” He hadn’t meant to startle her, but she obviously hadn’t realised how close he was standing. She gave a shriek of fright and the wooden spoon she had been using to stir the chocolate flew into the air. Demonstrating surprisingly quick reflexes, she caught the spoon in both hands, giving a shriek of horror and surprise as she did so. She had caught the blade and not the handle and both of her hands were coated in dark chocolate.

“What a mess.” She held her hands out to either side of her body looking adorably dismayed. Lucius smirked. Very deliberately he removed the wooden spoon from her fingers and placed it back in the bowl. Then he turned off the heat under the boiling water. Slowly, he advanced on the girl. She backed away nervously until her lower back came into contact with the kitchen worktop. Lucius didn’t stop his advance, crowding closer until his hips were pressed once more against hers. He reached around and, carefully avoiding her chocolate covered hands, placed his bowl of cream on the worktop.

He regarded her steadily. She was looking up at him, her eyes wide, her bottom lip tucked under her front teeth. He freed it with his fingers, his thumb running along the slight indentation left from her bite. She stiffened at his touch and he felt warm air hit his hand as her breath hitched.

Still, moving slowly and steadily, as if approaching a nervous animal, he leaned down and pressed his lips against hers. He reminded himself that this was his opportunity to prove himself. There was no hurry, no reason to rush the process, he had already achieved completion earlier in the day, now it was her turn and he was going to make her scream with pleasure. Much as he wanted to crush her lips beneath his, as he had done earlier, he held back. Keeping his mouth soft, he moved expertly against her, gently sucking on her bottom lip, abrading it with his tongue, but not seeking access to her mouth.

She tasted delicious. Like strawberries and summer and just a little bit like chocolate; she must have eaten some when he wasn’t looking. He wanted to consume her, and when he felt her tongue hesitantly seeking out his own, his iron control slipped and he thrust into her mouth, unconsciously pulling her closer against him. She went willingly, her body pliant and soft against his as her hands reached up –

“Don’t put those hands anywhere near my hair!” He caught her firmly by both wrists. Her eyes popped open and she gazed at him drunkenly, her lips parted and moist. Holding her gaze he brought her right hand to his mouth and swiped his tongue across her palm. The mingled taste of chocolate and her skin exploded on his taste buds and he licked her again and again. His tongue slipped between her fingers and she cried out as if he had put it somewhere much more intimate. He continued to lick, slowly, carefully cleaning away the chocolate, all the while she pressed herself against him, her eyes desperately fixed on his, the fingers of the hand he wasn’t licking clenched into a tight little fist.

He had never met anyone so responsive. He wondered if she had particularly sensitive hands or if she were simply so overstimulated that she would respond in the same way no matter where he licked her. It would be an easy enough theory to test.

Once her hands were clean (and he really didn’t want chocolate in his hair) he returned briefly to her lips, she kissed him back hungrily, now both of them tasted of chocolate. He slid his hands beneath her thighs and encouraged her to wrap her legs around his waist. Carrying her to the table he mused inwardly that it was seeing more action this month than it had in the last twenty years. Even with Hermione sitting on the table, she was barely taller than him, but he enjoyed the slight disparity in height and the easy access it afforded him to her neck as he nipped and sucked his way down to her collar bone. She was completely compliant now, following his lead, her small hands (still slightly sticky, but he wouldn’t think about that) threading through his hair and stroking across his shoulders. She seemed desperate to touch as much of him as possible, but when she began to pluck nervously at
the buttons on his shirt he manipulated her back until she was lying flat on the table. Lifting her legs, he placed her heels close to her buttocks. Her robe fell open around her thighs, exposing her glistening sex. Nervously, she pressed her knees together; trying to conceal herself, but Lucius gently parted them with one hand while the other moved up to unfasten her sash.

He peeled the sides of her robes open as if he were unwrapping a much anticipated gift. Whilst her earlier striptease had been impressive, it had done little more than whet his appetite and now he was free to feast his eyes on her naked body. She arched her back a little as the cool air hit her nipples, stiffening them to hard peaks. He allowed himself just the briefest of tastes; a brush of his tongue against their sweetness, before he pulled back, smiling slightly. She was gazing up at him with a wild, even desperate look in her eyes but she was still too repressed to beg for what she wanted. He looked away, his eye falling on the abandoned bowl of melted chocolate. Cautiously, he dipped a finger inside, the chocolate was hot, almost painfully so. He gathered a little onto the wooden spoon and held it over her trembling body. Her eyes widened even further as they fixed on the spoon which he slowly began to tilt. The molten liquid poured down to gather in her navel. She cried out a little but he saw the flash of excitement in her eyes as he lowered his head to lap at the little puddle in her belly-button. She arched against him, dislodging some of the liquid and he chased it with his tongue, causing her to squirm and wriggle even more. She stilled when he deliberately held the spoon over her nipples though, her eyes once more fixed on his, her breath held tight. He spattered the hot liquid liberally over her chest, watching her pink nipples disappearing under the glossy brown sheen as rivulets trickled down her throat and between her breasts.

He started with her neck and shoulders, lapping and sucking across her collar bones, down the front of her sternum and across the fronts of her shoulders. The chocolate against her skin was delicious and he felt intoxicated by the combination. He didn’t care that his back was aching from leaning over the table, or that the tips of his hair were probably dangling in the chocolatey mess he had created. All he cared about was gorging himself on the beautiful creature who lay so compliantly before him. Finally, he reached her areola, he circled his tongue around them one at a time enjoying the escalation in her cries of pleasure and allowing her to thread her fingers into his hair in order to bring him closer to her. When every last fragment of chocolate had been licked from her skin he settled his mouth over her nipple. The chocolate had hardened a little there and he was forced to suck hard and then use his teeth in order to scrape it away. She cried out at the abrasion, arching her back in order to push herself further into his mouth and pressing her fists against the back of his neck.

He pulled away panting a little. She laid before him, completely unabashed at her nudity her pupils huge, lips swollen and reddened from his kisses and her biting. Her nipples stood proud of her breasts, they too were reddened and she would be bruised in the morning from some of his more effusive attentions. He held her gaze, then deliberately ran his own along her body and between her thighs. She had very little in the way of pubic hair. Lucius supposed it must be some sort of Muggle custom – one of which he thoroughly approved. Her nether lips were entirely naked and already slightly parted, engorged with blood and slick from her arousal, he licked his lips, imagining the taste of her. Then, he picked up the bowl of chocolate and dipped his finger in once more, the liquid had cooled slightly. Her eyes tracked his movements as he licked his finger clean and her tongue darted out as if she were imagining the taste of him.

Without breaking eye contact, he upended the entire bowl over her genitals and watched with pleasure as she squealed in shock at the sudden application of warm liquid to her nether regions. He didn’t care about the mess as chocolate puddled under her backside and dripped onto the flagstones, he didn’t even care about the possibility of chocolate getting in his hair, although he did pull it to one side, all he cared about was sampling the culinary delicacy so deliciously laid out before him.

Achingly slowly, not sure if he was teasing himself or her, he bent his head and began to lick the
chocolate from the soft curls above her labia. The scent of chocolate mingled with her arousal went straight to his head, he felt intoxicated and if her blown pupils and vacant eyed expression were anything to go by she felt much the same.

“Lucius please—“her voice surprised him. She hadn’t been quiet before. There had been a whole cacophony of squeals, moans, and mewls, he didn’t think she was capable of remaining quiet during a sexual encounter, but she hadn’t actually spoken. Now the words spilled from her lips, her voice breathless and desperate. “Please, I need you to—“ She wasn’t quite brave enough to tell him what she wanted but she arched her hips, desperately trying to angle herself upwards so his mouth would fall on her engorged sex.

The temptation to tease her was strong. He could spend the rest of the day lapping at her stomach and inner thighs while she grew increasingly frustrated, but the urge for instant gratification was stronger. In his minds’ eye she was already coming undone beneath him. He could imagine the look in those eyes as she screamed his name and her soft acceptance of him afterward. This was not the time for teasing.

He dropped his chin slightly and flattened his tongue licking all encompassingly from her perineum to her clit.

“Yes, “ her voice was tinged with relief. “Thank you, Lucius, please do that again.”

He did it again, several times, listening carefully to the litany of sounds that escaped her expressive lips. She liked it when he circled her clit with his pointed tongue. She also liked it when he licked her outer lips and she liked it even more when he nibbled at them. She went wild when he straightened his tongue and thrust it as far inside her as he could. Her hips bucked around him and it was only his own hands on her thighs that prevented her from crushing his head in a chocolate covered vice.

Lucius was in heaven. Her pleasure filled response and complete supplication fed his vanity like nothing else could. He felt like a hero, a pioneer breaking ground for the first time as she writhed and moaned. It was quite easy for him to believe that nobody had ever given her such pleasure before; that he was the first man ever to drink from her delicious fountain and that, after having him, no other would ever be able to satisfy her as he could.

He raised his head slightly, still flicking his tongue just beneath her clit. Her head was thrown back, her hair had completely escaped from its confines and writhed around her head, its movements seemingly independent of hers. Her back was arched, her stomach desperately clenched and tiny beads of sweat stood out from the chocolate smeared skin of her abdomen and chest. She was beautiful. He wished he could capture her forever in this moment of abandoned pleasure; have a portrait painted and hang it on his bedroom wall as a constant reminder that he, Lucius, had brought her to this.

It was time to finish it. She hung on a knife edge of pleasure, it would take very little to push her over, but Lucius wanted her orgasm to be cataclysmic. He circled her clit again and then, began to lick and suck directly at the sensitive bud. She almost dislodged him with her thrashing and he placed a restraining hand on her hips to try and hold her still. The other delved between her thighs, his expert fingers sliding easily inside her. It felt like coming home, he was an expert in the topography of her vagina following their previous encounter and he quickly found the spongy area on the front wall which would take her over the edge. He couldn’t resist teasing a little. He could feel her orgasm building, the fine tremors in her sex transmitting themselves to him via his tongue and fingers. He could hear her cries escalating as she strained for her climax and it was easy to back off a little each time her peak approached.

Finally, when her cries had almost turned to sobs, he pulled her clit into his mouth, biting gently on the rock hard little bud as his fingers thrust forwards against her anterior wall. She came, screaming, her body bowing on the table as if she had been cursed. He kept his mouth on her, driving her
orgasm on, prolonging her pleasure for as long as possible until she quieted and her hands reached down to gently push him away. Only then did he raise his head to look smugly up at her.

Her eyes were open and she was gazing down at him with a look of such awe that he almost ejaculated in his underwear. She was an utter mess, her body smeared with drying chocolate, her crumpled robe, completely spoiled, and yet, she was also the most desirable thing he had ever seen. She bit her lip, her eyes wide and desperate.

“Lucius I need you—” she stopped herself, her eyes flicking away from his.

“You need me to what?” He smirked, even as he straightened up, rubbing his sore back. He was too old for this sort of thing.

“I—she steeled herself “I want you inside me.”
He climbed onto the table and held himself over her, their bodies not touching. He dropped his face until his lips just hovered over hers, he could smell her skin, chocolate and strawberries and Hermione.

“Say that I again,” he commanded.

She gently touched his cheek with a sticky hand. “I want you inside me, so badly.” She craned her neck, just enough to bring her lips against his in a whisper of a kiss.

Lucius reached down between them and released his cock from its fabric prison. It joyfully tumbled free and he breathed a sigh of relief. He was still fully clothed and he couldn’t even bring himself to care that he was probably covering some of his best robes in chocolate and body fluids.

“One day,” he told her conversationally, his lips at the corner of her mouth, “I’m actually going to fuck you in a bed.”

“I’d like that.” The rest of her reply was swallowed by the hard press of his mouth against hers as he slammed into her. She was wet and swollen and tight and Lucius forgot about the hardness of the table beneath his knees and the sticky chocolate which the elves would never quite get out of his clothes. He forgot about everything except driving himself and this wonderful, beautiful woman beneath him to the heights of even greater pleasure. He had lost all finesse, rutting against her like a teenager at Hogwarts who had managed to lure a willing partner up the Astronomy Tower, but she didn’t seem to care. She clung onto him like a limpet, arms, and legs wrapped around him as she whispered words of encouragement and praise.

He was wonderful, no one else had ever made her feel this way, she had never known it could be like this and she was going to—

He buried himself to the hilt inside her and cried out hoarsely as he came with almost painful force. It was even better than his earlier orgasm. He wondered, as she contracted around him in her own pleasure, if every time with her would be better than the last, if that were the case he would probably be dead from sexual excess within a week.

A/N 2: Phew! I’m exhausted. I’m a bit of a clean freak so I must admit all that chocolate made me a bit uncomfortable! I realise the last few chapters have contained a lot of smut. There’s the opportunity for more next chapter before we go on a bit of a smut hiatus. Are you guys keen for more or would you prefer a fade to grey so we can get on with the plot?
Also, I've made a Facebook page! It's looking a bit sparse at the moment but I'm hoping to spruce it up with links to my other stories and artwork I like etc. Please come and check me out.....https://www.facebook.com/fragilereality/
Chapter Summary

Hemione reflects on the important questions in life.....like is Lucius Malfoy now her boyfriend?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If anybody had told Hermione that she would ever find herself willingly lying naked on the kitchen table of Malfoy Manor, with the master of the house sprawled on top of her, she would have laughed at them. She had never had much patience with divination. But, there she was; pinned down by a semi-comatose Lucius and she was...happy. Of course, somewhere deep down in the dark recesses of her brain, she was already overthinking the entire encounter. Worrying about what her friends would say, and how she was going to extract herself from this situation and, most concerningly, was Lucius Malfoy now her boyfriend? Those thoughts were all very far away though. They were little more than tiny dots on the horizon of her consciousness. Most of her awareness was taken up with thinking blissfully of the exquisite pleasure of his tongue against her flesh, and his cock moving inside her, and the press of his heavy body against her own. How could it be so pleasurable? When her back ached and her elbows were rubbed raw and even her poor abused vagina felt sore. For all his skill, Lucius was not a gentle lover. Yet she loved his brutality, how could she have reached the age of twenty-one without even knowing that she desired to be manhandled?

For his part, Lucius seemed content to lie half on-top and half beside her. One of his large hands idly stroked her belly, but the burning sexual heat between them had died down to a gentle glow. Hermione wondered if they might lie there all night.

At first, she didn’t realise what she was smelling. She was surreptitiously inhaling the scent of Lucius’ hair mingled with chocolate and sex and dreamily re-living their encounter when the aroma first hit her nostrils. It was dark and smokey and not nearly as delicious as Lucius…

“Shit!” She leapt off the table, dislodging Lucius and scurrying across the kitchen as naked as the day she was born. When she opened the oven door she was hit by an acrid wall of black smoke and she stumbled backward into Lucius who had followed her across the room. He cleared the smoke with a rather impressive display of wandless magic, but, by the time she could get close to the oven, Hermione knew that the eclairs would be beyond saving. She sadly removed the charred remnants and dropped them straight into the bin.

“Sorry.” She gave Lucius a rueful look.

He smirked. “I am not particularly disappointed; I have already consumed rather a lot of chocolate.” Hermione harrumphed at that and removed the beef from the oven. The pastry was a little darker than it ought to be, but she thought she had rescued it in time. The centre of the meat might even still be rare. Lucius was looking appreciatively at the dish.

“This, however, I definitely have room for.”

Hermione stared up at him. “You’re still hungry?”

He nodded.

“How are you not fat?”

Lucius smirked again; he was clearly very pleased with himself. “I find sexual activity always sparks
“my appetite.” He turned toward the table and, with a casual flick of his wand, vanished her robe and the chocolatey mess surrounding it. Hermione suddenly became aware of her nakedness.

“Why do I always end up naked, whilst you are still fully clothed?” she asked, not really expecting an answer.

“I do not mind if you wish to put your clothes back on.” Lucius gave her a surprisingly gentle smile. “I asked you to cook dinner naked, you have, just about, done that.”

“Shit,” Hermione said again, looking around frantically. “I vanished my clothes,” she admitted in response to his enquiring look. “They go automatically to the washing basket in my flat.” In a strangely Pavlovian response, she shivered, clutching her arms to her chest, even though the kitchen was not in the least cold. Lucius regarded her for a moment before he flicked his wand again. Seconds later a bundle of white fabric flew into the room and into Lucius’ hands. He carefully unfolded a white shirt which he offered to Hermione.

“Thank you.” She slipped one arm, then the other into the shirt. It was ridiculously large on her petite frame, hanging down almost to her knees, the sleeves covering her hands. Lucius smiled again and grabbed the sides of the garment, drawing her closer so he could do up the buttons. Once she was securely buttoned in, he rolled up the sleeves. Finally, he folded down the collar and pulled her even closer, close enough to plant a chaste kiss on her lips. Hermione shivered again, this time not from the cold.

She set about putting the finishing touches to dinner, while Lucius laid the table and opened a bottle of wine. When she placed a plateful of oysters on the table between them he raised an eyebrow.

“Why, Miss Granger, anyone would think you were trying to seduce me.”

“I was.” Hermione bit her lip and shyly met his eyes, gratified by the spark of heat she saw there. He didn’t say anything, but reached out to take an oyster, seasoning it with lemon juice and Tabasco before tipping it into his mouth. Hermione didn’t wish to be a cliche, but she couldn’t help but watch as he chewed and swallowed. She had never found the sight of a person eating attractive before. Admittedly, she had spent a lot of her formative years watching Ron eat, which wasn’t a pretty sight at the best of times, but still, what was wrong with her? If Lucius noticed her inability to keep her eyes off of his lips he politely ignored it.

They ate in silence at first while Hermione tried not to stare at her companion’s mouth. The atmosphere between them sparked with static and she could barely sit still, so aware was she of every tiny move Lucius made. It was as if her previous climaxes had never even happened, her body having already reset itself into a state of permanent wanting. She wondered how many times she would have to come before she would finally be sated and able to be around him without this desperate need colouring her every action.

She was surprised, and pleased, to see that the beef had survived its overcooking. The ends were a little darker but the centre was still pink.

“You are an excellent cook,” Lucius smiled across at her, his expression one of genuine pleasure, as he chewed. “Did you not consider cooking professionally?”

Hermione shook her head. “A certain potions master always accused me of lacking in originality, and I must admit, at least when it comes to cooking, it’s true. I am very good at following a recipe but I’m not innovative enough to be a chef.”

Lucius sipped his wine as he considered her words, his grey eyes fixed firmly on her face. “And how are your studies progressing? Is the certain potions master happy with you?”

Hermione sighed, her good mood evaporating. Even Lucius’s magnetism couldn’t completely eclipse the feelings of helplessness which engulfed her when she thought about her ailing project.

“They are not going as well as they could be.” She poked disconsolately at her meat. “The scroll you translated was wonderful, but it made mention of so many ingredients and brewing methods that neither Severus, nor myself, have ever even heard of. In some ways, it raised more questions than it answered.”

“Have you considered visiting the library at Karolinska?”
Hermione frowned. “I’m not familiar with that name.”

Lucius chewed thoughtfully. “I suppose you might not be, and perhaps even Severus hasn’t heard of it. Karolinska is the wizarding library in Stockholm. It’s one of the finest in the world. About ten years ago a private collector who specialised in Trollish works, bequeathed their entire collection and the funding for a new wing to the institution. I have visited several times to view the works, they are astonishing.”

Hermione couldn’t help but smile at the genuine academic fervour in his voice.

“I never knew,” she said softly.

“Never knew what?” His expression sharpened.

“That you were so academically minded. I thought you were just some inbred, ignorant pureblood, whose old fashioned opinions were completely set in stone and who had no wish to learn anything new.” She blushed. “Sorry.”

Lucius waved a hand dismissively. “There is no need to apologise. To a great extent, your initial impression of me was correct. I have always been a scholar at heart, but before the war, I never allowed my academic leanings to have any impact on the prejudices I had been born to. It is only since the fall of the Dark Lord that I have indulged my academic leanings and, perhaps, begun to be more open minded.”

Hermione considered his words, her eyes fixed on his beautiful face. His expression was reflective, pensive even, it suited him. She was seized with an urge to draw his chiselled features, to caress the curve of his jaw with charcoal or pick out the fine lines around his eyes in pencil. She clenched her fingers around her cutlery. Such urges were completely alien and more than a little ridiculous, she was a terrible artist. What next? Would she be writing his name on her notebooks surrounded by little hearts?

“So tell me,” Lucius continued, unaware of her odd urges. “What possessed the brightest witch of her age to study under a surly potions master who had the audacity to deem her uninventive?”

Hermione laughed a little. “He may have been audacious, but he was sadly accurate in his assessment. I do find creative thinking difficult.” She gazed sightlessly around her for a few moments as she considered her answer. “I suppose I wanted to do the unexpected. After the war—" she glanced nervously at him but he seemed unaffected by her mention of the conflict in which they had both been involved “-we were all treated like heroes—"

“You were heroes,” he interrupted. Hermione frowned; it was odd to hear those words from him.

“Whether I deserved it or not, I was treated as a hero. I could have walked into any position in the ministry and ascended the ranks far faster than I deserved, in terms of experience or ability.” She glanced at Lucius, wondering if the thought of a Muggle-born witch escalating through the Ministry filled him with horror, if it did, he concealed it well. “I wanted to do something off my own back, something I didn’t have a natural propensity for, and with someone who wouldn’t pander to me just because of who I am. Potions and Severus seemed the obvious choice.”

Lucius smiled as he cleared his plate. “I can imagine Severus gives you very little leeway despite your fame. And what will you do when your studies are complete?”

Hermione bit her lip. Nobody had ever listened to her so intently before. Her friends asked about her studies out of a feeling of obligation, but she knew they weren’t really interested, didn’t understand why she didn’t take a ministry job and accept the privileges they considered her due.

“If I ever finish my dissertation, and I manage to become proficient enough in the techniques I am researching, I would like to design medicinal potions. Some of the Trollish brewing methods are quite unique.”

Lucius narrowed his gaze. “You will continue to work for Severus in this capacity?”

“I’m not sure. I like working with Severus, he’s brilliant, but this isn’t his area of interest. I would be better seeking a position with one of the large Wizarding pharmaceuticals.”
“You must know that the pharmaceutical branch of Malfoy Industries is one of the largest in the world. You should consider working for me.”
Hermione looked down at her plate. How could she tell him that she was already well aware of the work done by his company and that she had rejected the idea of working there based on the name behind the organisation?
“That’s very kind of you, Mr Malfoy, but I fear the waters of our relationship are muddy enough without you becoming my employer too.”
“Lucius,” he said softly.
“I beg your pardon?”
“My name is Lucius; I like it when you use it.”
The bloody blush was back.
“I like it when you blush too.” He pushed aside his empty plate and strolled around the table to stand over her. His fingers gently skimmed her cheek to follow the heated flush of her skin down into the line of her borrowed shirt. “If you are quite finished, I thought we could have tea in the library, I have found several more books which may be of interest to you.”

Well, he certainly knew how to win her over, Hermione thought, as she settled, still naked but for his shirt, on the chaise longue in the library. He danced attendance on her, bringing her a cup of fragrant Earl Grey and a whole stack of books and scrolls she hadn’t previously seen. She thanked him and dug in her beaded bag for her notebook and a quill.

She barely spared him a glance, quickly settling down to study with the single minded fervidity which had earned her the best NEWT scores in over fifty years. Lucius didn’t seem to mind. He had donned his reading glasses and was engrossed in his own book, one ankle casually slung over his knee, his teacup balanced on his thigh.

They were compatible. The thought occurred to Hermione so suddenly that she dropped a large blot of ink onto the page in front of her and had to reach into her bag for a handkerchief with which to dab at it. It seemed bizarre that a pureblood supremacist and a Muggle-born witch should have so much in common, but they did. She wasn’t sure if she knew any other man who would be so content to sit in silence while she studied, except perhaps Severus and, fond of him as she was, she had never felt the urge to kneel at his feet and worship him with her mouth. Speaking of Severus...

“Lucius?”
“Hmm?” He looked up, keeping his place with a finger in the spine of his book.
“Will you tell me how you saved Severus?”
Lucius looked away. “It’s not really my story to tell.”
“But I want to know.” She pushed aside her work and turned to face him on the sofa. “Did you know?”
“Know what?”
“That he was a spy?”
“Of course I knew!” Lucius looked affronted. “I may not be as intelligent as Severus, but I’m not stupid.”
“So if you knew, why didn’t you turn him in to Voldemort?”
Lucius furrowed his brow. “He’s my friend,” he answered simply.
“But Voldemort was your master; wouldn’t you have been rewarded if you had given him Severus?”
“Perhaps, perhaps not. It’s beside the point. Whilst most of the Death Eaters were a bunch of back stabbing hypocrites, Severus was, first and foremost, my friend. He risked his soul in order to save Draco. It didn’t matter what side he was on.”
Hermione processed this in silence for several moments. “Did you know Voldemort was going to kill
him?"
Lucius shook his head. “No, by that point I was fairly low down the Dark Lord’s list of confidantes.”
“Oh. Then how did you know to go back for him?”
“I didn’t really.” Lucius poured them both another cup of tea. “I just noticed that he hadn’t come
back from the Shrieking Shack. It was sheer luck that I found him in time.”
“But he was dead, we had checked.”
The look Lucius gave her was surprisingly gentle. “Whilst I do not doubt your capabilities under
normal circumstances, Hermione, might I suggest that you were perhaps a little overwrought? It can
be difficult to feel for a weak pulse when one is in the middle of fighting a battle.”
“I suppose,” Hermione admitted. She chewed on her lip. “I’ve always felt so guilty, over leaving him
there, alone. If I’d known he was still alive—”
“You’d have what? Given up your chance to save the world in order to save the life of your surly
potions master? You did nothing wrong and Severus doesn’t blame you for leaving him.” Lucius
stretched a little on the chaise. “If anything he is grateful that he owes me a life debt and not you or
bloody Potter!”
Hermione gasped. “He owes you a life debt?”
“I saved his life didn’t I?”
“And you still haven’t told me how.”
“That’s because there is very little to tell. I found him unconscious on the floor of the shack. By this
point, the Hogwarts’ wards had fallen and I was able to apparate him here. I left him momentarily in
the care of my house elves, kidnapped the best healer I knew, and forced him at wand point to treat
Severus. Once he was out of danger I Obliviated the healer, and the rest is history.”
Hermione felt her jaw drop open. “You kidnapped a healer?”
“You must understand that, at this point, I was a wanted man and Severus was a known Death Eater;
I could hardly just waltz up to St Mungo’s and check him in via the emergency room, could I?”
“I suppose not, but still, to kidnap someone—”
Lucius’ face grew sombre. “Hermione, you know who I am, you know what I have done in the past.
I am surprised that this, of all things, shocks you.”
They sat in silence for several minutes. Finally, Lucius placed his teacup on the coffee table.
“I have something for you.”
He was nervous, she realised, as he offered her his hand and helped her to her feet. She followed him
across the library to the potions section.
“Here.” He removed a book from the shelf and handed it to her without ceremony. Hermione gazed
in wonder at the navy blue leather cover. The title emblazoned in gold lettering: Moste Potente
Potions, she didn’t even have to open it to know it was the first edition she had been longing for.
“Thank you, but I can’t accept this.” She offered the book back to Lucius, despite the fact that her
entire soul burned to possess it.
“Why ever not?” He looked genuinely confused, his smooth brow furrowing.
“Because—“ she cast around for a way to say it politely “-because of what happened earlier, it feels
like payment for services rendered.”
For a moment he stared at her, shocked, then he threw back his head and laughed.
“Come with me, Miss Granger.” He beckoned with a finger and she followed him deeper into the
library until he stopped at a glass cabinet. “Look inside,” he commanded, stepping aside so she could
gaze into the container.
Hermione caught her breath. This copy of the book was loosely bound and the few pages that she
could see were covered in spidery handwriting rather than neatly typed script.
“Is that what I think it is?” she whispered reverently.
Lucius nodded. “I believe so. The book in your arms is a mere first edition. Before you is the first
edition. Rest assured, Miss Granger, if I wished to reward you for services rendered I would give
you this.” He gestured toward the glass case. “As it is, I merely wished to give you a token gift.”
“I…then…thank you,” she stammered eventually.
Lucius smiled. “You are quite welcome. This does, however, raise a delicate point.”
“What point?” She looked up into his inscrutable face. He stepped a little closer, one large hand sliding into her hair, his lips hovering over hers. Hermione instantly felt her body begin to respond to his proximity. It was as if all her neuro receptors were specifically programmed to his pheromones, only his.
“You see my dear, the hour grows late and I should very much like to take you to bed —” his lips quirked upwards in a brief smile “— but I fear I will be accused of attempting pre-payment for services which have not yet been rendered. His hand skimmed over her lower back, drawing her flush against him, making her very aware of his intentions. Hermione held her book a little tighter against her chest.
“So you’re saying —” she licked her suddenly dry lips “—that if I keep the book I also get to sleep with you, here, tonight?”
Lucius’ smile became a little broader. “That’s exactly what I’m saying.”
“And if I don’t keep the book?”
“Then I still hope you will sleep here tonight.”
Hermione gave a wide yawn. “I do feel very tired,” she murmured against his lips, the precious first edition still clutched tightly in her arms.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to those of you who reviewed on here. I’m new to Archive and still find replying a bit tricky but I’m incredibly grateful for your kind words - thank you all.
Degustation

Chapter Summary

Things get clean... then they get dirty again!

Chapter Notes

I can't quite believe I'm saying this, but I think this chapter might need a warning. Things got a bit out of hand somewhere in my head and I ended up having to delete my browsing history yet again! There's a bit of breath play in this chapter, no idea where it came from, but if you're likely to be bothered by it maybe skip the last bit of smut.

Also, I'm sorry the formatting isn't great on here - I really struggle to get decent spacing in - I hope it's not too off-putting.

Taking his proffered hand, Hermione followed Lucius through the Manor. It wasn’t at all as she remembered it. When she had been brought to the old house, during the war, it had felt steeped in darkness. As if Voldemort’s very presence had permeated the stone, leaving the building dripping with evil. Now it felt...different, lighter somehow. The scent of linseed and beeswax hung heavy in the air. Presumably industrious teams of house elves used scented waxes to polish the blond wood floors of the upper levels. The walls were papered in creams or sage green and, at the end of the long upper landing they were currently traversing, the large windows stood open, a gentle summer breeze stirring the lightweight curtains. Far from resembling the lair of an evil despot, the house now looked more like the sort of stately home Hermione used to visit with her parents. The kind where school children gave tours during the holidays and kindly old woman served cream teas in the gift shop. She half expected Lucius to try and sell her a pamphlet detailing the restoration of the building. “Narcissa remodelled extensively following the war.” It was as if he had read her mind. “I like it.” At her words, he stopped and looked down at her. “Do you? Narcissa thinks the house will always be contaminated.” Hermione shrugged, not willing to criticise his, only recently, ex-wife. “It must have been hard for her, living here, with Him.” Lucius gave her a long, level look before he continued along the corridor once more.

Hermione had never really given Lucius’ bedroom much thought. It was a bit like the inside of Rapunzel’s tower as far as she was concerned. The man was epitomised by the Manor, but the exact décor of the interior was unimportant. However, had she imagined it, she supposed she would have conjured up the image of dark wood, forest green walls and a bed heavily draped in velvet curtains. The Lucius who inhabited her head appeared to be a mixture of Casanova and Count Dracula in terms of his taste in soft furnishings. The master bedroom turned out to be the polar opposite. It was as light and airy as the rest of the manor. The large windows overlooked the rolling Wiltshire countryside, although it was dark enough outside that Hermione could make out little more than the outline of the hills. The room was softly lit by several sconces of candles lining the walls and was sparsely furnished with a few pieces in the Chippendale style. Of course, the bed dominated the
space, it was large, but not the four poster Hermione had imagined, and instead of heavy velvet drapes, it was dressed in crisp white cotton.

She looked around her, feeling suddenly very small and very nervous. Lucius slipped an arm around her waist.

“I keep the whips and chain in that cupboard.” He gestured toward a solid looking oak door. Hermione gazed at him, wide eyed and trembling.

“I’m joking.” He crossed the room and opened the door he had indicated. “It’s just the bathroom.” “Oh.” Hermione breathed out a relived sigh. “So, just to clarify, you don’t actually have any whips and chains, do you?”

Lucius shook his head.

“Good,” the word escaped her lips before she had time to fully consider what she was going to say. “I mean, not that there’s anything wrong with that sort of thing, if that’s what you like, but I don’t like it. At least, I don’t think I would, I mean, I’ve never tried but I don’t really-“

“Miss Granger?” He had taken hold of the lapels of his shirt and pulled her up against him once more.

“Yes?”

“You talk entirely too much.”

“I know, I babble when I’m nervous.”

“I’m nervous too.”

She stared at him, then slowly blinked. Lucius Malfoy was nervous. Not only was he nervous, but he had admitted it…to her. She felt strangely privileged.

“Is it because you think I won’t like the whips and chains?”

“Will you stop talking about the whips and chains?”

“You were the one who brought them up.”

He kissed her. His lips were firm and warm against her own, and he spanned her waist with his hands pulling her tightly against him. Their bodies moulded together, the contours perfectly aligned. It felt as if she had been made for him. She chastised herself for the ridiculousness of such a thought. Then she couldn’t really think about anything anymore because his tongue had slipped inside her mouth and her hands had reached up to caress the soft skin at the back of his neck, and everything felt so good. There couldn’t possibly be anything wrong in what they were doing. Not when her whole body was on fire at his touch, when he intrigued and excited her, when her heart fluttered at the sight of him.

Finally, they parted, both breathing heavily.

“Lucius?” She gave a little wriggle.

“Yes.” He had rested his forehead against hers.

“I would really feel a lot better about myself right now if I were to take a shower.”

His fingers insinuated their way beneath her borrowed shirt and skimmed the tops of her thighs.

“I’m just going to get you dirty again,” he pointed out.

“I know.” She gave a soft whimper as he ghosted his fingers over the curve of her buttocks. “But it’s the principle of the matter; I’ll know I started off clean. Besides” – she glanced at his pristine bed – “I can’t stand the thought of getting chocolate all over your sheets.”

Lucius gave a long sigh. “And I suppose telling you the house elves will clean it up isn’t going to get me a lot of leverage? Very well, please avail yourself of the facilities.” He released her and gestured graciously in the direction of the bathroom.

“Thank you.” Hermione rose onto her tiptoes to kiss him, but quickly evaded his groping hands and made her way into the en-suite.

She looked around in surprise. The room looked as if it had been taken straight out of a Muggle interiors magazine. It was spotlessly clean and rather sparse; the walls covered in white railway tiles, the floors grey slate, which felt wonderfully warm beneath her feet, did Wizards even know about
underfloor heating? A large claw footed bath stood on one side of the room and, in the far corner, a dinner-plate sized shower head was suspended from the ceiling.

A plain mirror hung over the sink and Hermione couldn’t help but look at herself as she began to undo the buttons of her shirt. Her hair was a disaster. It never responded well to sexual activity and that, combined with the humidity of the kitchen, had caused it to almost double in size. She was surprised she had made it through the bedroom door. She picked in disgust at a lump of chocolate which had made its way, unnoticed, into her curls. Despite Lucius’ best efforts her body was stained with streaks of dried chocolate and she winced as she tugged at a piece that had caught in what remained of her pubic hair. She definitely needed a wash.

She was distracted from her own state of dishabille by a movement in the mirror. She looked up and only just contained her gasp of surprise as the vision of Lucius, entirely naked, appeared before her. She swallowed and realised that her reflection was blushing, the ugly red staining her neck and chest as her eyes fixed on Lucius’ naked form. Very slowly, she turned around. It was written in the stars that naked Lucius would be even more beautiful than clothed Lucius. It had been pre-ordained from the beginning of time that Malfoy men would have the faces of angels and the bodies of gods and Hermione accepted this fact. But really? Was there any need for him to look quite so delectable? He almost seemed to glow, his pale, unblemished skin stretched tautly over his perfectly sculpted muscles. There was not an ounce of fat on him, but nor was he overly muscular, there was just a hint of definition, enough to let her know that he was a man. As if she could forget his maleness, when his cock proudly reared up from the nest of blond curls at the apex of his thighs. She had thought it beautiful before but here, in the context of his perfect body, it was even more appealing. She bit her lip and unconsciously flexed her fingers.

Without saying a word Lucius turned and stepped under the showerhead. As Hermione’s eyes travelled up from the perfection of his buttocks she gave a gasp of horror. A thick ridged scar transected his back, running from the right shoulder blade to just above his left hip. The skin around it was puckered and uneven as if the wound had never been properly healed. It was a hideous injury, rendered even more disturbing by the beauty of the rest of his body. The sight of it almost brought tears to her eyes, whether of rage or sympathy she wasn’t sure. How could anyone despoil such an oil painting?

“Severus.” Once more Lucius answered her unasked question as water began to tumble from the showerhead, soaking his platinum hair and coursing down the planes of his body. Hermione moved to join him under the deluge, her small hand tracing the roughened flesh of his scar. “Severus did this?”

Lucius’ head bowed under the weight of the water. “It was my punishment for my failure in the Department of Mysteries, I'm lucky he was chosen to punish me. Anyone else would have gone for my face.”

He turned to face her then, his head tilting to one side as he watched the water flatten out her curls, her hair turning black and clinging to her face and shoulders. “You were right.” There was a hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth. “About what?”

“You do need a wash.” He reached behind him for a glass bottle and poured a generous measure of its contents into his hand. Without hesitation, he began to wash her body, his fingers following much the same path his tongue had taken earlier. He started with her navel, a single soapy digit probing deeply inside inciting several breathless giggles from Hermione. Then he skimmed up her flanks, rubbing gently at the smears he found there. Finally, he began to rub his soapy hands over her breasts. Hermione sagged under his ministrations, reaching out to prop herself against the wall of the shower. He wasn’t deliberately trying to arouse her, in fact, she felt as if he were actively trying not to but the feel of his large warm hands stroking the slippery soap across her nipples, already sensitive from his earlier attentions, couldn’t fail to excite her. They hardened beneath his fingers, but he
moved away, instead, delving between her legs.

He rubbed carefully at her landing strip, removing every last hint of chocolate. Then he smoothed the soap over her inner thighs, banishing the mixture of chocolate and their combined emissions. Finally, he skimmed over her outer labia and up the crack of her arse. Hermione couldn’t contain her moan of arousal then, but he merely smirked and, to her chagrin, held her buttocks slightly open so the hot water would rinse the soap out from between them.

Then he reached for another bottle.
“Finally,” there was a note of satisfaction in his voice. “You have no idea how long I’ve wanted to get my hands on this rats nest.”
Hermione turned slightly to look up at him as he began to work the shampoo into her curls. “Will that turn it blonde and straight?” She gestured at the bottle he had replaced on the bathroom shelf. “No.” His long fingers began to knead her scalp. “I would sooner destroy a stained glass window, but it might render your hairstyle little less sentient than it currently is.”
The feeling of his hands in her hair was almost as pleasurable as his touch between her thighs. Hermione purred as he massaged her scalp, her eyes drifting closed with pleasure. Nobody had washed her hair like this since she was a little girl. In fact, nobody had ever washed her hair like this; there was something sensual in the touch of his hands even though they never strayed from her scalp.

He rinsed away the soapy water and began to rub in a conditioner, Hermione vaguely recognised the scent, it swirled around her and her belly clenched at the thought of smelling like Lucius until the next time she washed her hair. She was boneless under his ministrations, the feel of his fingers, combined with the hot water and the scent of his conditioner leaving her strangely hypnotised.

“There,” there was satisfaction in his voice as the water finally ran clear. He twisted the wet coil of her hair around his fist, using it to manipulate her head until he could cover her lips with his own. She willingly leaned into him, her palms resting on his chest as she tilted her abdomen to feel the press of his cock against her belly.
“Stop right there.” His fingers captured her wrist as she reached for him. She could feel him smile against her lips despite the censure in his words. “I have some very specific fantasies involving you and my bed; I will not allow your eagerness to derail them.” He placed her hand once more on his chest. She pouted. When had she ever pouted?
“Fine, but I still get to wash you, right?”
He hesitated, his body, so intimately pressed against hers, tensing just a fraction. “Very well.” He handed her the bottle of shower gel. Hermione tipped some into her hands, looking up at him as she did so.
“You don’t want me to?” she asked nervously.

He considered her for a moment before he answered. “You are not the only one who is used to being in control, Miss Granger.” That seemed to be all he was willing to say on the matter and Hermione, determined to torment him as he had tormented her, moved slightly back, out of the circle of his arms, and began to wash his chest.

Lucius had almost entirely escaped the deluge of chocolate since he had remained clothed during their encounter. He didn’t really need to be washed, so Hermione simply enjoyed the sensation of running her fingers over every inch of his silky skin. She loved the way it flexed and trembled beneath her, sensitive in areas she would never have imagined. He literally purred when she dug her fingers into the indentations at the top of his spine and trembled when her questing hands ran over the soft skin of his belly. In deference to his feelings on the matter, she gave his genitals only a cursory wash but spent longer soaping and running her fingers through the blond curls at the apex of his thighs. From the insistent tap of his penis against the backs of her hands as she did so, she thought he enjoyed it.
When every inch of him had been attended to she kissed her way across his chest, she could taste only water and a slight soapiness but his skin was like silk against her tongue and she could feel the reverberation of his groan along it.

“I want to wash your hair now.”
He smiled down at her. “Then do it.”
She stood on tiptoe and reached upwards, but despite her best efforts, she could not quite reach the top of his head.
Lucius smiled again. “I appreciate your problem.” To her surprise he knelt down in front of her, allowing her to rest her hands on the top of his head. The symbolism of the act was not lost on Hermione. Lucius Malfoy, former Death Eater and proponent of pureblood supremacy, was kneeling at her Muggle feet.

“Get on with it, Hermione, my knees are already complaining.” His clipped tones brought her out of her reverie and she quickly reached for the shampoo, vowing to make the experience as pleasurable for him as it had been for her. It was very evident that Lucius enjoyed her ministrations. He gave another groan of pleasure as she began to rub in the shampoo and tilted his head back against her hands. He reminded her of Crookshanks when he insistently rubbed himself against her hand, seeking more and more caresses. She obliged him, spending more time than was strictly necessary shampooing and conditioning his hair, scraping her nails against his scalp and wallowing in the arousal his pleased sounds induced in her. Eventually, though, she had to admit she was finished and she extended her hand to pull him to his feet.

They gazed at each other through the deluge for several long seconds. Drops of water clung to Lucius’ eyelashes and cascaded down his cheeks, she wanted to trace them with her tongue, taste every inch of his flesh. She wanted, so desperately to be close to him, to have him possess her, to do something to take away the ache which had been building all evening. He smiled knowingly, and she wondered, not for the first time, if he were actually a Legilimens, or if he were simply extremely perceptive. Either way, she was certain that he knew exactly how much she wanted him.

He left her then. Stepping out of the flow of water and wrapping a huge white towel around his body, his eyes sliding over her once more before he exited the bathroom. Hermione took a few moments to attempt to compose herself and made sure that the last vestiges of soap and shampoo were really gone from her skin and hair before she switched off the water and exited the shower.

She dried herself carefully, wrapping her hair in a towel until her body was dry. Then, with some trepidation, she applied a drying charm, flinching at the thought of her hair frizzling wildly out of control. It didn’t. Her corkscrew curls were loosened and her usually uncontrollable hair now hung in soft, shiny ringlets around her face. She ran her hand through the silky curls in wonder.

“Where did you get that conditioner?” She walked back into the bedroom completely naked, her nudity completely forgotten in her thirst for knowledge. Lucius was stretched out across the bed, equally naked, his own hair also dry. He looked up, heat flaring in his stormy eyes at the sight of her.

“Come here and I’ll tell you,” he invited. He reached out a hand and, when Hermione placed her fingers in his, he yanked sharply, pulling her down on top of him. Hermione gasped at the sudden sensual onslaught of so much skin pressed together. Lucius turned so they both lay on their sides and insinuated one thigh between hers, the rough hairs on his leg abrading her naked sex.

“Severus makes it for me.” Lucius was running his warm hands across the planes of her body. As if he were trying to learn her by heart.

“Yes really.” Hermione’s distracted brain could hardly imagine Severus tinkering away with beauty products in his lab.

“Really?” Lucius dipped his head and flicked his tongue against her nipple. “Life debt, remember.” Hermione found it odd that anybody would call in a life debt over hair care but she was finding it increasingly difficult to focus on the conversation. Her blood appeared to have all flooded
away from her brain and into her breasts, and all she wanted was for Lucius to continue his exploration.

“You know,” he said conversationally, as he teased her hardened nipple with his teeth. “I think you taste even better without the chocolate.” He bit hard on the curve of her breast, sucking the tender flesh into his mouth with bruising force. Hermione squealed and pressed herself harder against the thigh between her legs.

“You like that don’t you?” His lips were already moving to her other breast, where he bit again, even as his fingers twisted the nipple he had abandoned. “A bit of pain with your pleasure, it’s what you want isn’t it? Tell me…” He twisted harder as she failed to respond, gasping for air as the pain and pleasure mingled sending arrows of sensation to her sex. Circe! She was close already.

“Yes,” she gasped the words as she arched against him.

Hermione felt herself spiralling rapidly out of control. It was as if the entire evening had comprised entirely of foreplay and now, in an embarrassingly short period of time, she teetered, once more, on the brink of orgasm, despite the fact that Lucius had, so far, only touched her breasts. As he, once more, drew her nipple into his hot wet mouth he simultaneously increased the pressure of his thigh against her sex. With a wail of surprise, she tumbled over the brink and came, clutching the back of his head and shamelessly grinding herself against his thigh.

“Miss Granger.” He had released her nipple with a satisfied pop. “Let us be thankful my trigger is not as short as yours or we would already be done for the evening.”

She could only stare at him, his predatory grey eyes bored into her own as his hand stilled at her breast.

He loomed over her, dragging his erect member through her slick folds, kissing her with surprising gentleness as he did so. It was with the same care that he eased himself inside her, slowly entering her ready channel, even his gentle incursion triggering her walls to fasciculate around him once more. She groaned with pleasure, arching up against him, hooking one of her ankles around his leg. She couldn’t get close enough, it didn’t matter how deeply he possessed her, she wanted more. Merlin, she would climb right inside him if she could. He was still moving steadily, long, deep strokes, his face buried beneath her hair, his lips and teeth at her neck.

She felt the pressure building once more, but this time it wasn’t enough, she needed more, needed him to take her harder, or touch her or something… she wriggled impatiently beneath him.

“Is something the matter?” Lucius continued to move in the same smooth, unhurried manner.

“No,” she breathed out the answer as she bucked her hips against his, straining to connect her clitoris with his pelvis.

He smirked and she realised he was doing this on purpose. He was teasing her, holding back, waiting to see what she would do.

“Lucius…please…” her voice was strained.

“Please what?”

“I need…I need…”

“What do you need?” He stroked a little deeper and she moaned in appreciation, tilting her hips again.

She needed him to take her like he’d done before, to pound into her until it felt as if her she might split in two, to overwhelm her, to overpower her. She looked up pleadingly at him.

“You have to say it,” he whispered the words in her ear.

“What?”

“Whatever it is you’re too afraid to say.”

She closed her eyes, she couldn’t look at him.

“I think I might want the whips and chains.”

He stopped moving and stared down at her, his jaw slack. Then he pulled up and off of her. She couldn’t take her eyes off his cock, it was still heavy and swollen and slick with the fluid of her
arousal. He pulled her up onto her knees and came behind her, his large hand splaying possessively over her belly. He entered her roughly, filling her to the hilt. This was what she had wanted, what she needed. His cock seemed bigger and harder in this position and it rubbed against the front wall of her vagina making her feel deliciously full.

Lucius began to thrust, his pelvis tight against hers, his cock nudging up against her cervix. Hermione rolled her head back against his shoulder, and then gave a yelp of surprise when he grabbed a handful of her hair and yanked her head forward. “Look,” he hissed, his breath hot in her ear. “Look at yourself.” She opened her eyes. Of course, Lucius Malfoy had a mirror in his bedroom. Of course it was angled just so. So that he could watch himself fucking her. She had never seen herself like this before. Her knees spread, the pink lips of her sex wrapped around his pistoning member, her eyes wide and bruised and her hair wild once again. Without taking his eyes from hers, Lucius removed his hand from her hair and wrapped it around her neck. She felt a momentary flash of panic as his fingers settled against the delicate vasculature, lightly compressing her windpipe. He controlled her completely now, his ringed fingers a strange parody of a jewelled necklace around her throat, his thick cock ploughing into her willing flesh. “Is this what you wanted?” his voice was hoarse. His eyes glittered cruelly in the mirror as he tightened his fingers. “Yes,” Hermione wheezed. And it was. She wanted the fear, wanted to feel his power, wanted this dark possession. Already, she could feel her orgasm building again, but it felt tight, almost painful as his cock rubbed against the front wall of her sex and stimulated her bladder. She wasn’t quite sure whether she needed to come or to urinate…or both.

He continued to pound into her, holding her physically against him, his body hot against hers a slick sweat building between them. Then his fingers were sliding down across her taut stomach to settle between her legs. He manipulated her clitoris between his thumb and forefinger, his actions not gentle but calculated; measured. Hermione began to pant. She wanted to writhe against him but his restraining fingers kept her still. Her head spun and the mounting pressure between her legs both terrified and excited her. This experience transcended anything she had felt before. It was as if all of her previous sexual encounters had been painted in black and white and she had now burst suddenly through the canvas to find the world so vibrantly technicolour that her eyes could barely stand it. She closed them once more against the onslaught of sensation. “Look at yourself,” Lucius’ voice was a growl in her ear and he punctuated his words with a punishing thrust which had her crying out. She dragged her eyes open to stare unrecognising at the woman in the mirror. As Lucius intensified the pressure on her clitoris she felt the irrevocable build of her orgasm and knew that there was no turning back from the tsunami of sensation which was about to overwhelm her. She clung to Lucius’ forearm, vaguely aware of the movement of tendons and muscles beneath his skin as his fingers moved between her thighs.

The pressure on her neck intensified, she should have been frightened; she was alone in the house of a known Death Eater, her wand was nowhere to be seen and his long fingers were currently compressing the arteries of her neck, but she felt nothing of the sort. Even as she waited for her orgasm she felt gloriously fulfilled by her submission to him, by her trust of him. Red spots danced on the periphery of her vision, she felt light headed and high and the ache between her legs had become a desperate pulsing need. Just as her body began to contract around his Lucius loosened his hold, and as she came, the sudden rush of blood to her brain brought every aspect of the experience into crisp detail. Each and every one of her senses was heightened. She could feel the muscles of her thighs, belly and sex clenching and relaxing around his cock. She could feel his own answering shudder as he fought for control. It was as if she was absorbing him through the skin of her back where he was plastered so tightly against her, and the brush of his hair against her shoulders felt like the caress of silk to her hypersensitive nerve endings. At the peak of her pleasure, a gush of fluid shot
from her body and she whimpered in surprise and mortification, even as Lucius gathered whatever it was she had emitted onto his fingers and continued to rub at her clitoris. Her orgasm went on and on. She felt fatigued as if she were coming to the end of a marathon, her muscles ached and cramped, and yet, still flexed with pleasure.

Yet Lucius waited. He continued to move inside her with the same intractable, punishing rhythm, until the storm of her orgasm had passed. It was only when she finally stilled, and sagged, like a rag doll in his arms, that he wrapped them around her chest and began to pound into her even more vigorously. Hermione kept her eyes fixed on his reflection as he battered unrelentingly against her cervix. His teeth were gritted, his eyes feral and he snarled with pleasure as he reached his own peak, ramming her forcibly downwards onto his cock, his whole body shuddering as he pumped his seed as far into her as he could possibly reach.

Hermione had never felt more like running away in her life than she did in the moments that followed. As the endorphins began to dissipate the full recognition of what she had done began to crash around her. She had begged Lucius Malfoy, of all people, to fulfil some sort of deep and dark sexual craving she had hadn’t even known she possessed. She had allowed him, wanted him, to possess and dominate her in a way she knew she ought to find repugnant. Furthermore, he had brought her to the highest peak of pleasure she could possibly have imagined and she was terrified she might actually have urinated on him during the process. He didn’t seem overly perturbed. He was pressing gentle kisses against her bruised and bitten neck, his heart hammering against her back, his skin flushed and sweaty.

His flaccid cock slipped from between her thighs and Hermione winced at the trickle of fluid coursing its way down her leg. Oh if only she could simply apparate away and never see him again.

“Are you alright?” his voice was soft, tender even. She had never heard that particular tone from him before.

“No…yes…” She turned her head to the side, no longer wishing to see her own reflection.

Lucius sank down onto the bed, clumsily pulling her into his arms and flicking a hand at the mirror. Despite her emotional turmoil, she couldn’t help but be impressed at the small display of wandless magic as the glass darkened, no longer reflecting them. He gathered her more firmly against him, after a moments’, resistance she laid her cheek against his chest, breathing in his now familiar scent, it calmed her a little.

He stroked her hair. “Hermione I-“

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she almost sobbed the words. She couldn’t cope, whatever his response was going to be to what had unexpectedly transpired between them she couldn’t face it. He held her for a few minutes, his fingers continuing to stroke the skin of her back and the soft fall of her hair. The sweat had begun to dry on her body and, despite his proximity, she shivered. Lucius reached behind him for the bed covers.

“Do you still wish to stay?” There was something in his voice, another nuance she had not heard from him before that caused her to look up. He quickly shuttered his expression, but not before she had seen a flash of vulnerability, a tiny chink in his armour.

She nodded her head against his chest.

Lucius reached for his wand, which he had discarded earlier on the far side of the bed, he cast a rousing Scourgify over them both and the bedsheets. Hermione kept her face averted as he did so. Then he pulled her backward, settling her against him under the covers.

“Light on or off?”

“Off,” she answered immediately and sighed with relief as his brief nox plunged the room into dark purple twilight.

“I need you to know something,” his words were whispered as if in confession, it was easier to hear them in the dark, where she was free of the scrutiny of those grey eyes. She waited for him to continue. “I would never have done…I would never do-“ he hesitated, she had never known him to be lost for words before “- you asked me,” he finally finished.
“Yes,” Hermione whispered her own answer and felt his chest move as he sighed with relief under her cheek.
“I won’t ever do anything like that again unless you specifically ask me,” his voice was more matter of fact this time and Hermione didn’t answer. She stared off into the almost darkness, her mind racing, even as sleep pulled at the edges of her consciousness.

A/N2

I realise things got a bit intense back there. I just want to reassure you that we aren't really going to be seeing the whips and chains Hermione alluded too. Not that I'm averse to reading that sort of thing, but I've never tried writing it, and I'm not convinced I'm up to the job.
Chapter Summary

Draco sticks his oar in...

Chapter Notes

Hi Everyone,

Thank you so much to those who have left me comments, I am sorry I'm so terminally bad at responding to them - I really appreciate you taking the time to comment on my work. Your input really helps me to shape the story - thank you all.

“Run that by me one more time.” Hermione rubbed a hand across her forehead and stared at Draco with mingled surprise and horror. The blond wizard gave an impatient sigh and took a sip from the glass of wine he had poured himself on arrival.

“It’s very simple, Hermione. I want you to come out for dinner with me, Astoria and my father on Wednesday night. You can order the most ridiculously overpriced thing on the menu and ask for it to be cooked any way you like and my father will pick up the bill – I fail to see why this concept is challenging your supposedly brilliant mind.”

“Because your father hates me,” Hermione suggested, fighting the childish urge to cross her fingers behind her back.

Draco put his head on one side. “Really?”

Hermione took a swallow from her own glass, she hated lying to Draco but whatever there was between her and Lucius it was far too new and fragile to stand up to public scrutiny.

“Of course.” She really did cross her fingers this time.

“Because your father hates me,” Hermione suggested, fighting the childish urge to cross her fingers behind her back.

Draco put his head on one side. “Really?”

Hermione took a swallow from her own glass, she hated lying to Draco but whatever there was between her and Lucius it was far too new and fragile to stand up to public scrutiny.

“Of course.” She really did cross her fingers this time. “I’m a Muggleborn, and abomination, you know the vernacular.” She took another mouthful of wine, wishing Draco would bugger off, she had studying to do and she was tired.

Draco did not appear to be psychic. He settled into her single armchair and sipped his wine again. Hermione was having difficulty looking at him. It wasn’t just that she was feeling uncomfortable with lying to him; it was the fact that he looked so much like his father. It was making her clench in places Draco had never caused to clench before. It wasn’t that she suddenly fancied the ferret, (thank Circe for small mercies) more that he reminded her forcefully of somebody she did fancy. How on earth she could be capable of mounting any sort of sexual response she didn’t know. She had barely been able to walk on Sunday morning and today was not much better. Lucius Malfoy employed a bedroom technique which some might describe as brutal. Not only that, but he had kept up an unrelenting barrage of assault which had left Hermione weak at the knees and almost begging for mercy. She had no idea where he got the stamina from. No wonder Narcissa had left him; keeping Lucius satisfied sexually was apparently a full time job which required an iron cast undercarriage. Not to mention the biting. Hermione had been late for work that morning due to a protracted session in front of her, very disapproving, bathroom mirror, glamouring love bites into submission. Her neck was so enchanted she worried that she might look like a candidate for the headless hunt and she was seriously considering the Muggle option of a polo necked jumper.
Of course she had asked for it. She had practically got down on her knees and begged for it and, having had some time to consider, she wasn’t as mortified about her recently discovered urges as she had been initially. In fact, she felt almost proud of herself; as if in choosing to surrender control she had actually gained it. She was grateful to Lucius for indulging her, for taking care of her, and for somehow instinctively giving her what she had barely known she wanted. She had even visited the library and covertly consulted a few books. It turned out she was quite normal really, lots of people wanted to engage in rough sex, plus or minus the whips and chains and she definitely hadn’t weed herself during the act; so all in all, things were looking pretty peachy.

All of these thought shot through her mind in a flash as she glared at Draco, who was regarding her with a raised eyebrow.

“How about I tell you a little story, hmm?” he suggested silkily.

Hermione scowled, why did he remind her so much of Lucius, it wasn’t fair? She leaned on her kitchen island and fixed Draco with what was supposed to be a disinterested stare.

“Whatever, Draco.”

Draco smirked. “So, a couple of weeks ago – I’m not quite sure of the timeline – my father started asking Potter questions about you.” He paused, looking searchingly at Hermione. “He paused, looking searchingly at Hermione. When she didn’t respond he shrugged and continued. “He told Potter that he thought you’d make a good wife for me.”

Hermione pressed her lips together, biting back the squeak of protest that had almost escaped them.

“Don’t look so worried, Princess.” Draco’s smirk encompassed his entire face. “The idea is entirely unappealing to me too. When Potter first told me about Father’s scheme I thought it was some sort of bizarre manifestation of the guilt he still holds regarding his abominable parenting and endangering of my life during the war.”

Draco had read a lot of self-help books and still had the propensity to talk like one given the opportunity. Hermione would normally have mocked him but, on this occasion, she let his pomposity pass. She clutched the stem of her wine glass.

“I was pretty angry, as you can imagine.” Draco strolled across the room and removed Hermione’s glass from her nerveless fingers in order to refill it. “I eventually decided to confront father.” He lounged beside her against the counter. “I couldn’t believe he was interfering in my life again, not when he knew that Astoria and I were together.” He tucked a stray strand of hair behind Hermione’s ear. “So imagine my surprise when, mid-way through confronting him, I noticed your hideous handbag sitting on his kitchen table.”

“We were just-”

“Don’t bother lying,” Draco’s tone was gently chastising, “you know you’re dreadful at it, and I’m only going to catch you out.” He traced the spot of skin behind her ear with his index finger. “Is it just your neck you had to glamour or do these go all the way down?”

“Draco!” She slapped his hand away, her fingers covering her neck as her face bloomed into a blush.

“How did you know?”

“You missed one,” Draco said, moving back to the armchair, “and close up your neck is all fuzzy, you should wear a scarf or something.”

“Thank you,” Hermione bit out the words through clenched teeth.

“You’re quite welcome.” Draco was grinning now. “So, once I realised that Father was not trying to set you up with me but, in fact, very much decided he wanted you for himself, I decided to help him along the way by making sure we all went out for dinner together.”

“I really don’t think-”

“Of course, it seems he helped himself quite admirably after I left, but it’s too late now, the damage is done. Father thinks we’re going out together on Wednesday so I can decide between you and Astoria, and, since I don’t have any more pressing plans for the evening, I’ve decided to keep the date.” Draco examined his finger nails.

“But Draco-“ Hermione’s voice tailed off.

“Yes?” There was a hint of steel in Draco’s tone.
“I don’t really think it’s such a good idea,” her voice was small. Draco let you a long sigh. “So you and Father are just going to sneak around behind people’s back for the rest of your lives?”
“No…yes… I don’t know…it’s only happened a couple of times.” Hermione felt her blush intensify and she sank down onto the sofa opposite Draco. She was surprised when she felt the cushion depress next to her and his arm around her shoulders.
“Look Hermione, I’m not angry. Father’s been a virtual recluse since the end of the war and he hasn’t been any better since Mother left. I’m pleased he’s showing an interest in somebody and I’m even more pleased that he’s abandoned his prejudices enough to take up with you.”
Hermione had buried her face in her hands and now she kept them firmly over her face.
“But he has to learn that he can’t go around manipulating people into doing whatever he wants,” Draco continued, sounding extremely plausible. “If he wanted information about you so he could win you over, all he had to do was ask. Not go around spreading ridiculous rumours which would eventually get back to me anyway.”
Hermione looked up at him. “So this wasn’t an accident?”
Draco looked incredulous. “What did you think happened? That you slipped and fell on my father’s cock?”
“No,” Hermione wailed, the blush coming back into full force. “But I thought it just sort of happened, by chance, I suppose.”
Draco shook his head and made a sympathetic tsking sound. “You really don’t know my father, Granger, nothing just happens when he’s around. I assure you; whatever has happened between you has been entirely pre-mediated.”

Hermione shook her head in confusion. It was all a bit much to take in, especially in her slightly befuddled, still sleep deprived, state.
"Aren't you angry?" Draco asked.
"Why would I be angry?"
"Because he's lied to you, manipulated you-"
"I'm not really sure he has." Hermione thought back over their relationship. "I think I'm relieved more than anything."
"Relieved?"
"Harry told me Lucius had been talking about you and me getting together. I thought there was maybe some sort of Pureblood ritual where I had to sleep with the father and the son-"
"That's ridiculous!"
"Draco, you were both part of a cult with matching tattoos and a remit for murdering and torturing people because their parents weren't magical. A bit of wife sharing doesn't seem that preposterous to me!"
As always, when she brought up his past Draco backed down.
"Okay, I see your point but still -"
"And just because Lucius used a bit of subterfuge to find out about me, that doesn't mean that everything that's happened between us has been a lie. I think it's been an organic growth of mutual attraction."

Draco stared at her for a long time. "You poor innocent flower," he eventually said. "How on earth have you survived in the world for so long? Alright Granger, tell me this, when did you first see my father after he caught us in the kitchen at the Manor?"
Hermione thought back. "He came into the apothecary to buy some Dreamless Sleep; it was a complete co-incidence that I was even there that day."
"Hermione, my father has been taking Dreamless Sleep since he got out of Azkaban, he has a private supplier that delivers it direct to his door, do you really think he needed to go out and buy it himself?"
"Oh-"
"Yes oh! Then what happened?"
Hermione picked at a thread on her jeans. "He asked me to lunch."
"Yes, and then?"
"He asked me to help him learn to cook so he could impress a lady."
"Merlin's beard Granger! You actually fell for that? What did I just tell you? He hasn't been near a woman since before the end of the war. The only lady he's trying to impress is you!"
"But if that's true then why didn't he just ask me out, why all the subterfuge? I made him go to a fish monger for crying out loud!"

They both paused while Draco digested this fact. Finally, he shrugged.
"Who knows why my father does anything. He likes the thrill, I suppose, he can't just be honest about his feelings. Look Hermione, I love him and I love you - if you two can work things out then I'm all for it. But, don't you think my father deserves just a little taste of his own medicine? To know how it feels to be shifted about like a pawn on a chess board?"

Hermione stared at him. She was so confused. She liked Lucius, a lot. She liked spending time with him, she felt safe with him, which was bizarre considering their past. She fancied the pants off of him too. But, it seemed that Draco had something of a point. Had there really been another woman? Or, all along, had Lucius merely used his phantom dinner date as an excuse to get close to her. Admittedly, had he asked her out, she would have refused him. But now, she didn’t know where she stood. The amazing, heart-warming sense of trust she had felt in his arms seemed somewhat tarnished now. Something unpleasant uncoiled in Hermione's chest.

Draco was still waiting, more or less patiently, for her to answer his question.
"Maybe," she allowed. "What did you have in mind?"
"Nothing bad," Draco assured her. "We'll go to dinner, I'll flirt with you enough to make my father insanely jealous, then Astoria and I will leave, and you can confront him, get him to see that he can't go on lying his way out of every situation."
"But what about Astoria? Won't she get jealous?"
"No, because, unlike my father, I'm actually completely honest with her, she'll know it's a set up from the beginning."

Hermione ran through the scenario in her head. She still couldn't quite believe that Lucius had been after her all along. It still left the biggest question unanswered, why on earth would Lucius Malfoy pursue her? She supposed she would never find out unless she confronted him, and Draco’s plan would give her the opportunity to do that.
"Alright, I'll do it," she agreed.
Lucius didn’t think he had ever felt this nervous before going out for dinner. In fact, looking back, if one discounted his interviews with Voldemort, during which he had felt more terrified than anything else, he didn’t think he had ever felt this nervous, full stop. As he tried on and rejected several sets of dress robes he tried to convince himself that the evening would go without a hitch.

He had certainly left Hermione satisfied after their night together. The poor witch had barely been able to walk on Sunday morning. Uncertainty clenched in his gut. Had he been too rough with her? She had seemed appreciative at the time, a strange mixture of submissive and responsive which had fired his blood and left him a little delirious with lust. Lucius had enjoyed a lot of sex in his life. He had indulged in a varied diet ranging from vanilla to downright kinky; he didn’t particularly prefer one flavour over another. What he did find arousing was Hermione’s obvious willingness to explore her sexuality with him. It flattered his, already large, ego that she would ask him to engage in activities she had never tried before. He only hoped that he would have further opportunity to demonstrate his wide range of skills.

Sweet Merlin, what was wrong with him? He pressed his fingers to his brow, wondering if he had a fever. He had never agonised over a woman like this before, never performed a detailed autopsy of his sexual performance, never worried so much about what he was going to wear. Well, that wasn’t strictly true; he often worried about his clothes, but that was because he liked to look good. Not because he cared what anybody else thought.

He cared very much about what Miss Granger thought. There was something about the defensive jut of her small chin and the subtle press of her full lips when she was displeased that made him deeply uncomfortable. He would yield to her on almost anything; accede to any of her wishes if she would only stop looking at him with disappointment in those big brown eyes. He shuddered as he fastened the buttons on his shirt. He could only pray that Hermione never found out how vulnerable he was to her displeasure. She could dissect him emotionally if she so chose; pull him apart as easily as Severus eviscerated Scarab beetles before making (potion). He hated this feeling of exposure and yet, he craved her company.

She must never know. He told himself as he appraised his appearance one final time. He was as immaculate as always, his hair, his robes, even his shoes; he was perfectly groomed, masked, as always, in composure. He had been celibate for over four years, he acknowledged. Of course the first woman to break that drought was going to end up affecting him a little more than his previous dalliances. Whilst his objective to seduce Miss Granger had been fully satisfied he was not quite ready to let her go. There was no harm in continuing the affair a little longer, as long as Hermione never found out about his deepening feelings. He shuddered and reminded himself that a rather large obstacle, entirely of his own making both literally and figuratively, now stood between himself and the woman he desired.

How he wished that he had chosen a more conventional method of pursuit. It might have taken a bit
longer but the girl would have capitulated eventually, they always did. Now, he had maneuvered himself into an awkward corner, where he was actually going to be forced to fight his own son for her affections. He smoothed a hand through his flawless hair. Draco had everything, the Malfoy looks and fortune of course, but also an easiness of temperament and a lightness of spirit that he, Lucius was not in possession of. Furthermore, Draco was not nearly as tarnished by the events of the war as Lucius was. Given the choice would Hermione really choose him over his son? His head start, promising as it had initially appeared, was looking more and shakier by the minute.

Perhaps, he thought, as he apperated to The Three Broomsticks, he would be better focussing his attentions on Draco rather than Miss Granger. The boy was already enamoured by Miss Greengrass, surely it would be easier to steer him in that direction, taking advantage of the, still intrinsic, boy’s need to please his father, rather than trying to seduce Miss Granger out from underneath Draco’s nose. He smiled a little to himself as he made his way through the Leaky Cauldron. Yes! That would work, all he had to do was make it obvious to Draco how unsuitable Hermione would be for him, he was a master manipulator, and this should be a piece of cake.

Draco and Miss Greengrass were already seated when he arrived at Amicus Apple. His son shook his hand and introduced him to Astoria, who he had not seen for some time. She was beautiful, in an understated way; her dark hair curled over her shoulders and she wore a green satin dress which was draped in such a manner as to be both demure, yet alluring. She reminded him of Narcissa in some ways; a perfect paragon of pureblood breeding and manners. Yet, there was something more to her, something in the way she interacted with Draco, that spoke of a core of steel beneath her polished façade, an unwillingness to accede to societies dictates if they did not suit her. In short, she reminded him a little of Hermione, he could not imagine her taking the loss of Draco lying down.

As if summoned by his thoughts, he felt a ripple of interest spread through the room as heads were surreptitiously turned toward the entrance. He caught Draco rolling his eyes and heard him mutter, “Every time, you think they’d leave the poor girl alone, for once.” Along with just about everybody else in the restaurant, Lucius turned to observe Hermione remove her cloak and hand it to the maître de. He swallowed convulsively as his eyes fell on her bare shoulders and the exposed length of her leg. Her black cocktail dress was perfectly understated, but he could not seem to tear his eyes from her form, imagining as he was, the silky skin that lay underneath.

“Sorry about that.” Hermione was delivered to the table by an awestruck looking waiter and wrapped her arms around Draco in a warm hug. Lucius shuddered. The other dinners muttered amongst themselves at the sight of one of the golden trio sitting down to eat with not one but two Malfoy’s.

“No problem, Hermione, I had forgotten what a stir you cause, especially in that dress.” Draco gave her a lascivious look and Draco clenched his teeth so hard he was surprised his jaw didn’t crack. “Miss Granger,” he drawled, desperately trying to conceal his jealousy, “it seems you have quite the fan club.” He looked disdainfully around the room, hoping Draco picked up on his disapproval. A Malfoy should never make a scene.

She turned to him, a hint of hurt in her honey brown eyes and he seized her hand and raised it to her lips, his open mouthed kiss the closest he would allow himself to an apology. Their eyes met and he felt the tremble that ran through her fingers as their bodies connected. He allowed himself a smug smile as he pulled out her chair; she was still his, for now.

Hermione sat next to him and opposite Draco and Lucius did not like the way his son’s eyes travelled over her exposed décolletage as she arranged herself in her chair, smiling a greeting in Astoria’s direction and tucking her beaded handbag under her seat. Astoria might have the edge when it came to classic beauty but there was something enchanting about Hermione, a vivaciousness that captivated him, and surely could not fail to captivate his son too. He reminded himself of his
plan; he needed to draw Draco’s attention away from Hermione.

“Miss Greengrass, perhaps you might advise us on the wine list, I believe your family have several very successful vineyards in Tuscany, do they not?” He gave her his warmest smile, pleased when she blushed a little. At least she was not immune to his charm.

“I’m not expert, Mr Malfoy, but I’ll do my best.” She bent diligently over her menu. Lucius looked up just in time to catch Draco spearing Hermione with a thousand galleon smile.

“I’m sure you must have some opinions too, Hermione?” His son smiled warmly at the girl. “After all as talented a chef as you must have a well-developed palate.”

“I doubt there are any Muggle beverages on the menu here, Draco.” He cut in before Hermione could answer. “Perhaps it’s best to leave the choices to those who are a little better versed with wizarding society.”

There! He couldn’t have made it clearer to the boy, Miss Granger was unsuitable. Hopefully now Draco would back off and leave her to him. He could have sworn he felt the temperature to his left drop a few degrees. His barb had clearly struck home with Hermione.

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There! He couldn’t have made it clearer to the boy, Miss Granger was unsuitable. Hopefully now Draco would back off and leave her to him. He could have sworn he felt the temperature to his left drop a few degrees. His barb had clearly struck home with Hermione. He gave a mental shrug.

They perused their menus in silence for a few moments, Astoria making a few inane but politic comments regarding the diversity of the menu. Lucius placed the leather bound document on the table and fixed Hermione with a supercilious glare. “Would you like me to order for you, Miss Granger? I believe the menu is rather complex.” (In comparison to your coarse Muggle upbringing)

He hoped the subtext was clear to Draco who was staring at him aghast.

“No thank you, Mr Malfoy.” She placed her own menu on the table. “Whilst I do generally prefer the simpler things in life—” he was sure there was insult in there somewhere “—On this occasion I feel more than able to handle a little complexity.” She smiled warmly at Draco and Lucius felt her leg shift against his, was she playing footsie under the table with his son?

The white hot rage which coursed through his system was so strong that he almost hexed the waiter just for smiling Hermione too effusively. They all gave their orders and, after the wine had been poured, Lucius took a grateful slug.

“Hermione, won’t you tell us how your research is coming along?” There was an edge of desperation to Astoria’s tone. She was clearly aware of the uncomfortable dynamic between the trio and was doing her best to smooth things over. Lucius was again reminded favourably of his ex-wife; Astoria really would make a good partner for Draco.

“It’s going well, thank you Astoria.” Hermione smiled politely and Lucius suddenly wished they were alone, so he could probe more deeply and ask the several questions he had thought of since their last chat, her work fascinated him, almost as much as her agile mind. “In fact—”Hermione’s words interrupted him from his reverie “—I’m considering a trip to Stockholm in order to further my research.”

“Really, Hermione, I didn’t know.” Draco’s voice was like syrup, Lucius would never have employed such an inappropriately seductive tone over dinner. “Perhaps I could come with you, I know the city well, there are all sorts of little nooks and crannies I’d like to show you.”

Hermione blushed and opened her mouth to respond but Lucius got in before she could speak.

“Now, now Draco, I’m sure Miss Granger’s trip will be filled with dry academic meetings and the perusal of dusty libraries, you would be intolerably bored, I’m sure.” He said the last with such disgust that his own boredom was clearly displayed. “I would imagine you would be much better taking Miss Greengrass, her appreciation of the cultural aspects of the city is likely to be far in excess of anything Miss Granger has to offer.”

There was a brief silence as his three dining companions were dazzled by his rudeness. Draco had opened his mouth to respond when their starters were delivered.

Hermione had ordered scallops with cauliflower purée. Lucius touched his fingertips to the handle of his cane and muttered an almost silent Confundus. Hermione reached for the wrong fork.
“Really, Miss Granger, you are truly a shining beacon of Muggle manners are you not?” He leaned across her and plucked the correct piece of silverware from the selection at her side. “This is the correct implement, and please try not to eat off your knife; the clientele here are rather sensitive to poor etiquette.”
She snatched the fork from him, her eyes narrowing as she looked down at the one she held. She looked up at him, frowning, clearly about to retaliate when Astoria broke in, her voice a little desperate.
“What do you think of the weather we’ve been having? Surely this heat can’t last.”

The meal continued with excruciating slowness. Lucius continued to point out Hermione’s deficiencies to Draco, although he didn’t dare Confound her again, the look she had given him last time had been far too shrewd. His barbs did not seem to be having the desired effect on his son though. If anything, Draco was throwing Hermione more sultry looks across the table and, whilst the curly haired witch didn’t appear to be reciprocating his regard, she certainly wasn’t rejecting it either. Miss Greengrass did her best to pour oil on troubled waters, apparently oblivious to the fact that her paramour was blatantly trying to seduce the woman opposite him and every time Lucius spoke Hermione’s shoulders seemed to rise a little higher. He almost thought he had seen a crackle of static in her hair at one point.

They were halfway through their mains when Lucius delivered a particularly vicious riposte regarding the poor performance of Muggle born children during their first years at Hogwarts. Halfway through his diatribe Hermione stood, pushing her chair back before either Draco or Lucius could stand.
“Excuse me; I need to visit the ladies.” She strode away without waiting for either of them to respond. To Lucius’ surprise Astoria put down her own napkin and also stood.
“Excuse me.” She hurried after Hermione.

Hermione slammed the bathroom door and looked around covertly. Thankfully she was alone for the time being. She turned the cold tap on, splashing water against her cheeks. If they were wet already then she wouldn’t have to acknowledge to herself that she was crying.
“Hateful, horrible, bloody man,” she muttered, leaning her forehead against the mirror’s blissfully cool surface.

She couldn’t believe that she, Hermione Granger, war hero, had allowed herself to be brought to tears by Lucius Malfoy of all people. What an idiot she was. How on earth had she allowed herself to believe that he like her, that they were friends?

“Stupid, bleeding heart Gryffindor,” she muttered even more quietly. She must have mistaken Lucius for another one of her ridiculous crusades. She was so desperate to see the good in everyone that sometimes she failed to see what was painfully true: some people really didn’t have any good in them to begin with.

Lucius’ transformation from considerate lover to supercilious pureblood in the short space of three days was a clear indication of the blonde’s perfidy. She didn’t know if it was his desire to hide their relationship from Draco that was making him treat her so abominably, or perhaps, and more distressingly still, his behaviour today was simply an indication of how he could be expected to treat her whenever they were in public together.

The toilet door banged again and Hermione straightened up, scrubbing at her eyes. Astoria stood just inside the room staring at her.
“I’m so sorry,” the younger witch said, engulfing Hermione in a warm hug. “Lucius is being a pig.” Hermione could only nod in agreement as she hiccupped inelegantly against Astoria’s shoulder.
Hermione didn’t have a lot of female friends. She and Ginny were close, but there weren’t really any other female shoulders she would consider crying on. Under normal circumstances she might have felt uncomfortable, but Astoria’s embrace was so kind, so warm, and so natural, that she felt herself relaxing into it and accepting the comfort the other girl offered.

“I thought you two were seeing each other,” Astoria said hesitantly, once the words of Hermione’s tears had subsided.

“So did I.” Hermione mopped at her face with a hand towel. “But he’s made it more than clear this evening that he’d much rather being seeing you.”

“Astoria looked momentarily stricken. “I’m so sorry—”

“You have nothing to apologise for,” Hermione interrupted, blowing her nose vigorously. “He knows what I am and if I’m not good enough for him in public then it’s his loss.”

“Quite right.” Astoria handed her another paper towel. “Do you want to leave, you and I could sneak out the back, Draco would understand?”

“No.” Hermione shook her head defiantly. “No, I’m going to have this out with him one way or another; this isn’t an acceptable way to treat anybody. Although why I expected better from Lucius Malfoy I do not know.”

Astoria shrugged. “Draco expected better from him too. He said he thought his father was smitten.” Hermione gave an inelegant snort. “I’m really not convinced Lucius is capable of such a light hearted emotion.”

“Maybe you’re right.” Astoria toyed with the strap of her handbag. “Do you think Draco’s the same?” She blurted out the question as if it taken great courage to do so.

“No!” Hermione rebuttal was instantaneous and instinctive. “No, Draco’s a wonderful person, who, despite his horrific upbringing at the hands of that megalomaniac outside, is more than capable of loving you.”

“Thank you.” Astoria clutched Hermione’s hands in her own, her eyes bright. She glanced over her shoulder. “We’d better be getting back,” she said ruefully.

Hermione nodded but gave a wail of horror when she caught sight of her tear stained face in the mirror.

“Now he’ll know he made me cry.”

“No he won’t.” Astoria brandished her wand and began to cast a number of spells which Hermione had been too busy saving the world to ever learn.

Lucius and Draco regarded each other steadily over the table for several silent moments before Lucius looked away and signalled to the waiter for another bottle of wine. Being this consistently rude to a woman he only wished to take home and ravish was thirsty work.

“What exactly are you playing at, Father,” Draco asked after both their glasses had been refilled. Lucius sipped his drink, avoiding his sons’ eyes.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Why are you being so abominably rude to Hermione?”

Lucius feigned surprise. “I really don’t know what you mean.”

“Really?” Draco’s eyebrow disappeared into his hairline. “Correcting her table manners, criticising Muggleborns, not to mention flirting with my girlfriend; I feel as if I’ve accidently used a time turner and ended up back in the 90’s.”

“I’m sorry if I may have appeared a little overbearing,” he said with complete insincerity, “but I’m afraid I have realised what a terrible error I made in pushing you and Miss Granger together.”

“You have?” Draco looked relieved.

Lucius nodded sagely. “I have, I realise now that she is grossly unsuited to be the mother of the next Malfoy heir, I must insist that you return your affections to Miss Greengrass, she is a perfect paragon of pureblood virtue.” He pursed his lips piously.
Draco turned a strange shade of puce.
“You really are an arse sometimes, do you know that?” Lucius was prevented from retorting, and he would have said something terribly clever, by the return of Miss Greengrass.

The dark haired witch gave Draco a hard look as she sat down and very subtly shook her head, Lucius might not have noticed it if he hadn’t been studiously avoiding his son’s eyes, still smarting over being called an arse.
“Has Miss Granger been waylaid signing autographs on her way back from the lavatory,” he asked snidely. The girl had been gone for far longer than was proper. He wanted to get this interminable meal over with so he could take her home and do unspeakable things to her.
“I’m right here, Mr Malfoy.” Her tone, he noted, was extremely cheerful. “I did stop to speak to a few well-wishers. It is so rewarding to be lauded as a hero by society isn’t it? Oh, I forgot,” she added blithely as she took her seat next to him, “you wouldn’t know.” He winced, just a little, at that barb but decided to magnanimously ignore it.

Draco and Astoria were deep in a murmured conversation. Draco had placed his hand on top of his girlfriend’s. Lucius wondered if the stern look at been that was needed to bring the boy to heel.
He didn’t know whether to applaud Miss Greengrass or chastise his son for being such a milksop. Either way, he decided that the other couple were so absorbed in each other that it would do no harm for him to amuse himself with Hermione. Her presence next to him throughout the meal had kept him on a knife edge of anticipation. Her soft scent stimulated thousands of pleasurable memories and he could barely concentrate on insulting her for vivid sexual flashbacks. Sneaking a covert glance in the direction of his son, he covertly placed his hand on Hermione’s thigh. He eased it upwards a little, still staring blandly across the table, while his fingers slipped beneath her skirt. They encountered the lace the top of a stocking and then warm, soft flesh. Lucius inhaled sharply, he was assailed by images of Hermione, naked but for those stockings and a pair of high heels, legs wrapped around his waist as he plunged into her over and over again.

His pleasant reverie was interrupted by something sharp poking against his belly.
“Mr Malfoy-” Hermione leaned close to him and smiled sweetly as if she were making a particularly witty observation about the food “-if you do not remove your hand from my thigh within the next five seconds I will hex you so hard you’ll be grateful you have already sired an heir, do I make myself clear?” As if to punctuate her threat she angled her wand downwards in the direction of his crotch. He snatched his hand back giving her a wounded look as he did so. She ignored him, instead smiling brilliantly at the waiter who had come to clear their plates.

Lucius surreptitiously examined Hermione as she looked at the desert menu. He was rather stung by her rejection of him. Admittedly, he hadn’t been particularly nice to her over the course of the evening, but surely she had to understand that he had appearances to maintain. If she wished to keep their relationship a secret then they had to display a certain amount of animosity when in public. The last thing either of them wanted was the press finding out about their union. He ignored the tiny voice in his head which proclaimed that it would be extremely proud to be associated with Hermione Granger in public.

He regarded the slender curve of her throat remembering the taste and texture of that milky skin against his lips. She wouldn’t stay angry with him for long. Another glass of wine and a few compliments and he was sure she would be more than happy to accompany him home.
“I’m going to have the chocolate fondant,” Astoria said, apparently oblivious to the tension between Hermione and Lucius.
“Good idea.” Draco smiled across at her, placing his menu on the table.
“I shall have it too.” Lucius closed his menu. “I’m quite a fan of chocolate.” He glanced over at Hermione, wondering how she might respond to his loaded statement.
She closed her own menu with a snap. “I’ll have the lemon tarte; I’ve recently gone off chocolate.”
“How can anyone go off chocolate,” Astoria wondered.
“I don’t know,” Hermione shrugged. “I’ve just found it rather bitter recently.” She did not look at Lucius.

He felt slightly apprehensive as they waited for their deserts. He had stopped slinging barbs in Hermione’s direction, there seemed little point anyway, and Draco was now looking at Miss Greengrass with such blatant, cow-eyed devotion that it made Lucius feel a little nauseated. His son had a lot to learn when it came to managing woman.

Despite his self-professed love of chocolate he didn’t really want his desert when it came. He just wanted to leave as quickly as possible and apparate Hermione back to the manor where she seemed to find him a lot more charming than she did in public. Draco and Astoria appeared to be of the same opinion. They both finished their deserts in rapid time and Astoria placed her napkin on the table.

“Mr Malfoy, Hermione, I’m terribly sorry but I forgot that Mother asked me to look in on her cocktail party this evening. She’ll be terribly disappointed if I don’t drop by, would you please excuse me?”

“Oh course.” Hermione smiled across at her.
“I should really accompany you, Astoria.” Draco got politely to his feet and pulled out his girlfriend’s chair. “It’s a long way for you to apparate on your own.”
“Well, if you wouldn’t mind…” Astoria gave him a doe eyed look. “I’m not nearly as good at apparition as you are, Draco.”

Lucius looked at them both through narrowed eyes. As a master deceiver he knew when he was being lied to. Nonetheless he couldn’t wait for them to bugger off.

“Of course, you must leave; we wouldn’t want to disappoint your dear mother.” He stood and kissed Astoria’s hand. “Please convey my regards to her.”

“I should go to.” Hermione made to stand but Draco forcibly pushed her down into her chair.
“Please, Hermione, don’t leave on our account, you haven’t finished your desert yet.”

“I—she looked down at her plate “—oh.” She picked up her fork, looking rather dispirited.

In a flurry of goodbyes and goodnights and amidst a few more stares from the surrounding tables, the other couple left. Lucius, who had finished his own pudding, slid into Draco’s vacated seat so he was now opposite Hermione. She kept her head down and took small neat bites of her tarte.

“Would you like anything else, Hermione?” He asked as he signalled for the waiter, hoping she would say no so he could request the bill and they could leave.

“No,” she said shortly.

“Miss Granger, manners cost nothing.”

She looked up at him then and her eyes blazed with such ire that he was almost grateful for the waiter’s timely intervention. Unfortunately it did not last long enough; as soon as the man had departed she turned on him.

“As if you have any idea what consists of good manners you pompous, arrogant, good for nothing, arse.”

“My dear girl, there is no need to make a scene.” Lucius didn’t think he’d ever been called an arse twice in one night.

“A scene,” her voice rose, “you think a few insults is making a scene. You have absolutely no idea what I’m capable of.” She rose to her feet, Lucius felt a flicker of apprehension but was relieved to see that her wand remained somewhere out of sight. “You are a self-serving, duplicitous, ignorant, prejudiced, arrogant, popinjay and you’re not nearly as good looking as you think you are.” Her voice had risen several decibels. Necks around the room were being craned in their direction.

“Really Miss Granger, must you resort to petty name calling? You’re not even terribly good at it, you used arrogant twice,” Lucius said blandly, trying to pretend that the comment about his looks hadn’t hit home.
“You’re right; I’m not good at name calling. I find that in instances such as these actions speak louder than words.” Before he had any idea of what she was about to do she had upended the water jug from the table directly over his head. “Thank you for a most educational dinner, Mr Malfoy.” She set the jug down on the table and flounced out of the restaurant as Lucius helplessly spluttered and scraped wet hair out of his eyes. If he had been in any doubt as to how unpopular he had become with the wizarding world at large he was disabused of those illusions when several of the other diners began to applaud.

A/N Do any of you feel Lucius got off pretty lightly there...I do…it’s a good job the night is young...he wouldn’t be stupid enough to follow her out the restaurant would he…
Lucius wasted several precious moments removing an ice cube from the collar of his robes. Another
had somehow insinuated its way fully inside his shirt and was wedged somewhere around the waist
band of his trousers; he decided to let that one be. His quelling glare had stilled the smattering of
applause that had followed his impromptu soaking, but he was still subject to numerous sidelong
glances as he flung a handful of gold onto the table and stormed out of the restaurant, determined that
the girl would not get away with her insubordination.

He caught sight of her as soon as he left the restaurant. She was striding up Diagon Alley as quickly
as a short woman in vertiginously high heels could proceed over cobbles, which, fortunately, was not
very fast.

“Miss Granger.” She ignored him and he was forced to scuttle ignominiously after her. “Miss
Granger.” There was no way she couldn’t hear him. “Miss Granger, I wish to speak with you.” She
continued walking but raised her right hand above her shoulder making a curious gesture with her
middle finger. He assumed it must be some sort of Muggle salute. He sighed and withdrew his wand;
he really hadn’t wanted to do this. “Lевікорпус!”

She shot into the air, hoisted by one of her neat ankles. Her cocktail dress had rather more structure
than the garment she had been wearing the last time he had employed this particular spell. Its
crinoline skirts pooled around her waist, but the tight bodice kept her breasts fully covered. He was
only a little disappointed. Her backside was beautifully presented, and a suitable consolation prize. It
was covered only by the briefest of black lace knickers and the hold-up stockings he had
encountered earlier were now visible in all their glory. He was only a little disappointed.

Her backside was beautifully presented, and a suitable consolation prize. It
was covered only by the briefest of black lace knickers and the hold-up stockings he had
encountered earlier were now visible in all their glory. She made absolutely no attempt to cover
herself. Instead, hissing and spitting like a wildcat, she twisted in mid-air until she had him in her
sights. Then, she let forth with a barrage of hexes and curses of which any witch would have been
proud, let alone one currently suspended upside down with her knickers on show.

Lucius easily dodged her melee, although he thought one of the jets of fire she shot at him might just
have singed the edge of his robes; he hoped not, it was his favourite set. She reminded him of a small
but very angry octopus as her wild hair came free of its pins and seemed to boil around her flailing
limbs. Fortunately, Lucius had had plenty of battle experience and one upside-down girl was no
match for his superior fire power. He made short work of disarming her.

To his surprise, she continued to struggle, as if physical force might be enough to set her free. All the
while she kept up a vicious diatribe, waxing lyrical on his parentage, looks, and general demeanour,
one of which she found to be satisfactory. Finally, her angry writhing subsided.

“He came to stand in front of her, running a hand through his still wet hair. The ice cube had made its
way beneath his waistband and chose that second to slither lovingly over his backside.

“You didn’t say please.” He took pleasure in taunting her a little bit; she had poured a jug of water
over him in a public place.

“She spat the word out as if it disgusted her.

He knew better than to try and catch her this time. The girl was obviously in a snit. He lowered her
carefully to the ground and took a wary step back. She faced him defiantly, her chest heaving from her previous exertions.

“Now, Miss Granger, perhaps you might see fit to enlighten me as to the reasoning behind your recent attack on my person.”

She opened her mouth and shut it several times, her jaw working convulsively. “Who,” she began, her voice so highly pitched he could barely hear her, “who on earth calls somebody Miss Granger when they’ve shagged them six ways to Sunday and back again? Seriously, what in the name of Merlin is wrong with you?”

Lucius stiffened. He had suffered a very puritanical upbringing, he didn’t like to have his manners called into question, especially not by small Muggle born witches who had recently embarrassed him in public.

“It is simply a polite form of address,” he said.

“Polite!” Hermione screeched. “If you’re so polite then what the hell were you doing correcting my table manners in front of my friends, criticising me at every opportunity, then having the audacity to feel me up when nobody was looking?”

Lucius swallowed.

“You are one of the rudest men I know.” Hermione seemed to have forgotten her retreat; she took a step toward him and poked him hard in the chest. As she continued she punctuated each word with a further jab of her, surprisingly sharp, fingertip. “You are rude, uncaring, thoughtless and…and…and…and…mean,” she finished rather lamely.

Lucius only briefly rejoiced in her poor choice of insult before he realised that there were tears glimmering in her eyes.

“Miss Granger…Hermione.” He had absolutely no idea what to say. He had made lots of woman cry before. In the past, he had found it a useful way of extracting himself from relationships which had lost their sparkle. Stop bringing gifts, make them cry a couple of times and all but the most dense of witches would get the hint. His current circumstances were rather different. Hermione seemed more radiant every time he saw her. He couldn’t bear the idea of driving her away, but he seemed to be making a fantastic job of doing it. What was wrong with him? He had never behaved in such a gauche fashion before. He struggled to think of some debonair yet conciliatory statement which would repair their fast-crumbling relationship, instead, he found himself simply gaping foolishly at her.

Hermione scrubbed a hand inelegantly across her eyes, leaving a smear of something dark on her cheeks.

“Just fuck off why don’t you.” She turned and started to walk away from him again, abruptly heading down one of the side streets from where she would be able to apparate.

“Hermione…please.” He hurried after her, relieved when she stopped and turned to look back at him.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you.” He blurted the words, slightly heartened by the interested tilt of her head.

“Then why were you so horrible to me? You embarrassed me, you must know that.”

“I didn’t think you would take it to heart.” He looked around for inspiration. “I thought that the strength of our previous relations would be sufficient to convince you of my regard.”

“You thought because we’d had amazing sex I wouldn’t be upset when you demeaned me in front of my friends?”

Lucius shrugged. “Yes.”

She gave a heavy sigh. “It might have been better had you not criticised me in the first place.”

Lucius took a cautious step towards her. The truth seemed to be working rather well so far, he decided to continue with it. “I was trying to convince Draco that you would be an unsuitable wife.”

“Oh.” Hermione gazed up at him. “Why on earth were you doing that?”

Lucius looked away. “Because I might have suggested to Potter that I thought you and Draco would
do well together, and he might have passed on this information to Draco.” He prodded at one of the cobbles with the toe of his boot. Hermione narrowed her eyes. “But you don’t think I’d make a good wife for Draco?” “No, I think you’d be an abysmal wife, the poor boy would be constantly browbeaten.” He realised that verbalising this particular thought had not been a wise choice as soon as he spoke. “I thought you would be much better suited to me,” he said placatingly. “I am not easily henpecked.” “Obviously,” she muttered almost under her breath. “So, if you didn’t want me to marry Draco, and you liked me yourself, why did you tell Harry you wanted me for Draco?”

He glanced up and then away, her penetrating stare was really most off putting. “I was trying to discover your likes and dislikes,” he confessed. “In particular, I wished to know your favourite dish so we could cook it during our lesson. I didn’t want Potter to know my interest was in you so I distracted him with Draco.”

“So you weren’t cooking dinner for another woman?” “No.” He risked a glance at her; she was staring at him, chewing on her lower lip. He wished they could finish this stupid fight so he could go home, take off his slightly soggy clothes and bury himself deep in her willing flesh. “So every encounter we’ve had was premeditated by you?” Admittedly, she didn’t seem that willing. “Not the first one, I had no idea you would be at the manor that day.”

“But after that, every time we met, it was because you sought me out?” He nodded. Perhaps she would be happy. After all, surely it was rather flattering to have a wizard of his calibre eagerly pursuing her… she didn’t look happy.

“Draco was right,” she said more to herself than to him. “It was all a lie.” She gave him a hard look. “Why,” she asked. “Why did you pursue me? Was it to embarrass me, to humiliate me?” “No!” Lucius was genuinely shocked by her words. How on earth could she think that? When had he ever given her the impression that he found her anything other than desirable… well apart from in the bookshop all those years ago. To be fair, he hadn’t found her twelve-year-old bookish self in any way attractive; something for which he did not feel inclined to apologise. “I pursued you because I was attracted to you.” He moved closer. If she would just stop being so bloody prickly he was certain he could fix this unfortunate rift he appeared to have driven between them.

She snatched her wand from his hand and, for the second time that evening, he felt the press of it against his stomach. “Stop right there,” her voice was frigid. “So, Mr Malfoy—” the wand travelled up until it was poking him just beneath the chin. He tightened his jaw; he would not give her the satisfaction of seeing him pull away. “Let’s just get this straight, shall we?” She lowered her wand a little but still kept it trained on him. “After you saw me at Malfoy Manor with Draco you decided to pursue me with amorous intent, am I correct.”

“I simply wanted to—” “Yes or no, Mr Malfoy?” “Yes.” He slumped a little; she had the light of battle in her eyes now. “You found out where I worked, intercepted me there, took me out for lunch and then created a fictitious paramour in order to entice me to your home, correct?”

He nodded. “What about your offer of your library? Was that pre-mediated to?” “No!” he felt strangely injured by her mistrust. “You asked for access to my library, I never even mentioned it.” “No, but perhaps you manipulated me into asking for access to.” “Don’t be ridiculous.” The short fuse of his own temper had begun to smoulder. “You are making me sound like some sort of ogre; I didn’t manipulate you into anything you didn’t enjoy.” “That is not true,” she shouted, the pointy finger was back, stabbing him fiercely in the chest. “I did
not enjoy being forced to parade naked around your kitchen.”

“Really?” Lucius was rather enjoying this now, they were both bellowing at each other at the tops of their voices, heedless of the public nature of their fight. “I beg to differ, if you hated it so much then how come it made you wetter than an otter’s pocket?”

“You are disgusting!”

“Why am I disgusting? You wanted me too, Miss Granger.”

They stood in silence for a few moments, both glaring. Lucius’ chest was pounding, he wasn’t sure if it was exhilaration, or fear, or sexual arousal, but it was powerful whatever it was. He wanted her desperately.

“Why couldn’t you just have asked me out?” she asked in a quieter voice.

“Would you have said yes?”

“Of course not, I hated you.”

“There’s your answer then.” He felt slightly reassured by her use of the past tense when she said hate.

She rubbed her face again. “That doesn’t excuse what you did. If you know somebody would reject you then you can’t just use subterfuge to circumvent their morals.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s wrong.”

“Pffft.” Lucius let his derision be known. “I fail to see why you can’t simply admit that, my rather unusual seduction technique aside, our interactions have resulted in a very favourable outcome. As far as I can see you are being deliberately obstinate.”

“And you are being deliberately obtuse. If you really can’t see what you’ve done wrong then there is no point in me standing here trying to explain basic morality to you.”

“Oh stop being so melodramatic, you just don’t like the fact that I pulled the wool over your eyes.”

“That has nothing do with it. What I don’t like is the fact that you practically stalked me.” She was getting louder again.

“Now you are being ridiculous.” He reached out to pull her into his arms; he was definitely tired of this fight. Again her wand tip pressed into him. “Will you put that down,” he snapped.

“Let me take you home and I will see that you quickly forget all about this unfortunate evening.”

“Lucius Malfoy, I wouldn’t come home with you right now if you were covered in peanut butter and sprinkled with chocolate.”

He rolled his eyes at her. “Hermione, I’m tired, I just want to take you to bed, what do I have to do to rectify this unfortunate situation?”

“I would think it was obvious,” her voice was frigid.

“Well, it’s not obvious, nothing you have said this unfortunate evening is obvious, please enlighten me.”

“You need to apologise you, overgrown entitled schoolboy!”

Just like that Lucius’ temper finally snapped. “I am absolutely not apologising, you harridan. All of my actions led us to a series of mutually enjoyable encounters. You should be grateful that I put aside decades of prejudice in order to pursue you, most woman would get down on their knees and thank me for the attentions I have lavished on you.”

“Fine!” Hermione actually screamed at him. “Go and fuck them then…or better yet…go fuck yourself!”

She brandished her wand and hurled a curse he didn’t recognise, before she apparated away with a deafening crack.

Lucius stood for a moment, staring at the spot she had just vacated. He had felt the curse ruffle his hair as it had passed harmlessly over his head. He wondered briefly what she had been trying to do. He clutched his cane and apparated too, his own departure almost silent.

He arrived home to find the manor quiet and empty, as always. Yet somehow, it seemed even
emptier than usual. He wearily walked down to the kitchen and made himself a cup of tea, sitting at the scrubbed pine table which would always remind him of Hermione. He supposed that was it then. Their differences were simply too great to be overcome by their undeniable physical attraction. For the first time since he had walked in on Draco and Hermione in this room, he didn’t have a plan.

The End…Just kidding!!!
Harry and Ginny support Hermione through her trauma. They absolutely do not make fun of her at all...

“So just how wet is an otter’s pocket?” Ginny asked Harry. He furrowed his brow in response. “I really don’t know, Love, I suppose it would depend on the otter. Perhaps Hermione knows.” They both looked up expectantly at Hermione, who ignored them, instead, choosing to chop an onion so finely it was in danger of disappearing altogether.

“How’d you thought Lucius Malfoy was capable of saying something so crude,” Ginny remarked, flipping over the page of the newspaper spread across the kitchen table and continuing to read. “Perhaps it’s part of his unusual seduction technique, what do you think, Hermione?” Harry raised his voice a little as if his friend might have gone deaf.

Hermione continued to ignore them both. She had known this would happen. As soon as she’d seen herself plastered all over the first four pages of the Prophet. She had almost cancelled her dinner with Ginny and Harry, but they hadn’t had a proper catch-up in ages, and besides, who better to console her, following the miserable demise of her relationship, than two of her best friends. She had been depending on them to talk thing through in a sensible, sensitive manner. Glancing at the pair of them, giggling like teenagers over her exposed backside, she wondered what on earth she’d been thinking.

How had they failed to notice the reporter lurking somewhere in Diagon Alley? Not only had she been photographed hugging Draco, soaking Lucius, and giving him the finger, she had also been caught, on camera, suspended upside down with her knickers on show. Worse still, whoever the intrepid reporter was, they had overheard much of her argument with Lucius and had printed most of it verbatim.

“So you’ve been engaged in a torrid affair, having semi-aquatic sex with Malfoy senior for months and you’re only just coming clean with us now that it’s ended.” Ginny sidled up against the kitchen worktop and speered Hermione with a fierce look.

“No, that’s not what happened at all.” Hermione dumped a handful of chorizo into a pan of hot oil and inhaled deeply, hoping the heady scent of cooking paprika would erase the horrors of the past 24 hours from her mind.

“I must say, the Prophet seems to concur with Gin’s version of events.” Harry, remained at the table, and continued to flick back and forth between the various pictures of Hermione and the Malfoys. “Since when did you take notice of the Daily Prophet anyway?” she asked, stirring vigorously.

“How they produced genuine photographic evidence.” Ginny reached into the pan to snatch a piece of the cooking sausage. “Ow, that’s hot.” She sucked on her burned finger.

Hermione ignored her complaining friend and began to heat a second pan of oil in which to cook the patatas bravas. She wished they would change the subject.

Her wishing was in vain.

“Come on, Hermione,” Ginny wheedled. “Harry and I are so boring, we need to live vicariously through you, tell us what you’ve been up to. Wait, don’t tell me…” She held up a finger, her eyes screwed up with concentration before they widened dramatically. “You’re in a triad relationship with
both Lucius and Draco?”

Harry sniggered from the table.

“I am not in a triad relationship,” Hermione snapped. “I’m not in any sort of relationship.” She slapped Ginny’s hand away from the pan of chorizo, the girl was worse than a child. “And stop stealing the food.”

Ginny grinned unrepentantly over at Harry, Hermione felt unfairly picked on. To her surprise, Harry picked up on her disquiet.

“If you just told us what was going on, we wouldn’t have to speculate,” he said reasonably.

“You’re already speculating,” she snapped peevishly.

“Only because the story is everywhere,” Harry retorted. “You’ve no idea how embarrassing it was for me at work today. Everybody was asking me about you and Malfoy, and I knew nothing, what sort of a friend did that make me seem?”

“A good one who minds his own business?” Hermione suggested.

Harry and Ginny lapsed into silence, waiting for her to crack.

She heaved a sigh and turned her back on both her friends, busily chopping chilies. She wanted to tell them what had happened, she really did, but she was terrified at their potential response.

“Up until last night, I’ve been having a sort of…thing…with Lucius Malfoy.” The words were dry on her tongue; she was barely able to spit them out.

Ginny’s whoop of satisfaction and Harry’s resigned groan were not the responses she had expected.

“I told you it wasn’t the ferret, that’s dinner at a restaurant of my choice,” Ginny said smugly.

Hermione turned just in time to see the red-headed girl ruffling Harry’s already rumpled hair.

“You bet on me?” she asked, a note of incredulity in her voice.

Ginny nodded triumphantly from Harry’s lap.

“We’ve been discussing it for weeks.” Harry absent-mindedly stroked Ginny’s baby bump which was so large he had been forced to move his seat back from the table. “Ever since Malfoy senior started sniffing around you. Gin was adamant he was more your type than Draco.” He screwed up his eyes. “I still can’t imagine either of them being anyone’s type,” he said with a shudder.

Ginny smacked him affectionately over the back of his head. “That’s because you’re an idiot male,” she informed him kindly. “Both Malfoy’s are very sexy.” She looked up at Hermione again, her face growing serious. “Lucius is a bit scary though isn’t he?”

Hermione turned down the heat under the potatoes and came to sit at the table with her friends. She picked at the label on her bottle of beer as she considered Ginny’s question.

“I was scared of him at first,” she said eventually. “But, once I got to know him, he didn’t frighten me at all. He’s…different.”

“Different how?” Harry asked.

“It’s hard to describe.” Hermione considered for a few moments. “He’s quieter than I thought he would be, sadder too. I think he regrets a lot of what he did and I think he’s rather lost…” she tailed off, partly because her own description of Lucius was making her feel sad. “I thought you’d be horrified.” She looked up at Ginny, who had wriggled into her own seat and was shaking her head vehemently.

“Because of the whole diary thing, or because he’s a Malfoy?”

Hermione shrugged. “Both.”

“Hermione, we all did things during the war that we regret. I tried to kill Professor Snape several times and he’s still almost friendly towards me when we meet at ministry events. I’ve pretty much laid Tom Riddle’s diary to rest.”

“What about you, Harry?” Hermione looked over at her friend who was being uncharacteristically quiet.

“I’m willing to make an effort for anyone if you really like them.” He looked a bit uncomfortable.

“I’d prefer if you were seeing Draco…I have to say, but if you like Lucius then Ginny and I will
accept that, wont we Gin?”

Ginny nodded and squeezed the hand he had extended her direction. Hermione looked away. She adored Harry and Ginny and she was truly happy that her friend had found the family he had always longed for, but sometimes their easy intimacy made her reflect on how lonely her own life was. Since she and Ron had ended things the only significant relationship she had had was with Crookshanks.

“Thanks guys.” She went back to the worktop. “But you don’t have to worry. After the disastrous dinner last night, I won’t be requiring you to make an effort with anyone, I don’t think Lucius and I will be seeing each other again.”

“Why not?” Ginny furrowed her brow. “From the way you were talking a minute ago, I thought you really liked him. Is it because he turned you upside down and showed your knickers to the world?”

“That certainly has something to do with it.” Hermione agreed. “But, in his defence, the street did seem deserted.”

“It’s not the best defence I’ve ever heard.” Harry folded the prophet and placed it on the dresser in the corner. “I don’t think it’s particularly gentlemanly to display a ladies knickers on the off chance the street is deserted. Do you want me to duel him for your honour?”

“This isn’t the 1800’s, Harry,” Ginny said, “and at least they were nice knickers, imagine if it had been washing day.” They all paused and considered that thought.

“Well I’d rather not duel him if it’s all the same to you, Hermione.” Harry opened another beer and poured a glass of pumpkin juice for Ginny. “By all reports he’s absolutely furious.”

“He is?” Hermione was curious in spite of herself. “He sent at least two howlers to Kingsley himself. He’s got an entire team of hot-shot lawyers on the case. He’s slammed a wizarding injunction on the prophet and, last I heard, he was buying up shares. Kingsley reckons he’ll own the paper by tomorrow morning and will force them to publish a retraction.”

“That’s all very well.” Hermione stirred the potatoes. “But he can hardly slap an injunction on my bum can he?”

“I suppose not,” Ginny said thoughtfully. “Anyway, Hermione, what was last night’s fight about? Surely you can sort things out, if you like enough?”

“I did like him -” Hermione plunged a handful of battered squid into a deep pot of boiling oil. “- but he lied to me, in fact, it turns out he’s been orchestrating our entire relationship behind my back, I don’t feel I can trust him after what he did.”

“What exactly did he do?” She shot Harry a look, concerned that the hot headed friend of her youth had returned and he really was about to challenge Lucius to a duel in spite of his earlier protestations, but he looked thoughtful more than anything else. She quickly outlined the salient points of their relationship.

At the end of her tale Ginny’s mouth was actually hanging open. “I realise the man is a complete arse, but he must be really into you, Hermione. He’s been a recluse since the end of the war and he followed you into a Muggle supermarket…” she stopped, speechless.

“It was funny actually.” Hermione thought back to Lucius’ response to the Muggle wine aisle. “Anyway, you must see that I can’t forgive him for what he’s done, let alone trust him again.”

“Yeah.” Harry nodded slowly. “I know trust’s a big thing for you, especially after what happened with Ron.” He and Ginny looked guilty at each other.

“What’s that look about?” Hermione demanded. “If you two think I’m still holding a candle for Ron you can-“

“Hermione,” Ginny interrupted, “we don’t think you’re still holding a candle for Ron. It’s just we’re meeting him for dinner on Friday and we weren’t sure whether to invite you along or not.”

“Oh.” Hermione began to transfer dishes of food onto the kitchen table. “Well, I’d love to see him; we did part on good terms after all. Is Tatiana coming too?” She was proud of the way her voice didn’t quaver as she mentioned Ron’s muscular paramour.

“No, that’s just it.” Harry rifled through the pile of old Prophets on the sideboard and pulled one out.
He turned the pages rapidly. “This happened weeks ago, we were going to tell you but, we’ve hardly seen you.”

Hermione leaned over his shoulder to examine the picture of a rather bleary eyed Ron, wrapped around an absolutely gorgeous blond.

“I know what you’re thinking.” Ginny joined them in looking at the picture. “She’s completely out of his league.”

“I wasn’t thinking that!” Hermione protested, although not as vehemently as she might have. The truth was the woman was beautiful, effervescently so, and there was something terribly familiar about the arrogant tilt of her jaw, Hermione frowned. She couldn’t place her.

“So who is this woman?”

“That’s just it—Harry folded the newspaper and placed it on the dresser—Ron doesn’t know. He said she came onto him in the club that night, chatted him up really hard, and then disappeared. He swore blind that nothing actually happened between them.”

Although they look pretty cosy in the picture,” Ginny broke in.

Harry shrugged. “He didn’t say that nothing would have happened; only the woman disappeared all of a sudden. Ron had totally forgotten about her until the prophet published the picture. Tatiana went mental and dumped him straight away.”

“Poor Ron.” Hermione went back to her cooking. Now she had a little perspective on the situation she could feel genuine sympathy for her friend. He had really seemed to care about Tatiana and a single act of weakness had ended the entire relationship.

“Don’t feel too sorry for him.” Ginny was waddling around the table, laying out knives and forks. “He could have told her to get stuffed, that’s what Harry would have done, right Harry?”

“Right,” Harry agreed quickly.

“So what did Severus say to all this?” Ginny gestured with her fork in the general direction of the Prophet. Hermione had served up a feast of Spanish inspired dishes and the trio were eagerly tucking in. Hermione delicately spat out an olive stone before she answered.

“That’s pretty much the only silver lining to this whole debacle. He’s away on a buying trip the whole of this week. When he gets back he’ll probably sack me for improper behaviour.” She was only half joking. She knew her ultra-conservative employer would not be impressed with her behaviour, even if the knicker bearing had been entirely Lucius’ fault. “Blaise was surprisingly kind though.” She wasn’t sure if it had been the sight of her sexy underwear or that fact that Lucius Malfoy considered her worth shagging, but something seemed to have made Blaise Zabini sit up and take notice of her. He had fielded reporters all day and allowed her to hide out in the lab whilst he managed the shop. All he’d asked in return had been the opportunity to take her out sometime, once all the commotion had died down. Hermione had been suitably non-committal. She knew Blaise was considered Merlin’s gift to womankind by most of the wizarding world but she had never really found him that attractive.

“Blaise isn’t a bad guy actually.” Harry said through a mouthful of calamari. “You could do a lot worse. “

“She already has done a lot worse, “Ginny sniggered.

Hermione looked across at her two friends, united in puerile humour and felt a flash of warmth toward them both. They might be mocking her but they were demonstrating that they cared in their own twisted way. Some of the misery inside began to unclench a little, she would get through this.
By Monday morning Lucius was desperate. He had tried everything. Much of Thursday had been spent raging at The Daily Prophet and embroiled in a hostile takeover of epic proportions. He had thoroughly enjoyed bringing the full weight of his righteous indignation down upon the hapless reporter who had dared to impinge on his privacy and the foolish editor who had dared to publish the photos of himself and Hermione. He only wished he had been able to rail at them in person rather than via the medium of his lawyers who, he was certain, were much too polite.

Despite his busy day, he had still found the time to have an enormous bunch of red roses sent to Miss Hermione Granger. They had been returned, the heads removed and the petals viciously shredded.

He had felt truly heartened by her reception of his next gift. He had registered her as the majority shareholder of The Prophet. Admittedly, his lawyers informed him, she had attempted to give up the shares, but once she accepted the impenetrable red tape in which Lucius had steeped such a process, she had capitulated and accepted them. In high spirits, he doubled the size of the bouquet and increased the range of colours present in the floral tribute. This seemed to please her no better than Thursday’s offering, and Friday ended on a low as a convoy of owls interrupted his evening pot of Assam, delivering bucket after bucket of shredded petals. He was considering taking up the manufacture of potpourri.

Lucius had then sent her a rare scroll from his library, one he had been saving for just such an eventuality. Such was its value he had almost expected her to be beating down his door by lunchtime, desperate to thank him and hopefully resume carnal relations post-haste.

The scroll was returned a few hours after he had dispatched it, although the seal was broken and he was certain the little swot had copied it before she returned it to him.

On Sunday morning he had sent her an emerald and ruby bracelet. It was slightly ostentatious but he felt that the sentiment was clear. This gift was not returned. Instead, nestling amid the, now familiar, pile of shredded rose petals, was a small card thanking him for his generous donation to the St Pancras home for children orphaned during the second wizarding war. Lucius hadn’t even known such children existed. Although come to think of it, perhaps Narcissa had mentioned something about an orphanage during one of her long and painfully dull soliloquies on her charitable works. Lucius had generally ignored these on principle. He found the thought of the orphanage vaguely unsettling. He liked children, in a general, didn’t-ever-want–to-try-fatherhood-again, sort of a way. In a sudden fit of guilt, he sent his solicitor an owl asking him to arrange a regular donation to the cause. Not only did he find the sudden burst of altruism rather spiritually satisfying but it had some interesting tax implications and made him feel closer to Hermione than he had in some time. Unfortunately, his patronage of her favourite charity was about as close to Miss Granger as Lucius seemed likely to get in the foreseeable future.
He was stumped. Never before had he encountered such stubbornness from a woman. With retrospect, he was willing to admit that he had, perhaps, been in the wrong. He wished from the bottom of his heart that his childish use of Levicorpus had not resulted in her public humiliation, he had never meant for that to happen. He also wished he hadn’t been so rude to her at dinner. He could see her point, it had been demeaning and he could understand she had been hurt by it. The carefully worded note accompanying the bracelet had expressed such sentiments. It had not, of course, contained an apology. Malfoy’s did not apologise, but he felt that his remorse was implicit in his statement. She did not appear to agree.

As for his other behaviours; Lucius was really in two minds. He could see why she felt wary of him now she knew the extent of his scheming. (Or at least she thought she knew the extent of his scheming, he decided not to think about how she might react to his antics under the influence of Polyjuice.) Despite her intelligence, she was still a Gryffindor; brave, honest and loyal and his own tendency towards subterfuge clearly unnerved her. He wasn’t insensitive to the fact that she had opened up to him sexually and he supposed that her faith in him might have been somewhat shaken by the discovery that he had been deceiving her right from the outset.

Still, he thought she was overreacting. He may have been dishonest, but that did not change the undeniable chemistry between them. He knew she had felt it too. The almost magnetic pull of their bodies toward one and other, the compulsion to touch, the inexplicable rightness of him buried inside of her. It had not been one-sided, yet she seemed much more able to deny her urges than he.

Lucius felt like an addict in desperate need of a fix. He craved her soft skin and wild hair. His body throbbed with unfulfilled desire and, no matter how many times he brought himself to completion with her name on his lips, he felt constantly unsatisfied. He knew he should simply let the relationship end. He had set out to seduce her and he had done so with panache. He had, he believed, even briefly achieved his secondary goal of getting her to like him. The fact that her liking had turned to revulsion was neither here nor there. His goals achieved, he should move on to pastures new.

He had no interest in pastures new.

His continued incarceration in Malfoy Manor didn’t help. Having spent four years in self-imposed exile Lucius had become very used to his own company. He had shunned the outside world, willing only to tolerate Draco, Narcissa and, occasionally Severus as he immersed himself more and more in academia. Now though, he felt like a caged animal and Hermione was his gaoler.

He had thought nothing of the brief wind that had rippled his hair before she Apparated away. She had been overwrought, and it would not be the first time that an unhappy witch had misfired a hex in his direction in the midst of an argument. He had not given that particular part of the evening a second thought. Until, on his way to bed that evening, he had encountered one of the elves on the upstairs landing. The small creature had screamed loudly at the sight of him, and then she had disappeared without even a word of explanation. Lucius had ignored her, buried in his own thoughts, but even he had been startled out of his reverie by his reflection.

His poor mirror had been rendered quite speechless. It had been in his family for generations. It was used to pouring a soothing balm on the egos of flaxen-haired, smooth-faced Malfoy men. It had never before been faced with a full head of bright pink hair.

At first, he had almost found it funny. What a scamp that girl was, he had thought, marvelling at her audacity as he cast a hasty Finite Incantatum over his head. Nothing had happened. Just as nothing had happened when he had stood underneath the shower for three hours. Just as nothing had happened when he had applied every counter curse he knew. Just as nothing had happened when he
had summoned every single house-elf including the elderly male in charge of the rose garden, and demanded that they fix his hair.

It was unfixable.

He was already becoming accustomed to the idea that he would never leave the manor again. He would go into a gradual and gentle decline before he finally passed away and was buried by his loving elves beneath the rose garden. He thoroughly hoped that Miss Granger would weep bitter tears over his demise at her hands although he thought it more likely that she would dance on his grave.

Severus had been no help. Quite the opposite in fact. The surly half-blood had erupted, uninvited and unexpected into Lucius’ study with the same flagrant disregard for the manor’s wards and Lucius’ feelings as he had previously shown.

“Exactly which part of not harming Miss Granger did I fail to make clear?” Snape slammed a copy of The Prophet onto Lucius’ rosewood desk. Hermione’s beautiful bottom bobbed enticingly up from the front page.

“Severus I -”

“You what? You didn’t turn her upside down in the middle of Diagon Alley using a spell invented by me?”

Lucius coughed uncomfortably. “I did, unfortunately, do that but my intention was never to-”

“Did it not occur to you to at least check the surrounding area before abusing the girl in such a fashion?”

Lucius felt his cheeks flush; only Severus could have him blushing like a schoolboy.

“I was rather unhappy with the girl at the time, Severus. She had just poured an entire jug of water over my head; I may have overlooked the need to maintain her dignity.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose.

“You really are an arse, you know that?”

Lucius wished people would stop calling him an arse. Admittedly, his ego was sizeable but even so, his feelings could still be hurt. Severus interrupted his train of thought.

“I assume from her hangdog expression and inability to complete even the simplest of brewing projects that you and Miss Granger have parted company?”

“For the time being.” Lucius had no wish to divulge the full depths of his despondency to Severus.

The dark-haired wizard seemed distracted though, he was staring at Lucius, the furrow between his brows even more prominent than usual.

“Why on earth are you wearing that ridiculous turban?” he asked scathingly. “Please tell me you don’t have a resurrected Dark Lord perched on the back of your skull, that would be just my luck.”

Lucius self-consciously touched his headpiece. He had actually thought it looked rather fetching.

“I will have you know that my current state is entirely the fault of your apprentice,” he snapped, reaching up to unwind the turban he had taken to wearing.

Severus’ famously blank face became even blanker as he took in the magnificent glory of Lucius’ fluorescent pink hair. He raised his long fingers to press against his thin lips as he desperately fought back a smile.

“Have you adopted this style in order to impress the girl? If so I must warn you that your attempts are doomed to failure, I didn’t think it was possible for you to make yourself look any more foolish but, it seems, I was incorrect. You look ridiculous, Lucius.”

“The little hellcat hexed me.” Lucius hastily rewound the turban, he wasn’t sure how much more humiliation he could take. “I’ve tried every spell I can think of, I’ve even had the house elves procure me some Muggle bleach, nothing is working, Severus, I’m a prisoner in my own home.”
Buried deep in the mire of his own self-pity he had forgotten to whom he was speaking. Severus’ entirely unsympathetic answer brought him sharply down to earth.

“Well, it serves you right, if this is anything to go by. At least your backside isn’t front page news.”

“I made them print an apology,” he said sulkily.

“I’m sure Miss Granger finds that extremely comforting now she is the laughing stock of the wizarding world.”

Severus fingered his wand, his ugly face growing stern. “I had come here with intention of defending her honour. I had all sorts of nasty little hexes up my sleeve. However, I can see that Miss Granger has managed things in her own inimitable style. I suppose I might as well avail myself of your brandy whilst I’m here.”

“By all means help yourself.” Lucius’ sarcasm was entirely wasted as Severus poured himself a generous measure and sat down behind Lucius’ desk, propping his dragon hide boots on the highly polished surface. Lucius was relegated to the much smaller and considerably less comfortable chair in which he usually made those who came to him seeking investments sit and squirm.

“I don’t suppose you have any useful advice?” He finally broke the silence. Severus glanced up and sipped contemplatively at his brandy.

“You might consider shaving your head.”

“Not regarding my hair, I have no doubt that it will wear off eventually.” He strove for a confidence he did not necessarily feel. “I mean with regard to winning back the affections of your apprentice.”

He watched with some satisfaction as Severus choked on his drink and was forced to sit up, leaning forward over his knees as he coughed painfully.

“You genuinely think you can win her back after...this.” He gesticulated at the newspaper. In a fit of pique, Lucius picked up the offending item and flung it into the fireplace where he ignited it with a swift Incendio. He would not have Severus Snape eyeing Hermione’s behind.

“Oh very good.” Severus looking rather mournfully at the burning newspaper. “Only another hundred thousand copies to go and you will have dealt with the problem entirely.”

“Don’t you have anything helpful to say?” Lucius glared at his friend.

Severus’ face grew sombre. “Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. Leave her alone, Lucius. I tolerated your obsession with her in its infancy. I even thought a brief dalliance with you might raise her spirits and stop her from pining over that foolish Weasley boy. But this has gone entirely too far, you are in danger of doing permanent damage, if not to her heart, then to her reputation in our society.” He downed the rest of his drink, scowling as he did so.

Lucius took a moment to process Severus’ unwelcome words.

“You really don’t think there is anything I can do?” He hated the plaintive air which had crept into his voice.

Severus shook his head. “No,” he said firmly. “And, furthermore, I don’t think there is anything you should do. You got what you wanted, Lucius, you seduced her. It’s time to let her get on with her life now.”

He had Apparated away after that, leaving Lucius to stew in his own misery.

It hadn’t taken long though for his brain to begin to tick over once more. Hermione was still angry at him, and he was willing to admit that perhaps, just perhaps he had been more than a little in the wrong when it came to some of his dealings with her. Nonetheless, he wasn’t ready to apologise. Malfoy’s did not apologise. However, they were not averse to trying to talk a person round and, whilst he had never had much success getting Hermione to see his point of view; did he not have the ear of her greatest confidante? Tomorrow was Monday and, against his better judgment, he decided Camomile Jones would be keeping her weekly lunch date with Hermione Granger.
Thanks to all of you who leave me comments. I really appreciate them - even if it's just to point out errors in my story!! Sorry I'm not always the best at responding.

If any of you want to see Lucius with pink hair then please stop by my Facebook page - just search for Fragilereality on FB. I should warn you I'm not the greatest photo manipulator ever but you get the idea...
Lucius knew it wasn’t a good idea. He was not completely lacking in brain. In fact, in the past, he had taken pride in his keen intellect. Those days were gone. He vaguely recognised that he had become a slave to his more base instincts and that his obsession with Hermione Granger had reached a point where it was no longer healthy. Severus was correct. Lucius had damaged their relationship so irrevocably that there really was no way in which he could redeem himself. She had proven herself immune to all forms of flattery and bribery and, short of sending her the poems he had composed late one night after one too many glasses of brandy, he didn’t know how else he might make his feelings clear. He had accepted that their sexual relationship was over.

That didn’t mean that he had to forgo her company all together though. He liked her. He enjoyed spending time with her. He loved her sharp observations and the tangential thinking of her vibrant mind. Admittedly, he might also enjoy looking at her delectable body whilst appreciating her intellect but, he had realised, rather belatedly, that there was a lot more to Miss Granger than her excellent breasts and well-rounded backside.

If he could not be her lover then he would be her friend. Of course, he, Lucius Malfoy, could be neither. She had made that quite clear. But Camomile Jones could succeed where Lucius had failed. He wasn’t blind to the irony. He realised that Hermione’s main objection to his behaviour during their ill-fated relationship had been his propensity to play fast and loose with the truth and, by continuing to disguise himself as a woman in order to maintain his friendship with her he was, technically, continuing to lie. However, he was still strongly of the opinion that a lie was only a lie if one were caught telling it, and he did not plan to get caught.

Once he had suitably deceived himself he set about his preparations and donned the, now familiar, sack-like robes, favoured by Camomile. He felt a flicker of apprehension as he sipped from the bottle of Polyjuice potion. He imagined Hermione discovering his perfidy and firing hex after hex at him in an indignant rage. He pushed those thoughts to one side. He had faced Lord Voldemort before, how could he be afraid of one small potions apprentice?

He had managed to work himself up into such a frenzy of doubt and self-recrimination that he almost thought Hermione might not come. Or, if she did, she would be sure to accuse him immediately of gross deception. She did nothing of the sort. As soon as she saw his matronly form, sitting at their usual spot in her cafe of choice, she flew across the room and hurled herself into his arms.

He held her for a beat longer than was really appropriate. The soft rose scent of her hair overwhelmed his senses and he closed his eyes, breathing in her essence and allowing himself the brief fantasy that she was truly here, with him, without the barrier of deception and false pretences which he had been forced to erect. Finally, he released her and she slumped down in the chair across from his.
She looked dreadful, he was pleased to observe. Her face was pale and pinched and there were dark smudges beneath her eyes which her Muggle makeup could not conceal. Even her hair seemed dry and sad as it struggled to escape its ponytail.

“I know.” She waved an all-encompassing hand up and down her body. “I know I’m a state. I just can’t be bothered to care at the moment.”

Lucius hesitated. He wanted to comfort her, but he wasn’t sure how and he couldn’t risk giving himself away.

“I saw the feature in The Prophet,” he said. Knowing that just about everybody in the wizarding world had seen that.

Hermione snorted without humour. “You and everybody else in the country. Imagine how it feels, knowing that every person you meet on the street has seen your bottom.”

“That must be terrible,” Lucius acceded, dampening down a surge of rage and simultaneously feeling malicious delight over having had the journalist who had caught them on camera sacked. “You do have a very nice bottom though; if mine looked like yours I would probably pay for an advert in The Prophet.”

To his delight, she laughed. “Well, you’d end up paying me; I’m now the majority shareholder.”

“What?”

She nodded emphatically. “Mr Malfoy bought the newspaper so he could sack the reporter who took those pictures. Then he gave me the shares.” Her face was curiously expressionless as she imparted this information and Lucius couldn’t help but dig a little deeper.

“Why on earth would he do that?”

Hermione shrugged. “Guilt I suppose, and of course, he’s trying to win me over. He thinks that showering me with expensive gifts will make me forgive him for his abysmal behaviour.”

“And won’t it?” Lucius dared to ask, wishing he was taking notes.

“Of course not,” Hermione sneered as she looked angrily at the tea menu. “Nothing would make me take him back. Do you know, Camomile -” he once more found himself on the wrong end of her accusatory finger, he was glad she hadn’t applied it to his chest “- throughout this whole debacle that wretched man, hasn’t once said sorry.”

“Dreadful,” Lucius muttered, keeping his eyes fixed on his own tea menu. “He hadn’t said sorry. Did it really mean that much to her? Was that all he had to do? Sacrifice his Malfoy pride and apologise.

“So if he were to apologise,” he kept his tone offhand and one eye on the specials board to signal only passing interest in her response, “would you be willing to accept?”

“Of course not!” she said derisively. “The man’s a snake, the only reason he would apologise would be to get back in my knickers and there’s no chance of that happening again. I’m going to get a magically enforced chastity belt which is spelled to hex Lucius Bloody Malfoy at twenty paces.”

Lucius felt that the waiter’s interruption at this particular point was rather timely. He had experienced a stirring of hope at the mention of his potential redemption, but it seemed that, even if he were willing to apologise, she would not trust his honesty. He suppressed a sigh and ordered a much larger lunch than Camomile would normally have eaten.

“I’ll just have tea thanks.” Hermione gave him an odd look. “You’re very hungry today, Camomile.”

Lucius nodded sagely. “One of the healers at St Mungo’s, a terribly nice young man, has put me on some new medication for my arthritis. One of the side effects is an increased appetite.” He ruefully patted his protruding stomach.

“Oh, Camomile, I’m terribly sorry.” Hermione’s face took on a look of guilt. “I’ve done nothing but talk about myself since I arrived, what sort of a friend am I? How is your arthritis?”

Lucius wittered on for several moments. He hoped he was giving a believable account of the trials of living with chronic joint pain as he waited for an opportunity to turn the conversation back to Hermione.

“So how are your studies going?” he finally managed to ask after they had discussed his fictional
indigestion, gallstones, and gout. He instantly regretted the question as her face crumpled in on itself once more.

“Not well.” Her voice was small. “This has never happened to me before, Camomile. I don’t know what’s wrong with me, but I just can’t focus. Studying has always been my escape but, at the moment, I’m just all over the place. I don’t know how much more Severus is willing to take; he’s banned me from the lab until I stop acting like an ‘emotionally overwrought, pubescent teenager.’”

“I’m sorry.” He put down his fork, which he had been about to dig into the delicious smelling cottage pie in front of him, and reached for her hand. She clasped her fingers around his and bent her head over her teacup as she struggled not to cry.

“What about your dissertation?” he asked desperately, surely you can use your time out of the lab to work on that.

“Yes, of course.” She dabbed at her eyes and pasted a watery smile across her lips. “That’s what I’ve been doing.”

His relief was short lived.

“But, that’s not going well either,” she wailed, more tears escaping her frantic eye-dabbing.

Lucius felt a crushing guilt overwhelm him. Had he really reduced the inimitable Miss Granger to this? He felt the pink hair (which he had finally banished) had been entirely deserved.

“It’s not really Mr Malfoy’s fault though.” She had composed herself a little. “He actually helped me a lot with my research. The thing is I’m still at a dead end. I feel as if I’m on the brink of something truly important but I can’t quite reach it.”

“Oh.” Lucius didn’t quite know what to say. He was relieved that he was not to blame for this aspect of her misery, but he didn’t know how to help her either, not with without revealing himself.

“Mr Malfoy suggested I visit the Karolinska library in Stockholm, have you been?” She had dried her eyes and reached out to steal a chip from his plate.

He nodded carefully, surreptitiously moving the plate a little closer. If he could do nothing else for her, he could, at least, make sure she ate. “I have visited once, several years ago. It is a very fine collection.”

“I’m sure it is.” She was blatantly eating his food now. “But it’s no use to me. They won’t let me through the door without a letter of introduction, how ridiculously nepotistic is that?”

“Terribly,” Lucius muttered, realising that not much of a response was needed. “Can’t Professor Snape supply you with such a letter?”

She smiled for the first time that day. “I’m afraid he can’t.” She had picked up her own fork and was attacking his pie now. “He didn’t actually know anything about the library, and I think he was a bit put out when Mr Malfoy suggested it, he’s terribly prickly about things like that.”

Lucius bit back a comment about the generally astringence of Severus Snape and smiled blandly, wishing he’d ordered two plates of food. The chip, balanced precariously on the end of Hermione’s fork, suddenly paused in its journey to her mouth and she gazed at him, frowning.

“Hold on.” She lowered the fork. “If you visited, you must have had a letter of introduction?”

Lucius swallowed uncomfortably, the sizeable donation he had made to the libraries’ coffers had meant no such letter was needed.

“Which means you could write one for me.” Her face lit up at the idea as her brown eyes sparkled in his direction.

“I suppose I cou-”

“Better yet, you could come with me!”

“What?”

“You could come with me, to Stockholm.” Her fork clattered, forgotten to the table, and she clasped both of his hands in hers as she looked imploringly at him. “Oh please, Camomile, say you will. I’ve never been before, and it’s so much more fun exploring a new city with another person. I have a study budget, I can pay for us both.”

“I-” The warning voices in his head were unspeakably loud. This was a bad idea to end all bad ideas;
this was, without doubt, the worst idea in the history of humanity. He couldn’t go with her, it would lead to ruin. He opened his mouth to deny her.

“I suppose I could go with you.”

Her squeal of delight drowned out the cacophony of his own conscience as she rounded the table to fling her arms around him in a bruising hug.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” she chanted, almost throttling him. Lucius could only pat her back and pray to any helpful deity which might be looking down on him for understanding.

“Absolutely not.” With meticulous care, Severus Snape placed his stirring rod onto the workbench and began to sprinkle Lacewing flies onto the potion’s surface. Hermione felt a pang of guilt. The brewing he was doing ought to have been her responsibility.

“Why not?” she asked. Trying desperately to keep the whine from her voice.

“I’m not signing off your entire study leave budget on a hair-brained trip to Sweden to visit some library I’ve never even heard of”

“But Mr Malfoy-”

“That man is a reprobate, as you well know.”

“I do know that, but that doesn’t mean that he isn’t very knowledgeable when it comes to Trollish herbology. Please, Severus, I’m desperate.” She appealed to his better nature, she was sure he had one.

He gave a loud sigh. “At the very least, you will have to wait until I am able to accompany you, which will not be until the end of the month.”

“But Severus -”

“I will not hear of you gallivanting around the continent on your own, it’s unseemly.”

Hermione actually stamped her foot. “You are not my father, Severus Snape and besides, I’m not going on my own.”

“Well, of course, I’m not your father, no offspring of mine would be as mindlessly pig-headed as you, not to mention clumsy…” He ground to a halt.

“What do you mean you’re not going alone?”

“I mean I’ve found someone to accompany me.”

His eyes narrowed in suspicion. “If you think your study budget will be used to finance the Golden Trio’s annual European jolly you can think again.”

“I do have other friends,” Hermione said, not in the least offended by his disparaging tone. One did not apprentice under Severus Snape without growing an impressively thick skin.

“Who?” he asked suspiciously. “Ginevra looked fit to burst last I saw her.”

Hermione folded her arms. “It’s nobody you know.”

Severus mirrored her gesture, his stature much more imposing than Hermione’s. “I insist on knowing,” he told her, “or I will not release your study leave budget.”

Hermione took several long deep breaths in through her nose and out through her mouth. Their purpose was twofold. She found the breathing exercises extremely calming, but she also knew Severus found waiting for her to respond irritating in the extreme. It was strange that a man so fond of the dramatic pause in his own speech would find it so intolerable in others. She truly hadn’t wished to drag Camomile into this. She had been so grateful to the older witch for agreeing to accompany her; the whole trip had turned from a daunting ordeal into a wonderful adventure as soon as Camomile had agreed to come. She hated to repay her friend’s kindness by exposing her to the acerbic tongue of Professor Snape. Whilst she barely noticed his caustic nature these days, she feared that Camomile was of a more gentle persuasion and might be genuinely offended by her greasy-haired mentor.

“I don’t want you to meet her,” she said stubbornly.

“Why on earth not?”

“Because you’re rude, that’s why. You’ll hurt her feelings by saying something unpleasant and then I’ll have no study budget and one less friend.”
Severus scowled. “I am never rude to your friends.”
“You called Harry an emotionally stunted renegade just last week.”
“That was the truth.” He pursed his lips. “If you do me the honour of introducing me to your friend I shall endeavour to be scrupulously polite.”
“And you’ll authorise our trip to Stockholm?”
Severus gave a curt nod. “If I consider her to be a suitable chaperone, yes.”
“Oh, you will.” Impulsively Hermione flung her arms around his neck and planted a kiss on his bony cheek. Severus flinched, his fingers immediately coming up to rub away the evidence of her affection.
“Miss Granger, might I remind you that there is a strict no-touching clause in your contract?”
“Sorry, Sir.” Hermione was already on her way out of the apothecary, bent on owling Camomile as soon as possible. They were going to Stockholm!

Lucius had only just shed his disguise and was absent-mindedly rubbing the small of his back where Camomile seemed to suffer her lumbago the worst when Hermione’s owl shot through the window and landed in a heap of feathers on the floor in front of him. He carefully disengaged the scroll from its proffered leg.

Dear Camomile,

I’m so sorry to bother you again when you’ve already done a wonderful job of cheering me up today. I’m very excited about our forthcoming trip. Unfortunately, my employer has a protective streak (he thinks he’s my father actually) and he would like to meet you before you accompany me to Stockholm. Would it be possible for you to stop by the apothecary one day? I would be terribly grateful.

Yours

Hermione

He traced his fingers over her small neat signature and tried to dampen down the feeling of dread which assailed him. He wondered how likely it was that Hermione would still be signing off her letters with yours once Severus Snape had met Camomile Jones. Never a man to put off the inevitable he reached once more for Camomile’s shapeless black robes.

There was no way he could know. He told himself firmly as he shook Severus’ proffered hand and kept his eyes deliberately averted. As long as he didn’t succumb to his friend’s skill as a Legilimens there was no way he would be discovered. Severus’ fingers squeezed a little tighter than was polite and Lucius risked at glance at him.

Bollocks, he was pretty sure he knew.

“Ms Jones, how wonderful to meet you.” Severus’ voice was oily and Lucius winced at the dripping insincerity. Hermione seemed unaware of it though. She was beaming at the pair of them like a proud mother.

“Please have a seat, Camomile.” She gestured to one of the comfortable armchairs that populated the backroom of the apothecary. “Would you like some tea?”

“Yes please.” Lucius gratefully took the cup she prepared for him and sipped delicately. Severus continued to scowl as he also accepted a cup and sat opposite Lucius.

“So, Ms Jones,” he said her name with disdain, “how did you and Miss Granger meet?”

Lucius beamed inanely at a point somewhere over Severus’ left shoulder. “Well,” he simpered, “we were actually brought together by our shared love of tea.”

“You were?” Severus’ right eyebrow disappeared beneath his hair line.

Indeed.” Lucius nodded vigorously as he warmed to his theme. “We stumbled across each other in
the café where Hermione takes her lunch.”

“Indeed,” Severus echoed. “And what, pray tell, do you have in common beyond a love of tea?” Lucius bit back a facetious answer, he reminded himself that it was entirely possible that neither of his companions was aware of his true identity and the last thing he wanted to do was out himself to Hermione. “We both have an abiding love of Trollish herbology,” he said primly. “I understand that it’s an area into which your expertise does not really extend, Professor Snape.” He resisted a smirk as he saw his barb hit home.

“It is certainly not a particular area of interest for me,” Snape said. “My own interests lie more in the direction of truth serums and their application.” The threat in his tone was implicit and Lucius squirmed a little in his chair, as he masked his grimace with his teacup.

“How do you have any experience with chaperoning impressionable young woman?” Severus asked. “Miss Granger is a celebrated war hero,” Lucius answered smoothly, “I hardly consider her an impressionable young woman.”

“Thank you Camomile.” Hermione leaned over to pat his hand. “Severus seems to have some difficulty in seeing me as anything other than the bucktoothed school girl he first met ten years ago.”

“That’s not strictly true, Miss Granger,” Severus corrected her. “I am perfectly willing to admit that your teeth, at least, have improved over the years. It is your good sense and choice of travelling companions which I still find…lacking.”

Hermione rolled her eyes at his dramatic pause. “Well, it’s a good job you are merely my employer and not my father then, isn’t it? I’m sure Camomile will keep me on the straight and narrow, won’t you?”

“Absolutely.” Lucius refused to look at Severus despite the fact that he could feel the younger man’s gaze boring into him. “I am very confident in my ability to keep Miss Granger safe. I may look like a frail old woman,” he allowed his voice to grow a little more querulous, “but when those I care about are threatened, I can be as fierce as any lion.” He rather thought he’d overdone it, but Hermione gave a delighted little squeal at his declaration.

“Very well, Ms Jones, I can see that Miss Granger is quite set on this trip. Hermione, if you will excuse us for a moment, I wish to have a private word with Ms Jones.”

“Really Severus, I’m not a child,” Hermione huffed.

The dark-haired wizard merely stared her down until Hermione flounced out of the room with an irritated sigh. Lucius shot an admiring glance at his friend, he had never succeeded in managing Miss Granger so well, perhaps he could learn something from Severus Snape.

The loud slam of the door reminded him that he and Severus were now alone. He set aside his teacup and surreptitiously clasped his cane a little tighter. Despite his preparations he abruptly found himself on the end of Severus’ raised wand.

“Finite Incantatum.”

Lucius almost gave a smug snort. Was Severus such a fool that he had forgotten that Polyjuice could not be reversed with a simple spell? It was only as Severus let out a triumphant “Ha,” that Lucius realised he was scuppered. The spell had been aimed not at him, but at the glamour which had concealed his cane, making it appear to be a simple twisted wood walking stick. The spell fell away and his elaborately decorated and easily identifiable cane appeared, clutched between his nervous fingers.

“Hello, Severus.” He strove to sound blasé.

“Lucius.” Severus towered over Lucius’ sitting form, his wand still pointing rather disconcertingly at Lucius’ groin.

“How did you know it was me?”

“You touch your left ear with your right hand when you lie, you tap the fingers of your left hand against your thigh when you are nervous and, whilst you have not worn your usual overpowering aftershave, I am more than a little familiar with the scent of your shampoo.”
“Oh.” Lucius fought an overwhelming urge to tap the fingers of his left hand against his thigh. “Look, Severus, this isn’t what it looks like.” “Really?” Severus’s voice was dangerously quiet. “If that is the case then please do enlighten me, Lucius, exactly what is this?” He gestured dismissively at Camomile. Lucius had never wished to inhabit his own body more than he did in that moment. “…an accident,” he said eventually, stalling for time. “You mean you accidentally consumed Polyjuice potion on enough occasions to befriend Miss Granger?” “Not exactly, no. I consumed it once. Unfortunately, she befriended me during my transformation and after that thing became…well…complicated.” Lucius was not used to explaining himself and found it very difficult to do. “Indeed.” Severus was looking down his long nose at him. “So complicated that you are now planning to accompany Miss Granger to Stockholm, despite the fact that she had expressed a sincere desire never to set eyes on you again?” “Now that isn’t strictly true, Severus.” Lucius held up a reconciliatory hand. “Miss Granger has no desire to set eyes on Lucius Malfoy again; she is still very keen to maintain her friendship with Camomile Jones.” “Camomile Jones is Lucius Malfoy, you moron,” Severus spat the words so violently that Lucius was certain he could feel drops of moisture landing on his robes. “I refuse to discuss this with you any further. I am going to enlighten Miss Granger as to your true identity.”

He turned in a dramatic flurry of black robes and stalked to the door only to be stopped in his tracks by Lucius’ softly uttered words, “Remember your life debt, Severus.” “My life debt is fulfilled, I worked it off in hair care products and anti-aging cream,” Severus’ voice was smooth, but there was a tiny hint of uncertainty. “Really?” Lucius rose to his feet, grateful, for once, to have the upper hand. “Then why do you feel it tugging at you even now, old friend? You know as well as I do that your life is worth more than a few potions.” “What do you want, Lucius?” Severus turned to face him once more a dark scowl across his sallow face. Lucius shrugged. “I want your word that you will not reveal my true identity to Miss Granger.” Severus gave a heavy sigh. “Lucius, I would appeal to your better nature—“ “Your word, Severus, I will not be moved on this.” “Fine, you have my word that I will not inform Miss Granger of your true identity.” “Good, then your life debt is discharged.” Lucius pushed past Severus on his way to the door. “Oh wait; there is just one more, tiny thing.” “And what might that be?” Severus’ tone was dangerous. “I need a long-acting form of Polyjuice potion; I can’t risk a transformation in the middle of the Trollish archive, can I?” “That’s not possible, Lucius and you know it. Polyjuice takes a month to brew and Miss Granger wishes to leave in four days.” “You’d better get brewing then, hadn’t you old friend?” Lucius reached out and patted Severus’ cheek. “Neither of us wishes to disappoint Miss Granger after all.” With that he swept through the door and into the apothecary, feeling the best he had all week.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know…you want to know how Lucius fixed his hair…don’t worry, all will be revealed in the fullness of time. Including Camomile’s identity – eek!
Hermione drew in a long slow breath as they exited the Portkey office in Stockholm’s Vasastan district. She reached out and slipped her arm through Camomile’s, grateful for the older witch’s bulky presence next to hers. Hermione had been abroad enough times in the pursuit of her mastery to know that prejudice towards Muggle-born witches and wizards was still rife across Europe. Whilst the second wizarding war had been sufficient to dampen down those feelings in the UK, mainland Europe was a different matter entirely. She had been subject to prejudice against her dirty blood wherever she had gone and she feared that Stockholm would be no different.

Of course, on her previous forays abroad, to various potioneers conferences and meetings, she had been accompanied by Severus. Those who found her blood status lacking had hardly dared to pass comment whilst he had loomed like an angry storm cloud over her shoulder. But, nonetheless, Hermione had been conscious of the whispers that tended to follow her, some related to her celebrity status, no doubt, but many more pertaining to her blood status. The disadvantage of her birth was further brought home to her by the direct comparison of the way Blaise was treated compared to her. He was frequently asked to join exclusive societies, to submit papers to review groups or to attend bucolic dinner parties despite the fact that Hermione’s academic record far exceeded his own. To his credit, despite the animosity which until recently had existed between himself and his co-apprentice, Blaise rarely took these opportunities. Although Hermione suspected his reluctance was fuelled more by a desire to spend his time partying and chasing single witches rather than a genuine need to protect her feelings she had still been grateful to him for his surprising sensitivity.

Severus had simply ignored the issue. Hermione did not think him so thick-skinned as to be unaware of it. His own status as a half-blood did not appear to have hampered him. He was extremely well respected, with far-reaching contacts. Veritable flocks of owls asking him to speak or teach at various functions arrived each day. He rarely accepted these requests, preferring to spend his time working on his own experimental potions or haranguing Hermione and Blaise.

There had been little in the way of haranguing over the last four days, however. Hermione was almost beginning to feel uncomfortable at his chivalrous treatment of her. He had refused point blank to disclose what had happened between him and Camomile after Hermione had been ejected from
the back room of the shop. Camomile too had been remarkably sanguine on that point. Both had agreed that Severus had further explored her suitability as a chaperone and Severus had accepted that Camomile was up to the job. Hermione was certain there had to be more to their encounter than that. Severus had been unsettlingly kind to her. Despite the fact that her focus and drive had returned he had not asked her to resume her brewing for the shop instead, allowing her to pursue her research in order to make the most of the few days she would have in Stockholm. Even Blaise had noticed the change in their employer’s attitude and had accused Hermione of sleeping with Severus in order to curry favour. Unfortunately, both Severus and Hermione had heard his accusation. Poor Blaise had been hit by a variety of stinging hexes which had left him twitching and itching for days. Severus had looked at Hermione with such utter revulsion that it had been clear to all present that offering him sexual favours was not likely to improve her standing in his eyes.

Hermione enjoyed the reprieve from her more mundane duties and was pleased with the progress she had made in her research. She had managed to survive simply by not allowing herself to think about Lucius. It wasn’t easy. Every night he took centre stage in her increasingly lurid dreams. A libido she didn’t know she possessed had been awoken by him and it seemed unwilling to go back to sleep despite his ejection from her life. He still sent her flowers every day and she had given up shredding the petals. It felt like a terrible waste. Instead, her small flat, now looked like an expensive flower shop with the heavy scent of roses permeating every nook and cranny. It made it even harder not to think about Lucius which encouraged Hermione to spend more and more time at work where his memories seemed somehow less potent. She was still angry with him. His lying and subterfuge she might just have been able to stomach. She supposed that it was rather flattering to have been pursued with such single-minded intensity, even if his sole goal had been sexual gratification. The results had, after all, been gratifying for both of them. But his behaviour toward her during the dinner with Draco and Astoria was another matter entirely. He had hurt her with his snide and callous remarks; cut her to the quick with his sharp tongue and then expected her to docilely follow him home and hop into his bed. The audacity of the man made her blood boil. She was well rid of him and the dreams, the unbearably erotic dreams…they would fade eventually, just as her nightmares had after the war.

Camomile reached over and squeezed Hermione’s hand where it lay on her arm. “Are you all right, Dearie?”
“Yes, of course.” Hermione looked up into the crone’s whiskery face and gave a reassuring smile. “I’m just a bit nervous about visiting the archive, I think. A lot of the international academic community haven’t responded well to having a Muggle-born amongst them.” Camomile’s face darkened. “Well there had better not be any of that sort of nonsense while I’m with you, my dear, or they will feel the end of my wand.” She raised her twisted walking stick and gave it a threatening little shake for good measure. Hermione couldn’t help but laugh. “Thank you Camomile, I shall feel much better knowing you are protecting my honour. Do you know the way from here?”

They were standing on a busy Muggle Street. A never-ending procession of tall blond men and woman streamed unseeingly past the two witches in their midst. The spared not even a glance in Camomile’s direction and Hermione was glad she had thought to apply a subtle Notice-me-not charm. Camomile’s traditional wizarding robes were rather conspicuous in a way that Hermione’s jeans and jumper were not. Camomile looked around and then began to walk purposefully, threading her way through the other pedestrians, Hermione’s arms still tucked companionably beneath hers.

It took only fifteen minutes at Camomile’s rather uneven gait for them to arrive at a large, imposing looking sandstone building with a large sign reading ‘Karolinska Trollish Archive’ above the doorway. Hermione could feel the tingle of magic emanating from the building. “Muggle repellent charms,” Camomile supplied the information before Hermione could ask. “The Swedish are very keen on the hiding in plain sight concept.”
“What do the Muggles think is here?” The building occupied too enormous a site to be completely overlooked.

“A hospital apparently.” Camomile twisted the ring on the imposing wood studded doors and lead Hermione inside. “Nobody ever has an appointment here, but the muggles all think it is a very prestigious institute, it’s a clever piece of magic.”

Hermione was too distracted by the interior of the building to answer. It was truly magnificent. A black and white tiled floor extended almost as far as the eye could see in a dizzying herringbone pattern and, at each corner of the building, a magnificent spiral staircase made its way up to the four towers she had seen from the outside. Camomile seemed less impressed by the interior than Hermione. Without a glance around her she made her way to a large mahogany desk where an officious looking little wizard looked up only briefly at them as she presented their letter of recommendation.

“Sign here.” He produced a heavy leather lined ledger from beneath his desk and indicated a spot about halfway down one of the pages. Camomile signed with a flourish, Hermione looked over her shoulder, trying to read some of the other names listed there, but she didn’t recognise anybody. Once the ledger was signed the wizard produced two pairs of white gloves which he placed on the counter. He examined them both coldly. “Wear these at all times. The books must not be exposed to human skin… the acids…”—he gave a small shudder— “no eating or drinking in the archive and we close promptly at five pm, please make sure all books are reshelved by a quarter to.” He tapped his wand smartly against the desk and a large door behind him swung open. Hermione followed Camomile through.

The archive was far bigger than she could possibly have imagined. In fact, it rivalled the Hogwarts library in size. Hermione gave a soft squeak of dismay. How on earth was she supposed to find the information she needed amongst such a vast collection? Whilst the sight of so many books set her heart pounding it also terrified her. Camomile appeared to recognise her panic.

“Don’t worry, Dearie.” She pressed a comforting hand to Hermione’s arm. “None of the shelves are labelled, but luckily I know where the herbology section is. I can find you the texts you need while you take notes.”

“Thank you Camomile.” Hermione impulsively hugged the older witch. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

She repeated that thought mentally several times over the next few hours. Camomile was both tireless and invaluable. She brought Hermione tome after tome; neatly stacking and reshelving discarded texts as she went along. Once there was a large pile of books in front of them she began to go through them too, magically highlighting any parts she thought Hermione ought to read. She had an uncanny sense of what it was Hermione was looking for and by lunchtime, when she insisted they leave the archive for long enough to grab a sandwich, Hermione was delighted to realise that she was already further on with her research than she had been in months.

Quarter to five came all too quickly and Hermione helped Camomile to reshelve the books. Her back was aching and it was only as she rubbed her own spine that she noticed how much Camomile was wincing as she moved around the stacks.

“Camomile, are you hurt?”

“Oh no, my dear.” The older witch avoided her eye. “My back is a little stiff, that’s all.” Hermione didn’t push her further, but continued to keep a close eye on her friend as the finished their tidying and made their way from the archive. It was only as they stepped from the candlelit interior into to the bright Stockholm sunshine that she realised how pale her friend looked. Her whiskery complexion was almost translucent and the lines around her eyes were much more pronounced than usual.

“Camomile, you’re exhausted.”

“I’m fine dear.” She spoke in a slightly defeated tone as if, even she, knew she could not perpetuate
this particular lie for much longer.
 Their hotel was in Stockholm’s fashionable Södermalm district and Hermione had been going to suggest that they walk their in order to take in a few sights of the city on their way. Looking at her drooping friend she realised that Camomile was in no state to walk anywhere. A flash of guilt arrowed through her. She had been so wrapped up in her own studies that she hadn’t noticed that Camomile was flagging. What had she been thinking? How many times had the boys accused her of becoming so wrapped up in her work that she failed to take into account the needs of others? Camomile couldn’t be much under a hundred, and international portkey travel, followed by eight hours of research was far too much to ask of her aging body.
 “Let’s get you to the hotel.” She steered Camomile into a quiet alley where she judged it would be safe to Apparate. “Once I’ve got you settled I can pop out and get us some food.” Luckily she knew the co-ordinates of the hotel and was reasonably good at blind Apparition. She and Camomile disappeared with a soft pop.

Hermione looked with some apprehension at the small, white painted building on a quiet side street. It had looked a lot bigger and considerably more glamorous when she had booked the room online earlier that week. Shrugging her shoulders and telling herself not to be a snob she led the wilting figure of Camomile into the dusty foyer where they were greeted by an unenthusiastic reception staff.

Minutes later they were ensconced in their room and Hermione was assessing their surroundings with some dismay.
 “I’m sorry Camomile”— she took in the faded wallpaper, the peeling paint around the window and, worst of all, the small double bed, which was in place of the twins she had specifically requested —“this isn’t how the room looked in the pictures.”
 Camomile had barely taken in their surroundings. She had dropped her cloak on the floor by the bed and was in the process of removing her shoes.
 “It’s fine, Dearie,” she wheezed, the process of bending over clearly constricting her lungs. Without another word, she lay down on the bed giving a sigh of relief.

Hermione smiled down at her. She was so lucky to have such an uncomplaining friend.
 “I’ll just go down to the lobby and see if I can find us some food.”
 By the time she returned, laden down with two large sandwiches and a selection of pastries, Camomile was fast asleep.

Chapter End Notes

A/N I can’t see any potential pitfalls to this situation at all…

I promise I'm hard at work on the next chapter but I've also made a little collage...it includes my vision of Camomile - you can see it on my Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/fragilereality/Ten points if you recognise her! I'll post it at the beginning of the next chapter too for those of you who don't do Facebook.
That night, not for the first time, Lucius invaded Hermione's dreams. The first time he had come to her in this manner; after they had fought, she had been horrified. She couldn't believe that her subconscious would create such a scenario with a man with whom she was so incredibly angry. She had fought tooth and nail against her dream self, desperately trying to deny the inevitable until she had woken herself up. She had been bathed in sweat, the sheets hopelessly tangled around her legs, her body quivering with frustration and longing she had immediately wished that she had allowed the dream to take her where it would.

The next time he had visited her in her sleep she had succumbed without a murmur of protest. The sex in her dreams was often slightly surreal and did not come close to the smorgasbord of sensation that the flesh and blood Lucius was capable of providing. However, it had the distinct advantage of being an interaction carried out solely with herself and therefore the risk of emotional fall out from her actions was fairly limited. She occasionally felt guilty that she was using Lucius' memory to derive such delicious solo pleasure. Then she would remind herself of his myriad of barbed comments at that fateful dinner party, and she would reset her loop and find herself wondering how she could still desire him in the first place.

This time her dream was different. The sensations were amplified to such an extent that she was overwhelmed by the tactile stimulus. The bed sheets weighed heavy on her over sensitive skin and she was acutely aware of the press of a warm, male body along the length of her back. His erection swelled against her buttocks and his large hands skimmed across her belly, eliciting tiny shocks of pleasure and forcing her to grind back against him. He was barely touching her and already this dream superseded any other.

A gentle hand pushed aside her hair and hot lips were applied to the sensitive skin of her neck. She arched into them, remembering the marks she had born after the last time they had slept together. He bit harder, a soft growl of need reverberating against her skin as a large hand cupped her breast.

"Lucius," she hissed his name in a pleasured breath, gyrating wantonly against him now, one small hand reaching back to cup his thigh.

"Hermione?" His voice sounded hoarse and roughened with sleep. His lips had stilled at her nape
and then, suddenly, he had rolled her onto her back and his body was on top of hers, pinning her to
the bed as his gray eyes speared her own. Hermione could barely make out his expression in the dim
light that filtered through the thin curtains. She thought he looked, confused, uncertain, not a detail
her dreams had previously included.

"Hermione," he repeated. This time almost with wonder in his voice.

"I'm so sorry." He bent his head and brushed his lips against hers.

If she had been capable of raising an eyebrow Hermione would have done so. She had given up on
ever hearing those particular words from Lucius Malfoy. Clearly, his dream-self was capable of feats
his corporal body was not.

"What for?" she asked.

"For everything." He was raining down kisses on her face now. "For deceiving you, for not being
honest about my intentions." His hand closed once more over her breast his deft fingers finding the
nipple and stroking it into an aroused peak. "For being too afraid to admit to the depths of my
feelings. Most of all I'm sorry for the way I behaved at dinner with Draco and Astoria. It was
unforgivably rude."

"It was," Hermione agreed, although coherent speech was difficult when he was manipulating her
breast like that.

"Please forgive me." His words were solemn and held not a hint of artifice. Hermione was taken
aback. In real life she was uncertain whether she would forgive him, even given the articulacy of his
apology but here; in her dream landscape, with his hot and aroused body pressed against hers, it was
almost a moot point. Forgiveness bestowed upon a non-corporeal person was not genuine
forgiveness and she wanted the dream to continue as it had begun. Lucius appeared to interpret her
hesitation for a rebuttal.

"Please, Hermione," he sounded almost desperate. "Please let me show you how truly sorry I am." With those words he began to trail kisses down her neck and chest, only pausing briefly to dampen
her hardened nipples through the fabric of her nightgown, his final goal clear. Hermione couldn't
help but arch her breasts invitingly towards him. If this was how he wanted to apologise who was
she to stand in his way?

His lips blazed a trail across her stomach and it was only as he vanished both of their clothing that
she became aware that she had been wearing anything at all. Amusingly, Lucius had been dressed in
a loose black garment which, now she thought about it, bore a startling resemblance to Camomile's
robes. What an interesting detail for her subconscious to add she mused before Lucius arrived
between her thighs effectively shutting down her ability to think.

His large hands settled on the soft flesh of her inner thighs and pushed them apart leaving her open to
his scrutiny. He didn't linger to enjoy the view though; as soon as his way forward was clear he
began to lick at her outer lips. His tongue descended south and he used the leverage of her thighs to
manipulate her pelvis giving him access to her puckered hole. She wondered how on earth she was
managing to dream something she had never experienced whilst awake. The details were as clear
and the pleasure as intense as any genuine encounter. Any semblance of embarrassment was
eradicated by the sensations he was generating and she bucked against his mouth. In their previous
chocolate covered encounter she had held back, afraid of touching him with her sticky hands. Now
she had no such compunctions; she fastened her small fists into his hair and tugged sharply directing
him where she wanted him most.
He gave a grunt of amusement as she all but dragged him up to her clitoris, and then obligingly sucked the little bud into his mouth as two of his fingers plunged inside her. He worked them deftly against her inner walls, plundering her soft flesh, deftly seeking out that secret spot which would bring her to climax. As he rubbed at her G-spot he bared his teeth against her sensitive nub. Hermione's orgasm ripped through her, she had forgotten the almost painful pleasure of the climaxes Lucius was capable of inducing. Waves of pleasure rippled through her stomach and she released Lucius' hair to clench at the sheets. As she began to come down she looked around, in sudden fear, eager to ascertain that neither Camomile nor any other intruders were in the room.

"Is something the matter?" Lucius looked up at her from between her thighs, his hair delightfully mussed.

Hermione shook her head, her chest heaved and she could scarcely inhale sufficient oxygen to speak.
"No, I was just making sure there was no sign of Draco…or Blaise." She shuddered at the memory of her previous dream. Lucius looked puzzled.

"Were you expecting them to join us?"

"No, of course not…It's just—"She ground to a halt. How did one explain to her phantom lover that during a previous (dreamed) assignation they had been interrupted by his equally phantom son and friend? "Never mind." Despite her orgasm her body still thrummed with arousal, she felt as if she would never get enough of him and who knew how long she had before the apparition faded. She gripped his shoulders, manhandling his much larger frame up the bed until he was lying on his back beneath her. He looked up at her his gray eyes amused.

"What are you doing, Miss Granger?" His voice trickled down her spine. How she had missed that aristocratic drawl. She should have hated the sound of it; instead it only stoked the fire of her arousal.

"I'm taking charge," she told him earnestly as she straddled his waist. He raised an eyebrow but didn't object, lounging back with feline grace against the pillows, regarding her through sleepy, hooded eyes.

She bit her lip and took hold of his cock with both hands. They looked strangely childlike against his girth and she marvelled, not for the first time, at her body's ability to contain such an implement. Lucius gave a soft groan and pressed himself up into her hands as she stroked him. A glistening drop of fluid appeared from the slit at the head of his cock and she dipped her head to swipe her tongue across it, savouring the salty taste on her palate. Lucius groaned again and another drop instantly replaced the one she had swallowed.

"Hermione, please."

Her eyes flew to his. She had never heard him beg before and it increased her arousal tenfold. Still holding him firmly in her hand she placed him at her core and began to slowly impale herself upon his length. It was harder than she had expected. She was swollen with her own arousal and the fit was terrifyingly tight. She had never taken the initiative in such a manner, and along with excitement came a slight flicker of fear, of hurting Lucius or herself in the process. From the desperate look on his face and the way he clenched at the hopelessly rumpled bedsheets, she didn't think she was causing him any pain and finally, her pelvis met his and she rejoiced at the incredible feeling of being completely filled. The head of his cock was nestled just against her cervix, the slightest movement of her hips caused it to bump against her sensitive core, arrowing sparks of pleasure and pain through her entire body. The sensation had the potential to be overwhelming; she would need to proceed with caution.

Lucius appeared to have missed that memo. He suddenly grasped her hips with bruising force and
thrust up into her with such velocity that he nearly unseated her. Hermione acted completely without thinking. Later, when she thought back over her actions she surmised that she had perhaps not forgiven him as completely as she had at first thought. Or perhaps, she had simply been infuriated at his attempt to wrestle control of the situation back from her. Or maybe she just had a brutal side which had henceforth not been released. Whatever the thought process behind it she drew back her hand, leaned forward, and slapped him hard across the face.

Lucius fell back against the pillows, a red handprint blooming against his pale skin. Hermione remained still, her hand smarting, her sex still pulsing with pleasure but a terrible sense of apprehension pervading her consciousness. What had she done and how on earth would Lucius react? He pressed a hand against his face, his eyes had a strange look she had never seen before. They were wide, the pupils so dilated that the gray irises were almost completely gone and there was something terrifyingly feral in his gaze.

"Do that again." His voice was like sandpaper on silk.

Hermione heaved in a breath. His command was unmistakable and judging from his girth between her legs and the look on his face her blow had aroused rather than chastised him. Still, could she really strike him again, this time in cold blood?

The crack of her palm against his cheek echoed through the silent room and this time his response was unmistakable. His growl of pleasure was combined with another helpless thrust of his hips. Encouraged, she struck him again wringing a sibilant, "yessss" from his lips. Acting on instinct now, she leaned forwards and dug her short sensible nails into the smooth skin of his chest, raking them viciously down his body.

"Merlin, witch—"his voice was strained and before she knew what was happening Hermione's control of the situation was wrested from her. Lucius reared up, capturing her wrists in his hands and tipping her unceremoniously off him and onto her back. Within seconds she was pinned to the bed, her wrists held firmly above her head and Lucius buried deep within her once more. His hips began to move against hers with pounding force as his lips crashed down on hers. Hermione was overwhelmed. Their sweat slicked bodies were crushed together, his hot and demanding mouth plundered hers and his pelvis mashed against her clitoris as he thrust over and over into her tender and swollen sex.

The force of his hands on her wrists was such that her fingers were almost numb, the frantic pounding of his cock against her cervix was somewhere in the strange no man's land of pleasure and pain. Hermione lolled helplessly beneath him, still desperately kissing him back, her tongue duelling with his for supremacy as she refused to completely surrender.

"You are mine, Hermione Granger." He wrested his lips away from hers for long enough to speak against her throat. "You will always be mine."

Hermione had long prided herself on her embrace of feminism, and later she would berate herself for finding his possessive declaration so utterly desirable but, in that moment, she was powerless to resist it. Unable to free her hands in order to touch him she wrapped her legs around his waist. Lucius grunted his approval into her mouth. His thrusts became more intense and more erratic, she could feel him hardening even further inside her, thickening in preparation for his own orgasm.

"Come for me." His harsh words, grunted against her neck were accompanied by the sensation of his teeth upon the sensitive skin.

Hermione was powerless to do anything other than obey. She screamed into his hair as her second orgasm ripped through her, her desperate sex clenching around him as she struggled to control the
maelstrom of sensation. Lucius seemed equally overcome. He bucked hard against her, a list of profanities trickling from his lips before he gritted his teeth as he finally came. She could feel him pulsing and the warmth inside her as he coated her inner walls with his ejaculate. He continued to thrust erratically for quite some time. His hands had finally released hers and now cupped her jaw as his lips moved across her cheeks and eyelids. Hermione couldn't resist the urge to dig her fingers into his soft hair once more and she traced the contours of his skull and the indentation at the nape of his neck. Lucius pulled away a little allowing their eyes to meet. He gave a rueful smile. Hermione reached up to tentatively touch his lips.

"Best dream ever," she muttered before she closed her eyes and allowed sleep to fully claim her once more.

Lucius stared at his uncharacteristically dishevelled reflection and resisted the urge to smash his fist against the unforgiving bathroom mirror. What on earth had he done? He hadn't meant for that to happen. He had woken fully aroused and already engaged in foreplay with what appeared to be a willing partner. When she had hesitated apologising had seemed like his only option, and once he had started he had been unable to stop. The thing was, he was truly sorry. He couldn't understand why he had avoided saying so for so long. Once the litany of regret began to fall from his lips he had found himself unable to stop the flood gates. He had apologised for every last tiny demeanour and it had felt right, he had felt purged by it. He would probably still be apologising now if his more base instincts hadn't taken over.

He hadn't come to Stockholm to sleep with her though. Far from it. He had come to be her friend and something about what he had done sickened him. He had though he was making love to a willing and forgiving partner and, whilst he had been surprised that she would forgive him so easily, he hadn't stopped to question her easy acquiescence. Until that was, she had touched his face, declared his presence in her bed a dream and fallen quickly back to sleep. Lucius had done a lot of things he was not proud of but he had never taken an unwilling woman to bed, or anywhere else for that matter. The thought that he had somehow coerced Hermione into sleeping with him was repugnant, he felt sullied by his own actions and he couldn't bear to think how she would respond when she found out that her 'best dream ever' had in fact been an unfortunate reality.

He groaned and traced his fingers across the slight swelling where one of her blows had crushed his lip against his teeth. At the memory of her striking him, his cock gave an interested twitch and he looked down at the unrepentant organ in disgust. Never in his entire pampered and privileged life had anybody physically struck him. Of course, there had been the odd bout of Crucio or the occasional, more exotic, curse from his fellow Death Eaters but nobody had ever actually applied their flesh to his in a violent manner. He had found it breathtakingly intimate and incredibly arousing. He understood now why so many people wished to be spanked and he closed his eyes and swallowed briefly at the thought of an enraged Miss Granger taking out her pique on his backside. He had spanked plenty of bottoms in his life but he had never once invited any woman to attack his. He wondered if offering himself in penance would be sufficient to quell Hermione's ire. It seemed unlikely.

He splashed cold water on his face, watching as the droplets ran down his troubled reflection. He couldn't remain here. It was clear that the Polyjuice Severus had given him was not up to the job. His reflection contorted with rage. He would strangle the potions master with his bare hands that was for sure. Lucius struggled to remember his friend's words as he had handed him the Polyjuice bottle. 'This will suit your needs,' he had said. The slippery little shit. The potion had undoubtedly been longer acting. Lucius had gone four hours between doses the previous day and had taken a surreptitious swig just before they left Karolinska. He had planned to take another mouthful before bed too, but he had not expected to need to do so. His instructions to Severus had been clear enough — he expected the potion to last all day. Judging by the time now, the altered Polyjuice had been
designed to last just long enough to lull him into a false sense of security and allow him to transform at the most inopportune of moments. He clenched his fists and imagined punching Severus' conniving face before reminding himself that simply providing the man with a blow by blow account of what had happened when Lucius Malfoy had woken up in bed with Hermione Granger would probably be a much more effective punishment.

Slumping dejectedly on the toilet he considered his options. He couldn't remain here as Camomile that was certain. By his calculations the Polyjuice potion had worn off at around eleven pm, meaning it had lasted six hours. There was no way he could spend a whole night with Hermione under such circumstances, especially when Camomile's body was considerably more infirm that he had imagined and likely to simply shut down at the end of the day. The risk of transforming in Hermione's presence was simply too great. He was extremely lucky she had been asleep this time.

For a brief moment, he considered the possibility of leaving the bathroom, waking Hermione and being completely honest with her. He felt perfectly capable of further apologies if they were required. His new ability to say sorry felt like an untapped spring deep inside him, ready to gush forth at the required moment. Unfortunately, he suspected that no amount of apologising would be sufficient to win over Hermione when she became aware of his latest indiscretion. This left him, once more, with subterfuge as his only option.

He opened the bathroom door a crack, his eyes immediately drawn to the deeply sleeping figure sprawled across the bed. She was lovely, despite her swollen lips and tangled hair, or perhaps because of them. He ignored the painful contraction of his heart, he must have indigestion, and silently summoned a parchment and quill.

His note written; he tiptoed across the room and placed it on the pillow beside her. He drew his wand quietly and carefully healed the bite mark he had left on her neck. Finally, from the doorway he cast a gentle cleansing charm, ready to run for it if it woke her, but she merely sighed and turned over, tucking a hand beneath her thighs before settling more comfortably beneath the sheets. Lucius fought a strong and foolish compulsion to press his lips against hers in a farewell kiss before he slipped soundlessly through the door of their room and out into the night.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know - she hasn't worked it out yet and isn't she supposed to be the brightest witch of her age...maybe I just needed to put in some smut because there's going to be a bit of a smut hiatus for the next few chapters...I promise Lucius isn't going to get away with this indefinitely.
Hermione awoke slowly. She burrowed down beneath the covers, her body was filled with a pleasurable ache and she wanted to savour the sensation for as long as possible before she was forced to face the reality of the day. In spite of her best efforts that reality could not help but intrude. Her dream had been so vivid. Yes, her subconscious had conjured up encounters with Lucius in the past but none with the clarity of the previous night’s lovemaking. It was as if he had really been in the room with her and the genuine emotion in his response, whilst uncharacteristic had seemed completely authentic. Then there was the bruised feeling between her thighs, entirely reminiscent of genuine lovemaking. She supposed she must have orgasmed in her sleep with such force that she had strained an internal muscle.

After a few minutes of sleepy contemplation it occurred to her that she was naked. She must have stripped of her nightgown during the fits of imagined passion. She jolted fully awake, realising abruptly that she must therefore be lying nude next to an unsuspecting Camomile. She cautiously raised her head, hoping that her nocturnal antics had gone unnoticed by her elderly companion. Camomile was not there. Hermione’s initial thought that she must be in the bathroom was interrupted as she caught sight of a roll of parchment on the pillow. She clutched the sheets across her breasts as she sat up and began to unroll it.

My Dear Hermione,
I am so sorry to abandon you during your research but I am afraid I have been called away on an urgent family matter. I received an owl while you were asleep informing me that my brother in Bratislava is most unwell. I must go to him at once as he has no other surviving family. I may not return for quite some time. I have made arrangements for your ongoing access to the archive. Please forgive me.
Your friend
Camomile

Hermione traced her fingers over Camomile’s signature. She wished her friend had said goodbye in person before she left. She hated to think of Camomile worrying over her brother’s wellbeing in the middle of the night whilst Hermione enjoyed an erotic romp with Lucius. There was no mention of her own disturbed sleep so she hoped this was an indication that she had not given anything of her dream away.

She swung her legs over the edge of the bed and stretched. Her body really did ache as if she had taken part in an all-night sexual marathon. Her breasts were tender and there was a dull throbbing between her thighs. Surely she hadn’t — she leapt out of bed and ran through to the bathroom, her fingers dragging aside her abundant hair so she could examine the skin of her neck. Lucius had bitten her there, hard. If their encounter had been more than a dream — the skin was completely unmarked. She allowed her hair to fall and rested her forehead against the mirror. What on earth had she been thinking? That Lucius had sneaked into her room and ravished her whilst Camomile slept peacefully beside them? What a ridiculous idea. She needed to get that man out of her head.

Still railing at her own stupidity, she turned the dial of the shower to its maximum and climbed under the hot water. She was more than a little nervous over returning to the Trollish Archive without
Camomile’s steadying presence. The wizard on the door had been perfectly polite and Camomile had promised she had made arrangements for Hermione to have access; still she felt a shudder of apprehension at the thought of facing him alone. She sighed and worked some conditioner through her hair. Really, she was Hermione Granger, she had broken into Gringott’s bank – why on earth she was allowing a single librarian to intimidate her she didn’t know.

An hour or so later, dressed and breakfasted, Hermione emerged onto the Stockholm street. She felt a little better after the firm talking to she had given herself. She stopped dead in her tracks when a familiar figure uncoiled itself from the sandstone wall against which he had been lounging.

“What are you doing here?” She stared hard a Lucius. He looked as impeccable as always, the morning sun glinting on his blonde hair, his robes neatly pressed and immaculate. There was nothing about him to suggest that he had sneaked into her bedroom and ravished her. She irritably pushed the memories of her dream to one side; thank goodness he wasn’t a Legilimens. “Our mutual friend asked me to come…please, just give me a moment.” He held his hands up placatingly, clearly expecting her to storm off without giving him a chance to speak.

Lucius touched his hair self-consciously; a slightly apprehensive look flitted across his handsome countenance. “Muggle shampoo, very clever.” Hermione allowed a brief smile to touch her lips before she scowled at him again. “I see you managed to counteract my hex.” He took another step closer and Hermione raised her hand in warning. “I wish to apologise.” Her mouth dropped open with surprise. This was just too much like her dream for her to believe. “What for?” she asked, surreptitiously pinching herself hard and wincing at the resultant pain. “For everything, for deceiving you, for treating you as a commodity. Most of all for my deplorable behaviour in the restaurant with my son. I had become—” he hesitated searching for the right word, “—fond of you.” He pronounced the word awkwardly as if it were not the one for which he had been searching “I know it is no excuse but I was nervous and I behaved badly because of it. Please forgive me.” He took another step toward her and caught one of her hands in his. She dragged her thoughts away from memories of the previous night and gazed up into his gray eyes, they shone with almost hypnotic sincerity. “I don’t expect to continue our physical relationship.” She ignored the stab of disappointment at his words. “I only ask that you allow me to be your friend. I promise never to insult you in such a manner again.”

“Oh.” Hermione really didn’t know what else to say. Ron and Harry had never apologised so eloquently. She was still confused. The magnetism of Lucius’ presence was immensely distracting. It was difficult to even try to remember why she was angry with him when he was looking at her with such sincerity and when her body still throbbed with pleasure from her dream. He wasn’t even suggesting they resume their relationship – if that was what you could call a series of profoundly affecting sexual encounters combined with a number of interactions based entirely on mistruths. He was simply offering to be her friend. She couldn’t turn that down, could she?

“Alright,” she said. “I accept your apology.” The look of genuine relief on his face tugged at her heart strings. “But no more lies please, Lucius. I realise it’s in your nature to be dishonest but I hate it, I would much rather hear the truth from you, however painful it might be.”

“You have my word.” He was still holding her hand and he stroked his thumb across the back of her knuckles. Her belly flopped uncomfortably.

“Have you eaten?” She wasn’t sure whether she was relieved or disappointed when he released her
hand and offered her his arm instead.

“Yes, thank you, I had breakfast in the hotel.” She slipped her fingers into the crook of his arm. He looked up at the shabby building and shuddered with some of his old arrogance. “I shall need to find myself some alternate accommodation. Yours look a little too…rustic for my tastes.” Hermione supressed a glare. He was being honest which was what she had asked for after all. She meekly followed Lucius as he set out in the direction of the Trollish Archive, completely oblivious to the stares his outlandish clothing garnered. Actually, Hermione wasn’t sure if people were staring at his clothes or the man himself. Even in a country filled with beautiful people Lucius Malfoy was something else. His blonde halo and lean, muscular physique could not help but draw the eye, and his chiselled face was as handsome as ever despite the slight frown that furrowed his brow as he considered which street to take. Hermione could easily have allowed herself to engage in fantasies in which Lucius was cast as a marauding Viking, seeking to lay waste to everything he saw, until—she shut down that train of thought abruptly. He had said they would not continue their physical relationship. He was here to be her friend and she should be grateful, she didn’t have much chance of getting into the archive without him.

Accessing the Trollish Archive in the company of Lucius was an entirely different experience to going in with Camomile. There was no meek presentation of a letter of recommendation this time. Lucius simply strode across the magnificent floor, giving his surroundings not a second glance and attracted the attention of the dour wizard behind the desk by rapping the sliver top of his cane sharply against the rosewood.

Hermione cringed at the thought of the officious little wizard’s response to such rudeness but, to her surprise, the little man was nothing but obsequious.

“Mr Malfoy, what a pleasure it is to see you again, Sir, is there anything I can do to assist?” Such was the sincerity of his grovelling that he didn’t even spare a moment to give Hermione the same disparaging looking he had bestowed on her the previous day.

“My associate and I—Lucius took Hermione’s arm once more—will require access to the archives for the next few days. We will need a private reading room and a dedicated research assistant.”

“Of course, of course, Sir, reading room two is free and I shall be happy to assign an assistant to you.” He shot a glance at Hermione out of the corner of his eye.

She unconsciously moved a little closer to Lucius and the goblin’s eyebrow rose. “If you and your associate would just sign the register please.” He pushed the leather bound book across the desk toward them.

“You know exactly who we are.” With those words Lucius turned on his heel and, taking a numbly unprotesting Hermione with him, walked straight through the door of the archive, not even waiting for it make itself visible.

“Lucius.” Hermione removed her arm from his once they were alone. She didn’t know whether to chastise or applaud him. “You were so rude.” She let a tinge of admiration creep into her voice.

“Was I?” Lucius was already scanning the books on the shelf closest to him, his leather gloved hand skimming across the titles. “I didn’t notice.”

“Well you were.” Hermione moved a little closer to try and turn his attention away from the books.

“He was quite rude to you yesterday but you were much worse today.”

“He was rude to you?” She suddenly wished she were not the sole focus of his attention, now the full intensity of his hawkish gaze was fixed entirely on her. “I shall have him sacked immediately.”

“No, please, don’t do that. He was just a little disparaging that’s all. It’s no more than I’ve come to expect, please don’t get him fired. Who knows what his home circumstances are? He might have a disabled wife and eight children to take care of.”

Lucius stared at her for several more seconds his gray eyes boring into hers. Finally, his gaze dropped to her lips before he looked away and shook his head slightly. “Very well,” he said. “But he will treat you with nothing but courtesies from now on or he’ll feel the sharp end of my wand.”

His protectiveness reminded her so much of Camomile that Hermione almost giggled. “Thank you Lucius.” She squeezed his arm before turning her attention to the books also.
If Camomile had been a good research assistant Lucius was even better. For one thing his presence had gained them access to their own personal lackey. The quiet, unassuming young man assigned to assist them not only quickly located the books and scrolls they needed, but reshelved the volumes they were finished with and kept them awash with pots of tea and well-nourished with delicate cakes and, at lunchtime, generous sandwiches. Lucius’ translation skills were second to none and by the end of the day Hermione could not believe just how much they had accomplished. Admittedly, her back ached and her fingers were stained with ink but she couldn’t remember the last time she had felt so satisfied by her work.

Even Lucius’ snobbery could not dampen her good mood. He had excused himself briefly during the afternoon and, on their departure from the archive, he informed her that he had booked them both into Stockholm’s premier hotel. Hermione had initially put up a fight. There was nothing wrong with the place she was staying, she had argued. She had already paid for four nights in advance and she wouldn’t get her money back. Lucius did not seem to feel that this was a valid argument and, Hermione was just a little bit curious to see what it would be like to stay in Stockholm’s equivalent of the Savoy. She grudgingly accepted Lucius’ offer and apparated back to her hotel to collect her possessions.

Lucius elected to wait outside and she quickly began to magically cram items into her suitcase, marvelling that Camomile had managed to pack in the dark without disturbing her at all. She must have been distracted by her dream. She was a little surprised, on picking up her nightgown, to find a long blonde hair clinging to the soft fabric. It definitely wasn’t one of hers and it was too smooth and silky to belong to Camomile. She held it up to the light. Her mind flickered back to her dream, surely it couldn’t— No! She was being ridiculous, the hair must have stuck to her when Lucius had side along apparated them earlier and then fallen onto the bed. It was the only reasonable explanation. Still something itched at the back of her mind, until she entered her own private suite at the Lydmar hotel at which point she was so distracted by the sumptuous luxury that she forgot to think about Lucius or his hair or anything except the enormous bath which dominated a bathroom bigger than her flat.

A cool breeze blew off the water and Hermione shivered as goosebumps formed on her arms. Stockholm was warm, but out here on the archipelago it was chillier than she had anticipated. “Are you cold?” Lucius glanced down at her. He was still dressed in his full wizarding robes, completely unwilling to make any concessions to their whereabouts or the weather. “A little.” She tried and failed to suppress another shiver. The ferry taking them to Uto was too crowded for her to risk a warming charm. She was surprised when Lucius placed an arm around her drawing her into the heat of his body. The climate control charms that affected his robes instantly warming her as much as his own heat did. Hermione inhaled discretely as the scent of his warm body washed over her. Other than offering her his arm this was the first time he had touched her during their trip. He had been the perfect gentleman. During the day he assisted her with her research, tirelessly translating and taking notes on her behalf. By night he had taken her to dinner in a dazzling series of flashy restaurants where he had not criticised her table manners or her choices of food or wine. He had strolled with her through the cobbled streets of the old city and had even accompanied her on a trip to the Abba museum. Although he had not been completely able to hide the look of dismay on his face as the super group’s hits played on repeat during their two hour visit.

He had appeared to all intents and purposes to be the dedicated suitor; chivalrously chaperoning her around the city, except he had not tried to lay a finger on her. He treated her with such old fashioned courtesy that Hermione was beginning to find it hard to believe that he had ever left her bruised and aching after a night of passionate sex. The gentleman who held her chair out for her and placed her napkin across her knees seemed far removed from the man who had upended an entire bowl of chocolate across her body and then proceeded to lick it off. Whilst Hermione hadn’t entirely forgiven
him for his previous actions she had to admit that she was still attracted to him. Everything about him was magnetic, the slightest whiff of his aftershave left her panting in a Pavlovian response which would have been funny had she not felt so confused by her feelings. Was it possible that their argument and her subsequent hexing of him had been sufficient to quell Lucius’ feelings toward her? He had intimated to feeling more than sexual attraction, but if that were the case he was doing an extremely good job of hiding it.

She sighed and allowed herself the luxury of leaning against his solid frame as she breathed in the top notes of sandalwood and jasmine that clung to him. He turned in her direction and she felt a tiny stab of satisfaction as she felt his lips press against the top of her head. Their last day in Stockholm was almost over. They had completed their research that afternoon and could have returned to London immediately, but Lucius had wished to visit an exclusive restaurant on Uto. Hermione had not wished to deny him the opportunity. Especially when the success of her research so far was largely down to him. They had spent a pleasant evening together and were now returning to the city centre where they would take a Portkey home.

“What will happen when we go home?” She tried her utmost to keep her voice casual. Lucius’ arm tightened a little around her shoulders. “You will complete your thesis, it will receive great accolade, and you will be inundated with job offers from every pharmaceutical company in the world, I imagine.”

Hermione smiled at his words. He was probably correct. She felt as if she had found the missing link in the Trollish Archive. The half formed theories she had been carrying around in her head for the last eighteen months had finally coalesced into perfect focus. She couldn’t wait to return to London and begin her practical experiments. However, that was not what she had been asking.

“I didn’t mean with regard to my research.” She tilted her head a little in order to look up at him. “I meant between us, will I still see you?”

“Of course.” Lucius’ firm mouth quirked into a smile. “I still have a great deal to learn about the culinary arts if you’ll consent to teach me?”

Hermione couldn’t quite believe his audacity but at the same time was so pleased with his answer that she couldn’t help but smile. She was acutely aware of his closeness, of the warmth of his body pressed against hers, the solid press of his thigh and the light stroking of his fingers against her upper arm. She drew in a long, shaky breath, her eyes fixed on his lips which were no longer smiling. For some reason he seemed unwilling to take things further between them, which seemed odd to her when he had proved to be so sexually aggressive in the past. Emboldened by the resurgence of her academic ability Hermione reached up and threaded her fingers through the silky hair at the nape of his neck. She applied light pressure, pulling his head down toward hers and, to her great relief, felt no resistance. He inclined his neck in her direction, bringing those delectable lips ever closer to hers. Her eyelids fluttered shut in anticipation of his kiss.

With a cacophony of revving engines and diesel fumed shudders the ferry abruptly ground to a halt, the suddenness of its docking almost pitching Hermione off of her seat and bumping her forehead against Lucius’ mouth.

“Sorry!” Her cheeks flamed as she righted herself rubbing her bruised forehead and realising to her horror that Lucius was bleeding. “Here let me.” She dug in her handbag and removed a paper tissue which she used to dab at his lip.

“It’s nothing.” His warm fingers covered hers as he reached up to take the tissue and press it more firmly against the contusion. Hermione reluctantly withdrew her fingers from his, noticing as she did that, up close, he bore a very faint bruise at the corner of his mouth.

They parted company at the Portkey office. Lucius expressed a desire to see her safely home, but Hermione assured him there was no need. Indeed, she was already distancing herself from him. The urge to pore over her notes, refine her brewing instructions and begin to write up her thesis was almost overwhelming; nothing could have distracted her from the academic utopia which lay ahead.
If Lucius was offended by her dismissive behaviour he didn’t show it. He merely kissed her hand, promised that he would see her soon and apparated away as if they had done nothing more than take a quiet stroll through London rather than spend four intense days in Stockholm. Of course, Hermione realised, things seemed considerably more intense from her point of view since she had also engaged in a torrid sexual encounter of which real-life Lucius was completely unaware.

As soon as she reached her flat all thoughts of Lucius disappeared from her mind. She was opening her first notebook almost before she walked through the door. She spent only a few moments greeting an ecstatic Crookshanks before she sat down at the kitchen table and began to scribble feverishly. The night passed in a blur of ink stained fingertips, chewed strands of hair and increasingly strong cups of tea. Her back and wrists ached, her eyes were dry and gritty, and her stomach rumbled ominously, but Hermione could not stop. After months of drought the floodgates had finally opened. She felt reborn, as if she finally knew who she truly was once more, as if her purpose in life had become clear again. She wrote and wrote, page after page of covered parchment falling to the floor much to the disgust of Crookshanks who lingered beneath the kitchen table. Finally, sixteen hours later, she pushed her chair away from the table and stretched her aching back.

She was finished.

Of course, there would be re-writes and revision. There were a number of practical experiments which still required to be completed and their results might alter her writing a little, but the bare bones; the essence of what she wanted to achieve lay before her. She felt as proud as if she had just given birth. A few moments later it struck her that she was also just as hungry. She glanced around the kitchen. She was still wired from too much tea and the adrenaline of her studies. She needed something to do to help her come down…she needed to cook. She turned her attention to the shelf of cookery books above the kettle and gave a small frown as her fingers traced across a volume she didn’t recognise. It was a book on pizza dough.

Hermione’s brain at that moment was like a tightly coiled spring. She had spent the entire evening putting together conjuncture after conjuncture; chasing down evidence, combining facts and making a science of what had previously been considered folklore. Her brain was primed, like an Olympic athlete curled into the blocks. It was ready to perform and perform it did. Her eyes remained fixed on the book cover as her brain flicked through the evidence as quickly as a Muggle newspaper running over a printing press. Camomile’s pizza in the park, the scroll, the faint bruise on Lucius’ lip, the ache between her thighs after her dream encounter, Severus Snape’s odd behaviour, Lucius’ sudden appearance immediately after Camomile’s departure, it all flashed before her eyes and then the final image froze in front of her—a single blonde hair where no hair should have been.

Hermione reached for her wand.
Coq au Vin

Chapter Summary

Hermione schemes and plots and forgets to wash....

Chapter Notes

Hi Everyone, thanks for the comments and kudos - I am terrible at replying to them but the notifications make me so happy when they pop up on my phone throughout the day.

I need to post a word of warning. I've tried not to leave such a cliff hanger this time but the story is still a bit up in the air and unfortunately I'm going on holiday tomorrow morning. I'd love to think I'll have time to write while I'm away but I suspect I may not. I promise to come back rejuvenated and full of ideas!

White hot rage coursed through her. Exacerbated by her hyper-vigilant state and by sleep deprivation it took hold and festered like a particularly vicious strain of bacteria infecting every cell in her body. She didn’t know with whom she was more angry, herself or Lucius. He had fooled her, duped her in the worst way possible. She had believed Camomile Jones to be a true friend, a kindred spirit of sorts. She had confided things in Camomile she never would have told another person. Despite her realisation that the elderly witch had been nothing but a wolf in witches clothing Hermione still felt a wrench at her loss. She could not bring herself to feel angry at Camomile, she still thought of her as a friend, despite the fact that she fully understood that the Camomile she had known was not actually a real person.

But Lucius? He was another matter entirely. He had pulled the wool over her eyes one too many times as far as she was concerned. How dare he, after his sincere apology, continue to perpetuate such a lie? Thinking back over the chronology of their relationship she realised that Camomile had been with her right from the very start. Had Lucius really entered into their association with the desire to spy on her in such a manner already firmly entrenched? How odd. She couldn’t help but wonder why he had felt the need to do such a thing. Admittedly she had put up some resistance to his seduction. There had been a token denial of her attraction to him; a desperate attempt to retain some dignity in the face of her complete mental and physical surrender to his magnetism, but she had succumbed easily enough. What purpose had Camomile played? Her minor efforts in pouring oil on troubled waters seemed fairly insignificant when compared with the effort Lucius must have gone to in order to procure Polyjuice potion and a supply of hair in order to affect such a frequent transformation.

Hermione’s enraged musings drew to an abrupt halt. She found herself scribbling the word Polyjuice over and over in the margin of one of her notebooks. Lucius must have been taking Polyjuice, there was no other way he could have disguised himself so completely without her detecting his use of a glamour. She frowned and drew a circle around the words. Something wasn’t right.

The realisation hit her like a high speed train. There was no way Lucius could have been using a
conventional preparation of Polyjuice. He had been unconscious on the bed by 6:30 pm at the latest. Hermione had fondly watched him sleep for at least three hours before she had slipped under the covers beside him. He had obviously procured some sort of long acting potion. Polyjuice itself was an extremely difficult potion to brew, Hermione knew that from her own early experiences. All attempts to modify it had, as far as she knew, met with failure. There were only a handful of potions masters in the Western World who she thought might have a chance at extending its length of action. One of them was her employer, and Lucius Malfoy’s best friend. At the thought that Severus had also been a party to her downfall Hermione clutched her wand so tightly in her fist that the pliable wood almost snapped in two.

If Hermione was angry with Lucius and Severus this was nothing compared to the blinding rage she projected internally. How on earth could she have been so stupid? She berated herself over and over. She had behaved like a simpering fool, so caught up in the haze of sensual attraction Lucius had spun around her that she hadn’t even occurred to her to look beyond the surface. The clues had all been there, staring her in the face, yet she had continued to delude herself, willing to believe the impossible rather than acknowledge the actual truth. She could only conclude that she had wished to be deceived. That on some level her subconscious had felt it better to ignore what was going on and engage in a relationship with a man who was, at best a pathological liar and at worst actually genuinely insane, rather than be alone. Was that really what all of this had been about? Had Ron’s desertion of her for a Quidditch playing, muscular thighed temptress really affected her so deeply that she had been willing to lie to herself in order to perpetuate a relationship with a man who, now she came to think about it, was just about as unsuitable for her as it was possible to be. What on earth was wrong with her? Had he slipped her a lust potion too on top of everything else?

She hadn’t let go of her wand since she had had her epiphany and she used it now to run a few diagnostic spells. Are far as she could discern she was not under the influence of any form of dark magic. Any stupidity had been entirely of her own making.

She took a moment to study her wand. She had purchased a replacement for her original after the Battle of Hogwarts. Her new wand was slightly longer and more flexible but with the same dragon heartstring core as her old one. She had taken great pleasure in snapping Bellatrix’s wand into several pieces. She caressed the smooth wood, rubbing her thumb absently over the delicate carvings at the handle.

In the past she had occasionally indulged her vicious streak. She had led Dolores Umbridge towards what she thought would be an encounter with a feral giant during her fifth year, something for which she felt no regret, not even when Umbridge’s actual fate had become known. She had also kept Rita Skeeter in a jar for quite some time and of course, she had branded Marietta Edgecomb a sneak for betraying the DA. Despite all these actions Hermione did not like to think of herself as vindictive. She was fiercely loyal to those she loved and would do anything to protect them. In this case though, nobody she loved had actually been hurt. The insult had been only to her and, in truth it was only her pride that was injured. Whilst her initial impulse had been to hex Lucius to Hogwarts and back, and she still vibrated with angry magic, she was beginning to see that retribution was not the most sensible course of action. At least not via the means of brutal spell casting. There must still be a way she could enact her revenge, not just on Lucius but on Severus too.

Her adrenaline rush was beginning to fade. She settled on the couch next to a purring Crookshanks and consumed a bowl of cereal without milk. When she had eaten she pulled a throw over herself and settled down to sleep, using her prodigious brain to neatly compartmentalise her life as she had done since the end of the wizarding war. No thoughts of Lucius or her rouge employer would be allowed to disturb her sleep; she needed her rest in order to plot effectively the next day.

Fortunately the next day was Saturday. Hermione was not certain she would have been able to greet Severus with any level of equanimity had she been expected at work that day. As it was she had two
days to compose herself before she would be forced to interact with the former spy. In the cold light of day she felt more betrayed by Severus than Lucius. Prior to their highly charged relationship she and Lucius had been nothing to each other. Her expectations of him had been raised by his apparent kindness, but in truth, why on earth had she expected better of a former death eater? Snape was an entirely different matter. Since the loss of her parents Hermione had to admit that she had elevated Snape to the position of something of a surrogate in her eyes. Whilst her friends continued to find him prickly and unpleasant, Hermione had seen beneath the surface to a man who appreciated human companionship, to some extent at least. She had thought she had detected a degree of concern towards her which went beyond the expected relationship of apprentice and mast which was certainly not apparent in Severus’ encounters with Blaise. She realised now that she must have been so desperate for any sort of father figure that she had unwillingly projected her own emotions on a reluctant and unwitting Severus who had ultimately chosen to aid his friend in duping her rather than come to her protection.

Hermione couldn’t quite see how she could punish Lucius for his misdemeanours. She suspected that if he could treat her with such lack of respect then any feelings he may have claimed to harbour toward her were probably fairly shallow and insubstantial. He might be briefly inconvenienced if she deprived him of sex but really that hardly seemed like much of a punishment. Severus on the other hand was a much easier target. She knew exactly how to hit him where it hurt and Lucius had inadvertently handed her all the tools she needed.

She spent the next two days brewing furiously. She had temporarily converted her kitchen into a small laboratory which was at least adequate for her purposes. Under normal circumstances she would have let herself into the apothecary and used her bench in Severus’ lab but since he was strictly persona non-grata, and she had no desire for him to get an inkling of just how advanced her research now was, she decided to stay at home. It did make cooking rather difficult but she wasn’t really hungry anyway, she never was when she was working.

On Sunday evening she was interrupted at her work by a loud banging on the door. She jumped a little at the volume of the pounding and then went back to stirring. Whoever it was would get the message and disappear fairly soon. To her surprise there was a scuffling sound at the door and she felt her wards shift as Draco Malfoy strolled into kitchen.

“How did you do that?” she demanded. Her wards were extremely complex, she hadn’t expected Draco to have the skill to dismantle them.

“Why do you always underestimate me, Granger?” Draco planted a kiss on her cheek and then wrinkled his nose. “No offence, Hermione but you smell a bit ripe, when was the last time you took a shower?”

“I don’t know—“Hermione gave her potion two counter clockwise stirs “—Friday morning I suppose, why?”

“Because you smell.” Draco enunciated each word carefully as if speaking to somebody particularly slow witted.

“It doesn’t matter if I smell, as long as I don’t see anybody.”

“But you’re seeing me.” Draco insinuated himself between the cauldron and Hermione.

“Not voluntarily.”

Draco let out a loud huff. “Have I done something to offend you?”

Hermione sighed and cast a stasis charm over her potion. Now he mentioned it she did feel rather bitter toward Draco. She glared at him so hard that he frowned and looked over his shoulder.

“You remind me of your father,” she said after some consideration.

“Oh—“Draco flopped down onto one of her kitchen chairs “—well I can’t exactly help that, can I?”

“I suppose not.” Hermione gave herself a surreptitious sniff. She didn’t smell great, brewing was sweaty work and she had been sleeping in her clothes for the last couple of days.

“What’s he done now anyway?” Draco got up from the chair to prowl amongst her kitchen
cupboards. “I would have thought you would have been feeling pretty proud of yourself after you hexed his hair pink.”

“Did he tell you about that?” Hermione was surprised; she had expected Lucius to be too vain to leave the manor with his Barbie pink hair.

“Not exactly, one of the house elves told me.” Draco straightened up and looked accusingly at Hermione. “Dammit, Granger, you have nothing to eat in this hovel.”

“I’m not hungry,” she replied automatically. She was never hungry when she was working on a project, although now he mentioned it there did seem to be a sort of empty ache somewhere in the region of her solar plexus.

“Yeah and you don’t need a wash either, I’ve seen you like this before, remember?”

Hermione did remember. She and Draco had studied for their NEWTS together. It was only once she had returned to school, no longer responsible for saving the world that Hermione had begun to really grieve for the loss of her parents. Studying had suddenly become the most important thing in the world to her. Without Draco’s reminders regarding basic standards of hygiene and regular fuelling she might have actually wasted away in the restricted section without anybody noticing. Still, she wasn’t going to admit to needing him.

“I’m right in the middle of an experiment, Draco.”

“Which you’ve put a stasis charm over.” Draco began to push her bodily in the direction of the bathroom. “You hop in the shower, wash off the stench and do something about that dragon’s nest on your head. I’ll go out and find us something to eat.”

“OK.” On some level she knew he was right. She’d been working for almost forty-eight hours straight she probably did need a break and her hair did feel horribly itchy...

Twenty minutes later they were seated on the couch each balancing an enormous plate of coq au vin on their knees. Hermione smiled to herself, only Draco Malfoy would go out for takeaway and come back bearing gourmet French cuisine…Draco or Lucius, her smile faded.

“So are you going to tell me what ridiculous teenage stunt my father has pulled now?” Draco asked around a mouthful of crusty bread.

Hermione put down her plate and looked contemplatively at him. It would do her good to talk to somebody and she couldn’t face the risk of hearing ‘I told you so’ from Harry and Ginny. She told him the entire sordid tale, pausing only to take unladylike mouthfuls of her delicious food. By the end of the story Draco had stopped eating, his jaw hung open and he was staring at her, completely speechless.

“I this honestly true?” he demanded.

Hermione nodded.

Draco blinked slowly. “My father turned himself into a woman in order to peruse you? Granger, he wouldn’t even accompany Mother to the Ministry Ball.”

“I don’t see the significance,” Hermione said shortly.

“I just think he must really like you to have gone so…crazy.”

“I don’t think so.” Hermione put down her plate, suddenly no longer hungry. “I think he just saw me as a challenge, something to be conquered.”

Draco shrugged. “Maybe, that certainly sounds like father.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes before Draco spoke again. “So what are you going to do?”

“What do you mean what am I going to do?”

“About father and Severus. Surely you have some sort of terrible revenge planned?”

It was Hermione’s turn to shrug. “Not really. I’m a bit old for revenge don’t you think. And besides, other than killing you, I wouldn’t have the first idea how to exact revenge on your father.”

“You know you sound kind of sinister when you talk like that?” Draco looked a little uncomfortable.

“I suppose killing his son and heir would be one way of getting your own back but landing yourself in Azkaban would rather defeat the purpose of your revenge wouldn’t it?”
“I suppose.” Hermione carried the plates into the kitchen. “In that case I’ll let you live.”

“Do you know what would really upset my father?” Draco had entered the kitchen area on surprisingly silent feet.

“I’ve just said I don’t,” Hermione snapped, almost dropping the plates she had begun to wash. “Seeing you with someone else. Especially a handsome younger man.” Draco hauled himself up onto the worktop and kicked his legs playfully. “That would really hit him where it hurts. My father is very sensitive about his age.”

“Well that’s not going to happen,” Hermione said firmly. “I’m sworn off men for good.”

“I didn’t say you really had to go out with someone else. You just have to give the impression of it.”

“Isn’t that rather puerile?”

“No more puerile than disguising yourself as a woman in order to spy on your girlfriend.”

“I wasn’t his—” She stopped, realising that Draco was baiting her. “Anyway I don’t exactly have men queuing up waiting to take me out. You’re with Astoria, Harry’s with Ginny, Ron might be single but I’m certainly not getting back into that can of worms again. I don’t know anybody else well enough to pretend to be my boyfriend.”

“Yes you do,” Draco said with the irritating confidence that still made her want to slap his handsome face. “Blaise.”

“Blaise!”

“He fancies you.” Draco smiled smugly.

“He does not, and if he did that would be a very good reason not to lead him on.”

“Oh don’t worry about Blaise.” Draco waved his hand airily. “He’s so full of it you can tell him you’re just using him to make Father jealous and he’ll go out with you anyway on the assumption that no woman can resist the Zabini charm.”

Hermione knew Blaise well enough to know that what Draco said was probably true. Still she recoiled mentally at the thought of actually dating Blaise, even if it was just for show.

“Besides—” Draco took the plates from the draining board and began to dry them “—Blaise isn’t actually a bad sort, you might actually get to like him if you give him a chance.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, feeling steamrollered by Draco’s boundless enthusiasm. “I’ll think about it, but I need to confront your father first.”

“I suppose so.” Draco gave her a slightly uncertain look. “I don’t mind if you hex his hair again, he deserves it, but you aren’t really going to hurt him are you?”

“Of course not, Draco, I’m not a monster.”

He continued to look a little concerned.

“Well maybe you’re father deserves a bit of a scare.” She bit her lip and was surprised to find her eyes had filled with tears. “I really liked him!”

Draco dumped the tea towel he was holding onto the worktop and wrapped his arms around her in a brotherly hug, rubbing his hands up and down her shaking back. To her absolute horror Hermione felt herself beginning to sob.

“We liked all the same things,” she wailed pathetically against his collar. “Nobody else wants to spend as long reading as he does.”

“I know.” Draco continued to rub soothingly at her back.

“And he made me feel attractive, not just because I let him copy my homework…because obviously he doesn’t have any homework…I felt like he liked me for myself…If…If…If.” She indulged in a few more wails.

“If it’s any consolation I think he did find you attractive. Granger, I think my father was crazy about you. Are you sure you really want to break up with him over this, because it seems like you really care about him?”

“No!” Hermione pulled away from him, frantically scrubbing at her eyes. “No, Draco, I can’t stay with him after all this. What am I supposed to say? Hey Lucius I know you’ve been playing me for a
fool the whole time, and I can’t trust you as far as I can throw you, but let’s carry on seeing each other anyway because you’re just so handsome?” She hiccups another sob at the end of her rebuttal. “I can’t trust him, not after this, and if I can’t trust him I certainly can’t love him.”

“Okay,” Draco’s voice was soothing as he hugged her again. “Okay, then confront him, make him understand what he’s done wrong.”

“I will.” Hermione had begun to compose herself once more. She patted Draco’s shoulder. “Thanks Draco.”

“Anytime.” He smiled, slightly shyly at her.

She pushed her hand through her hair. She felt curiously cleansed by her bout of crying. The way ahead seemed clearer now.

“Is there anything else you need?” Draco pushed his hands uncertainly into his pockets. Hermione thought for a minute and then nodded. “Can you recommend a decent lawyer?”

Draco frowned. “Hermione, I know my father’s an arse with a weird habit of dressing up as a woman, but I don’t actually think that’s a criminal offence.”

Hermione’s answering smile was wolfish enough to make Draco shiver. “The lawyer’s not for your father. He’s not the only person to have pissed me off.”

“Snape?” Draco looked puzzled. “What are you going to do to him?”

Hermione smiled again. “I’m going to hit him where he’s most vulnerable…right in his wallet.”
By Monday morning Hermione knew exactly what she needed to do. She also knew she had run out of time. She was due at the apothecary by nine. Severus would be expecting a full written report of her trip to Stockholm, and for her to work in the shop as she normally did on a Monday. She was a terrible liar and an even worse actress; there was no way she would be able to behave normally around her employer knowing what she now did.

By eight am she was showered and breakfasted and unable to put off the inevitable any longer. She took a handful of Floo powder and thrust her head into the fireplace.

"Blaise," she called, it's me, Hermione, can I come through?

She was looking out over what she could only describe as the consummate bachelor pad. Blaise's flat was so cliché it almost made her eyes water. The man himself lounged on a low slung leather couch, his feet resting comfortably on an expensive looking glass and chrome coffee table.

"By all means, Granger." Blaise looked unsurprised at the intrusion. "Feel free to come through. Anytime you want to see me half, or indeed fully naked all you have to do is ask."

Hermione's eyes flicked over his bare torso as she climbed out of the fireplace. No wonder Blaise was perennially late for work. Despite the lateness of the hour he was still wearing a low slung pair of pyjama pants. They were caught rather precariously over his narrow hips and looked like they might slide down to his ankles at any moment. His lean, unblemished torso was completely exposed and he appeared completely unselfconscious as he continued to lounge on the couch from where he returned Hermione's appraising stare.

"Like what you see, Granger?" His tone was mocking and she was irritated to feel a blush stealing over her cheeks.

"You have a very nice couch," she deliberately misunderstood as she brushed the soot from her jeans.

"Thanks." Blaise had spotted the blush and now smiled wolfishly. "Now, what can I do for you? I
"No." Deciding he wasn't going to invite her to sit, Hermione took the initiative and perched herself on a leather armchair which matched the couch. It was a lot less comfortable than it looked she noted as she squirmed against the firm leather. "I have a proposition for you." She fixed Blaise with a steady look.

The dark-haired wizard raised an eyebrow. "Why Granger, I didn't know you cared."

Hermione ignored his innuendo, she was well used to it. "How would you like to be Severus' only apprentice?" she offered. "No more competing with me, full access to all the research grants, no more being overlooked for the prime projects because I've put in a better proposal; you would get to do all the complex brewing on your own."

Blaise pursed his lips. "If this is your way of telling me that Severus had given you your mastery a year early I'm going to puke, Granger."

"It's not," Hermione assured him. "Quite the opposite. I want to break my apprenticeship agreement."

Blaise's eyebrow rose even higher. "You what? Granger, that's insane, even if it were possible why on earth would you want to do that? Snape worships the ground you walk on, he lets you away with murder. You've no idea how much menial crap I've had to do in order to allow you on your little jaunt. You would literally be kicking a gift horse in the mouth."

Hermione set her jaw. "I don't want to go into details, but I recently discovered that Severus hasn't been honest with me regarding an important matter. I feel that our professional relationship it compromised to the point that I can no longer work with him."

"What matter?" Blaise's sharp eyes probed hers. "Is this to do with Malfoy?"

"What makes you say that?" Hermione dug her nails into the skin of the back of her hand. She hadn't counted on Blaise asking this many questions.

"It just makes sense doesn't it?" Blaise rose to top up his cup of coffee and brought Hermione a mugful at the same time. She took a sip, surprised to realise he knew how she took it. "Malfoy and Snape are friends, aren't they? Have been since their Death Eater days. It stands to reason that whatever Malfoy did to piss you off Snape must have known about it. Now you want revenge on both of them."

Hermione frowned at him; he was more astute than she had given him credit for. "Like I said." She kept her voice even. "It doesn't matter exactly what I'm angry about. I want to break my apprenticeship agreement and I need you to help me, are you in or out?"

"Steady on, Granger." Blaise held up a placating hand. "How far do I have to implicate myself here? Snape's a dangerous man to cross."

"All you have to do is speak to my lawyer and corroborate some observations I've made. Snape can't blame you for that. In fact, he can't blame you for any of this. Isn't getting rid of the opposition a wholly Slytherin thing to do?"

"Hmm." Blaise looked unconvinced. "Sometimes I think you would have made a good Slytherin, Granger. What's in this for me?"

"Besides having your competition out of the way?"
"Maybe I don't mind the competition that much."

Hermione chewed her lip. She had thought he would jump at the chance to be shot of her. "I'll give you a potion." She eventually offered. "I've developed several this week, I'll give you the full research history and patents to one, a good one."

Blaise tapped his fingers against his thighs. "Alright," he agreed. "And you'll let me take you out to dinner."

"Absolutely not."

"Why not, Granger? I promise to be more of a gentleman than Malfoy. If you come out with me I guarantee I'll be the only one to see your knickers."

"Gratifying as that thought is, Blaise, I prefer to keep our relationship professional."

Blaise examined his fingernails. "I'm afraid I'm out then, Granger. That was my final offer, take it or leave it."

"Fine." Hermione rose to her feet. "One dinner, no groping." She marched toward the fireplace. "And I hope you've put some clothes on by then."

By Friday afternoon Hermione was as ready as she would ever be. Draco's lawyer had proved more than up to the task she had set him and, several visits to the patent office later, all of her paperwork was in order. All she had to do now was the break the news to Severus that he was about to find himself, short one apprentice.

Her peace had been interrupted several times that week by owls from Lucius. They had borne an array of elaborate gifts and increasingly desperate notes. The correspondence had started off casually enough. He had wondered how her studies were going and if she might be available to meet. When this line of questioning was met with no response he asked if he had done something to offend her, then if she was alright. Finally, on hearing from Severus that she was unwell, he begged to be allowed to visit her and make sure she was being adequately cared for.

Hermione was not made of stone and the increasingly desperate tone of his notes did not leave her completely unaffected. It was clear that he did not suspect anything was amiss between them and was genuinely concerned for her well-being. Hermione had to remind herself several times that, concerned as he might outwardly appear, Lucius Malfoy was nothing but a cold-hearted manipulator who was willing to lie and cheat his way through any situation in order to achieve his objectives. With that thought firmly in mind, she wrapped a small vial of perfume in tissue paper and attached it and an accompanying note to the leg of a post owl.

The final pieces of her plan in place, she Apparated to Diagon Alley and made her way to the apothecary. Blaise was serving behind the counter and gave Hermione a nervous look as she entered. As she had expected, Severus was nowhere to be seen. He did not enjoy the public relations side of being an apothecary owner and he preferred to ride out the Friday rush in the subterranean laboratory rather than cater to the endless requests for Sober-Up, Pepper-Up, and Hangover Potions.

Hermione hefted the heavy satchel of papers she carried more firmly over one shoulder and made her way down to the laboratory, glancing at her watch as she did so. She estimated she ought to have around ten minutes alone with Severus.

Professor Snape was hunched over a silver cauldron at the back of the lab. In the dim lighting and dressed in his habitual black, his hair dangling over the cauldron, he looked more than anything like
an oversized black crow about to be pitched into a cooking pot. Hermione smiled at the image. She had told him several times that his poor posture was bad for his spine and would leave him with a permanent hunch, but he had refused to listen.

"Hello, Severus." She took a rather perverse pleasure in startling him, suppressing a smile as he jumped. He quickly concealed his startle with several rapid stirs of the cauldron before setting down his stirring rod and turning to glare at her.

"Miss Granger, you've returned and in rude health I see. How fortunate you've regained your strength just in time for the weekend."

Hermione smiled sweetly at him. This would be much easier for her if he continued to be as acerbic and unpleasant.

"Thank you for your concern, Severus. I do feel much better." She walked across the lab and placed her satchel down on the bench nearest him. "I couldn't wait until Monday to show you the results of my research. Things really came together in Stockholm. I think you'll be impressed."

"I'll be the judge of that." Whilst his tone was harsh there was an eager glint in his eyes which belied his lack of interest.

Hermione placed several stacks of paper onto the workbenches. Each contained the research and formula behind a separate new potion. Each stack was topped by a yellow patent certificate. Severus impatiently moved these aside and began to leaf hungrily through the paperwork. His expression gradually changed from sceptical to incredulous as he thumbed through her work with increasing enthusiasm.

Hermione leaned back against the opposite bench and tried to keep the smug grin from her lips. The information she had uncovered in the Trollish Library had allowed her to view potion making in quite a different way. In Trollish culture, ingredients were used and combined quite differently and, using a few rarer ingredients, in combination with their unique brewing methods Hermione had developed a range of healing potions the like of which had never been seen before. Her universal antidote, more effective and more easily manufactured than any Bezoar, would alone see her set for life.

"This is astonishing," Snape murmured the words, half to himself as he continued to scan her work. "Congratulations, Hermione, I had no idea you were capable of this."

"Indeed." Hermione used his own phrase and Severus glanced up at her and frowned. He flipped his way to the top of the pile of documents and scanned the patent sheet which he had previously overlooked.

"I'm afraid you have made rather an omission here." His long spidery finger indicated the section of the form where the patent holder was named. "Your contract clearly states that any potions developed under my tutelage will be patented in joint names, with Snape Potions Inc entitled to twenty-five percent of the profits."

"It does say that, doesn't it?" Hermione agreed mildly. "However, since I have chosen to terminate my contract and end my apprenticeship early I am no longer bound by such conditions."

Severus frowned. "You must know, Hermione that it is not possible to terminate an apprenticeship contract." His face grew stony. "Indeed the contracts are deliberately watertight in order to prevent greedy apprentices attempting to do their Masters out of what is their fair share of the fruits of their labours." A dark stain had crawled up his cheeks. Hermione balled the fingers of one hand into a fist.
"I quite agree, Severus. However, I have taken the trouble to peruse my contract whilst in the company of a lawyer and it has come to my attention that not all your contractual obligations were fulfilled, thus leaving our contract open to being voided at any time."

"What...?" Severus looked genuinely confused.

Hermione unrolled a highlighted scroll in front of him. "I am entitled to a chunk of bread and cheese and a flagon of mead every lunch time, you have never provided this."

Severus rolled his eyes. "You have never asked for it—"

"On the 30th of April of each year of the apprenticeship, the Master will accompany the Apprentice to the Beltane celebrations in order to instruct them in the appropriate rituals."

"But that's all a load of poppycock, you wouldn't have wanted to go to—"

Hermione raised her voice slightly. "Where appropriate, the Master will provide pastoral care and guidance in order that the apprentice not be lead astray during the period of their apprenticeship."

"Hermione, this contract is three hundred years old. Nobody adheres to these rules and furthermore, I have done my absolute best to guide you in an appropriate fashion—"

"Really?" Hermione interrupted, feeling her rage beginning to overwhelm her. "If you were truly trying to guide me in an appropriate fashion perhaps you would have tried a little harder to prevent me from waltzing off to Stockholm in the company of a man you knew very well I never wanted to see again."

Snape opened his mouth to respond but before he could do so they were both interrupted by the loud crack of Apparition as a very confused looking Lucius Malfoy appeared between the two of them clutching a tiny bottle of perfume in his right hand and a crumpled note in his left.

It had been a week since he had last seen her. He had thought they had parted on good terms. The few days they had spent together in Stockholm had been sublime. He had found assisting Hermione in her intellectual endeavours to be almost as satisfying as sleeping with her. She was so quick, so insightful, so interested. He loved the tangential nature of her thinking and the way she would catch onto an idea before he had even begun to fully articulate it. He had never met a woman like her. He had never met a person like her and he wanted to bask in her presence in the same way that Muggle women appeared to enjoy lying on the beach soaking up the rays of the sun.

He hadn't wanted to let her go on their return to London. Not just because he found her so magnetic but because he didn't want to lose the train of their thought. He could see where her research was leading and, whilst he lacked the technical knowledge, to fully understand how she would utilise what they had discovered, he longed to remain part of the creative process. He had felt her drawing away from him as soon as they had returned to England. It was not intentional, he was almost certain of that. She had simply become so immersed in her studies that he had ceased to exist. He had experienced the same all-consuming passion when faced with a particularly thrilling business deal. He had ignored Narcissa for days at a time as he hammered out the details to some deal or another. He could hardly blame Hermione for doing what he had been guilty of so many times before. He vowed to give her time and space in the hope that she would come back to him once her research was complete.

His resolve had lasted less than thirty-six hours. After that, he had visited his favourite jeweller at the upmarket end of Diagon Alley and selected a pair of gold and ruby earrings. They were the most understated item of jewellery he had ever bought. Narcissa would have scoffed at them, and not just
because of their Gryffindor colours, but Lucius had observed that Hermione was not one for ostentatious displays of wealth and he hoped that she would appreciate he was at least trying to emulate her tastes.

His gift had garnered no response; nor had his notes, flowers or chocolates. He had begun to worry. Could she have somehow found out? He couldn't believe he had got away with his nocturnal transformation unscathed. Not only was he unscathed, but he had come out of the whole debacle to find his relationship with Hermione repaired and himself on the receiving end of a very pleasurable (if morally dubious) sexual encounter. Surely if she had realised that he and Camomile were one and the same she would have confronted him over it. He had seen her wrath before; she was in possession of a fiery temper. It seemed unlikely she would simply sever all ties and not even discuss his transgressions. Besides, the gifts had not been returned or donated, they had simply not been acknowledged. Perhaps she had just been busy.

Finally, Lucius had visited the apothecary where a grumpy Severus had informed him that Hermione was unwell. Lucius hadn't been sure whether to be concerned or relieved. Of course he was worried that she was ill, but at the same time he recognised that this gave her ample reason to not have acknowledged his gifts. He still wished he knew where she lived though, so he could ascertain for himself whether she was alright. He had considered enlisting the help of Draco, but after the night out with Astoria he wasn't sure Draco was actually speaking to him, and he felt fairly certain that his son would not be willing to furnish him with Hermione's address.

In an attempt to distract himself Lucius had turned his agile brain to other matters. He had received an owl the previous week from the orphanage to which Hermione had donated one of his previous gifts. They had thanked him for his generous donation and asked if he might be willing to make another. Initially affronted at their sheer gall, Lucius had then begun to wonder how on earth they could have burned through such a substantial sum of money already. Their director, a young Muggle-born wizard named Dennis Creevy, certainly had guts if he was willing to approach men such as Lucius directly, how was it that his enterprise was failing so thoroughly?

After some consideration, Lucius had sent off another, equally generous, donation and had asked to see their business accounts. What he saw within filled him equally with rage and despair. Despair that there were so many children orphaned as a result of the war. How could he have been so blind to the magnitude of the situation? How could he not have known that his own actions had directly resulted in so many living upon the charity of others? His rage was at least not directed inward. The orphanage was not short of donations. It had many regular benefactors and although the amounts, his own donations aside, were small they amounted to a decent income. It was clear though that this particular charity had not caught the eye of Narcissa or one of the other Pureblood wives out to improve their social standing. The problem lay not in the income of the orphanage but in their outgoings. Lucius could see at a glance that they were being vastly over charged for services, and goods. Even their tax bill resembled that of a successful private enterprise rather than an exempt charitable organisation. It seemed that Mr Creevy was being grossly taken advantage of.

Lucius' quill raced across the paper as he set out a list of proposals. Malfoy Industries could provide the orphanage with most of their material goods at cost price. He would also rotate the interns on his management training scheme through the orphanage so that the business side of things was being overseen by an experienced manager rather than a wet behind the ears schoolboy. Finally, he could ask one of his tax accountants to investigate the serious over taxation issue and claim the rebate the facility so obviously deserved. He just needed to present these ideas to Creevy in a way the boy would find acceptable.

He was so engrossed in his proposal that he almost didn't see the owl which had swooped through the open window of his study. It dropped a small parcel directly onto his parchment and then waited,
hooting imperiously, for him to provide it with a treat before it flew away. Lucius' heart leapt when he saw Hermione's neat writing, and then sank as he realised the parcel was addressed, once again, to Camomile Jones. Wishing with every bone in his body that he had never introduced his female alter ego into the volatile situation he glanced at the note. It was strangely formal. It thanked him for his help, assured him that she had completed her research successfully and hoped that his brother was recovered. The parcel, it said, was a small gift, a token of her gratitude for his help with her research.

Lucius personally felt that he, Lucius Malfoy, had done a lot more to help than Camomile Jones who was far too old and doddering to have provided the assistance Hermione needed. Perhaps he would receive a similar token in due course. He was rather offended that Hermione would take the time to write to Camomile before him. None of these vague feelings of hardship prevented him from opening the package in front of him. He had only seconds in which to examine the perfume bottle before a familiar tugging sensation began in his solar plexus and before he could say 'illegal Portkey' he was unceremoniously dumped onto the floor of Severus' laboratory.

Lucius scrambled to his feet and rubbed at his bruised backside as he gazed back and forth between Hermione and Severus. They were glaring both at each other and at him. He wasn't quite sure what he had interrupted, but he strongly felt the need to extricate himself from the situation as quickly as possible.

"Hermione, Severus." He kept his voice as smooth and unruffled as possible. "What a pleasant surprise. I appear to be the victim of a malfunctioning Portkey, if you'll just excuse me." He began to sidle out of the laboratory, his eyes fixed on the doorway as a sprinter fixates on the finish tape.

"Stop right there." In that moment Lucius knew exactly how the diminutive Hermione Granger had kept both Potter and Weasley in line for so long. Her voice was terrifying. "Tell me, Mr Malfoy, how did this letter which I wrote to my friend Camomile Jones come to be in your possession?" She snatched the crumpled note from his limp fingers.

Lucius sought desperately for a lie. "It must have been a wrong delivery," even to his own ears he sounded far from credible, "the owl looked terribly confused. I realised as soon as I opened the letter that its contents weren't intended for me. I was just bringing them back to you…" There, that sounded almost believable.

"I thought you were the victim of a malfunctioning Portkey?"

Fuck.

He looked desperately at Severus, pleading non-verbally with his old friend to provide some form of assistance. Severus' scowl only deepened.

"Why don't you just admit it, Lucius?" Hermione wore a look which was frightenningly similar to that of her employer.

"Admit what?" Malfoys never admitted anything, unless forced at wand point.

She drew her wand. "That you are Camomile Jones, that you have always been Camomile Jones and that you adopted her persona specifically so you could spy on me with an end to seducing me."

Lucius opened his mouth. He needed to say something, anything. He needed to Slytherin his way out of this and fast before he lost her for good. Unfortunately his vocal cords appeared to be welded shut and his usually rapidly firing brain had slowed to the point of sluggishness. He fought desperately against his uncharacteristic loss of verbosity.
"I'm sorry." The words, unwelcome and hugely inadequate, dropped tritely off his tongue.

"You're sorry?" Hermione's normally melodious voice rose to a shriek, she planted her hands on her hips. She reminded him more of Molly Weasley than Severus in that moment. "You're sorry," she said again, advancing on him, the well-remembered pokey finger extending before her. "Have you any idea how far beyond sorry you've gone? What happened to promising to tell the truth?"

"I was going to start," he pleaded. "In Stockholm, after I apologised I promised myself I wouldn't lie to you again and I haven't."

"Apart from when you told us you'd been the victim of a malfunctioning Portkey." Severus put in helpfully. Lucius glowered at him.

"I was caught unawares."

"Or when you said that you had realised the letter was not intended for you. You must have known you were the intended recipient since you are, in fact, Camomile Jones."

"Shut it, Snape!" Hermione rounded on Severus, her accusatory finger now turned in his direction. "You do not hold the moral high ground here. You knew Lucius was Camomile, didn't you?"

Snape hesitated and Lucius was glad to see his old friend put so unexpectedly on the spot.

"Yes," he said eventually. "I knew it was Lucius."

"And you didn't think to warn me, even though you knew that Lucius and I weren't speaking?"

Snape's mouth set in a firm line.

"He couldn't warn you." Lucius had no idea where this bout of honesty had come from. He wanted nothing more than to bite off his own tongue as it continued to implicate him. "I called in my life debt."

Two pairs of incredulous eyes turned in his direction. "You wasted a life debt on this?" Hermione's voice had dropped. "What on earth were you thinking? Severus is one of the most powerful wizards of your generation, you could have had him do anything—"

"It was better than slowly killing me with his demands for hair care products and anti-aging cream," Severus interjected which brought Hermione's attention back to the dark-haired wizard. "Don't think you're off the hook here, Snape." She poked him hard with the jabby finger. "There's no way someone unable to brew their own conditioner could have managed a long-acting Polyjuice potion. You made that for him." It was a statement not a question.

"Miss Granger—" in an act of what Lucius would only describe as pure recklessness Severus grabbed the accusatory finger and removed it from his body "—might I remind you, and not for the first time, of the no-touching clause in your contract."

"Might I remind you—" she wrestled her hand free "—that as of today that contract is terminated." She punctuated each word with a further jab at his chest.

Lucius stared at the two of them in surprise. He was struck by an entirely new form of guilt. He hadn't realised that his actions might harm Severus' relationship with Hermione. He knew that his friend was fond of the girl, even if he would never admit it. The loss of his position as her master would hit him hard.
"It really wasn't Severus' fault…" he began awkwardly, not wishing to further implicate himself but, at the same time, feeling the need to defend his friend.

Hermione rounded on him once more. "I am done discussing this with both of you." Her wand was up again and Lucius took a step backward, only just resisting the urge to place a protective hand over his hair. "I've am thoroughly tired of being lied to and manipulated by a pair of over grown schoolboys, both of whom ought to know better. You—" she rounded on Lucius "—are nothing more than a pompous, arrogant arse and I must have been temporarily insane to have ever thought there was anything more to you, and stop clutching your hair, you're not even worth the energy it would take to hex you. And you—"Lucius was temporarily relived to see her ire directed away from him "—I trusted you, I looked up to you." Lucius' relief turned to shock as he realised there were tears glinting in her eyes as she looked at Snape. She turned away from them both and began to gather up the piles of paper on the desk, shoving them haphazardly into a brown leather satchel. She slung the strap over her shoulder and stood to face Severus again. "You let me down," she said simply, before turning her back on them both and leaving the lab.

The two men stared at each other in silence for several seconds. Severus' face was a blank mask, if he was hurt by Hermione's words there was no sign of it. Finally, he spoke, "What the fuck are you still doing here?"

"What?" Lucius' heart sank, he wasn't sure he could cope with being rejected by Hermione and Severus in the same day.

"I would think it should be obvious to a man who claims to be so well versed in the ways of women," Severus spoke slowly, as if to a particularly backward child. "When a woman leaves an emotionally charged situation in such a manner she wishes to be pursued. In this instance, I imagine she would prefer the pursuit of her lover as opposed to that of her erstwhile employer. Since I have never known her in that capacity and have absolutely no desire to do so, I suggest you follow her before she gets away from us both for good."

"Right." Lucius stared stupidly at Severus. He was paralysed by fear, uncertain whether he could face another confrontation with her.

"And yet you're still standing here." Severus glowered at him. "Get out."

"Of course." Lucius suddenly regained the use of his legs and hurried to the doorway.

"And don't forget you've lost me several million galleons in revenue through your stupidity." Severus' words floated after him as he climbed the stairs. "I will expect to recoup my losses from you in some capacity." Lucius ignored his friend, and a puzzled-looking Blaise Zabini who observed from the apothecary counter, as he burst through the shop door and out onto Diagon Alley.

He looked around in desperation hoping that he hadn't emerged too late. There! He caught a glimpse of curly brown hair whisking around a corner and gave chase through the busy street.

"Hermione!" He shouted her name as soon as she was within earshot. She glanced back at him over her shoulder and then continued to hurry away. "Hermione, please." His much longer legs easily brought him level with her and he caught her elbow. "Please, just listen to me."

"Why?" She turned to face him and he drew back a little, shocked at the twin streaks of tears which ran down her face. "So you can lie to me again, feed me some other story about how sorry you are? There's nothing you can say to make this right, Lucius. And do you know what really hurts? I've not just lost you; I've lost my best friend too." She turned away once more but Lucius fell into step alongside her not willing to let her leave without having his say.
"Hermione, I know what I did was wrong. Believe me, I do and if I could go back and do it all again I would. But I can't. You're my best friend too." He risked placing his hand on her arm in order to stop her. "I've never been so happy as I was when I spent time with you, whether I was Camomile or Lucius, I enjoyed every moment and it was real, the friendship was real, my feelings are real. Hermione, I love you."

They both stared at each other for a painfully long moment. Lucius couldn't quite believe those words had come from his lips. Of course, he wasn't above a well-placed I love you in order to get his own way, but this wasn't one of those. The words had sprung forth unbidden from some rusty chamber deep inside him, and now they were free, he couldn't seem to escape them. He really did love her.

"No, you don't." Her voice was implacable. "You don't love me. How can you, you barely know me, and I don't know you at all."

"But—"

"You have to trust someone in order to love them, and you don't trust me if you did you wouldn't have had to keep lying. And as for me—"she gesticulated toward her chest, fresh tears sliding down her cheeks "—I can't believe a bloody word you say, can I? This isn't love, Lucius, it's just sex and cooking, and we both deserve something better than this. Please, just let me go." She turned her back on him and walked resolutely down the street, her small shoulders firmly set. Lucius stood alone in the middle of Diagon Alley. Pedestrians streamed around him as he watched her retreating back until she was out of sight.
_dimsum_dimsum_ Dim Sum

Chapter Summary

Chinese and gossip with Ron, Harry and Ginny.

Chapter Notes

Hello Everyone. I know, I know, I’ve been super slow to update and then a post you a
measly 2000 word chapter. I’m sorry. I thought this chapter would take a couple of days
max but real life has, yet again, got in my way so I’m sorry this has taken so long. We
are only 4/5 chapters from the end now though so I promise you won’t have to tolerate
my slow updating for much longer. Thanks for all your lovely comments, I really
appreciate them even though I’m terrible at replying.

“So are you and Blaise going out now?” Ginny waddled past Hermione and settled herself on the
couch in the living room with a relieved sigh. Harry, laden down with large bags of Chinese
takeaway, was hot on her heels. Behind Harry came a slightly sheepish looking Ron. Hermione gave
him a nervous smile. The two of them hadn’t really spent any time together since Ron had ended
things and moved out of their flat in order to peruse his muscular thigthed Quidditch player. They had
agreed that they didn’t want to throw away ten years of friendship just because they were no longer
together but actually spending time in each other’s company was easier said than done and Hermione
had been relieved when Ron’s team had embarked on their extended European tour.
“What makes you say that?” She busied herself handing out plates and wine glasses.
“This!” Ginny brandished a slightly crumpled copy of The Daily Prophet, which Hermione realised
she had not had the misfortune of reading that day. At least she hadn’t made the front page. Her story
wasn’t featured until page three, although she did merit a two page spread with the headline ‘Malfoy
out while Zabini Slythers-in!’ she winced as she read it. The story was accompanied by two large
photos. One showed Lucius looked austere and aloof; she avoided his eyes. The other had been
taken a few days previously and was of herself and Blaise, laughing uproariously over dinner in a
small restaurant. The byline was just as salacious as the headline suggested. Hermione was cast as a serial dater of rich
men. Skeeter intimated that she enjoyed hopping from bed to bed and Blaise should watch out as it
was only a matter of time before the famous Gryffindor maneater chewed him up and spat him out.
Hermione threw down the prophet without finishing the story.
“You should know better than to believe everything you read in that rag.”
Ginny shrugged. “Well, the story about Mr Malfoy was true.”
Harry had laid out numerous aluminium containers on the coffee table and was beginning to remove
the lids. Hermione took a deep calming breath allowing herself to be soothed by the scent of Black
Bean Sauce and monosodium glutamate. Ron crammed a handful of prawn crackers in his mouth.
“I can’t believe you went out with Malfoy.” He sprayed a few crumbs as he spoke.
Hermione rolled her eyes at him but didn’t dignify his comment with an answer. She had decided not
to tell him of her suspicions regarding the attractive woman he had met in Bratislava. If Ron found
out that he had been almost seduced by a Polyjuiced Lucius Malfoy there was no telling what he
would do. Whilst Hermione still smarted from their break-up, the last thing she wanted was for Ron
to challenge Lucius. There would be only one outcome of a duel between those two and it would not be in Ron’s favour.

“Blaise and I are not going out.” She carefully mixed garlic, soy sauce and wasabi paste in a small bowl before helping herself to several dumplings.

“How is having dinner together not going out?” Ginny tenaciously pursued her point, nibbling on a cracker with considerably more finesse than her brother.

“It was one dinner.” Hermione expertly manipulated her chopsticks. “He blackmailed me into going out with him in order for his help in breaking my contract with Snape.”

“Yeah, about that.” Harry had loaded up his own plate with food but was unselfconsciously using a fork to convey his rice and shredded chicken into his mouth. Life with the Dudley’s had not involved lessons in the art of chopsticks.

“What about it?” Hermione kept her voice even. It had only been two weeks since she had terminated her contract with Severus but this was not the first time that she and Harry had argued about it.

“I just wish you’d give him another chance.” Harry had the grace to flush slightly at the irony of him of all people championing Snape but ploughed on regardless.

“Honestly, Hermione it wasn’t his fault what happened. If he was under the compulsion of a life debt then he couldn’t have told you what Malfoy was up to. I know he’s a greasy git and Merlin knows how you’ve tolerated him this long but I think he’s actually fond of you. Last time I saw him he looked miserable.”

After the Battle of Hogwarts Harry had tried very hard to befriend Snape. The potions master had initially appeared to capitulate, although he had been hospitalised in St Mungo’s for several weeks, and unable even to talk when Harry had first sought him out, so his capitulation may have been more forced than Harry liked to think. After Snape’s recuperation Harry had persisted in trying to befriend him. He had not been entirely successful, but a kind of wary truce now existed between the two of them. Harry’s testimony had transformed Snape from war criminal to war hero and it was The Boy Who Lived’s stalwart championing which had allowed Snape to maintain his place in society whilst other ex-death eaters, such as Lucius, were forced to hide away.

Hermione took a slug of her wine and looked at Ron and Ginny, both of whom were concentrating on their food, clearly not wishing to take part in this argument.

“He always looks miserable when he sees you.” She tried to divert Harry’s attention from the matter in hand.

Harry was not to be so easily diverted. “Well, this time he looked even more so. He asked after you, you know. He even said he wished you well.”

Hermione felt the unexpected sting of tears just beyond her eyes. She missed Severus. The last two weeks had been thoroughly exciting. Once word of her new potions had got out several large pharmaceutical companies had begun to vie for the patent rights. What she hadn’t expected was the numerous job offers she had received along with the requests to produce her new potions. It seemed that her lack of a complete mastery would not stand in the way of her becoming the head research chemist of one of the largest wizarding pharmaceuticals in the country. She could pretty much name her terms and her salary and would be given carte blanche in terms of research.

“It was a dream come true, and every time a new offer had arrived she had longed to discuss it with Severus.

“Well, he should have thought about all that before he sided with Lucius against me.” She drank some more wine and avoided Harry’s eye.

“He was compelled by a life debt, Hermione. It’s not like he picked Lucius through choice.”

“Even I feel a bit sorry for the greasy git,” Ron interjected through a mouthful of spring roll. “He spends all these years training you up, and then boom, suddenly you’re an international superstar and he doesn’t get any of the credit. He must be turning in his coffin.” The final statement was said with more relish than was strictly necessary.

“Thanks for that, Ron.” Harry glared at their friend.

“I honestly think he understands why you’re angry. He doesn’t expect you to put his name on the patents or anything like that; he just wants to talk to you.”

“He really said all that?” Hermione felt her heart soften a little.
It was Harry’s turn to look away as he spooned more rice onto his plate. “Well, not in so many words, no. But I knew what he meant.”

Hermione let out a deep sigh. “No. You think you know what he meant based on what a kind and reasonable person might mean in the same circumstances. If Severus is sorry he needs to come and say it to me, then I might consider forgiving him.”

Ginny let out a low whistle. “Phew, you’re harsh, Hermione. Remind me not to fall out with you. Anyway, enough about Snape, more about Zabini. Tell us about your date.”

“For the forty-second time, it was not a date.”

Hermione’s grumpy tone left Ginny undeterred. “Fine, tell us about the dinner you were forced to attend under duress with one of the best looking men we know.”

Hermione put down her chopsticks and thought hard about what to say. The dinner with Blaise had been considerably more pleasant than she had expected. He had been kind, charming, and confident; the perfect date really. He had asked her questions about herself and they had talked in a way they never had during their years of working together. Blaise had not bothered to hide his admiration of her and Hermione had felt a warm glow suffuse her that had nothing to do with the wine she had imbibed.

All in all, it had been a wonderful first date with a handsome young man who didn’t have the unfortunate history of having tried to kill her in the past. So why was it that when Blaise had lingered outside her flat, clearly hoping for an invitation in or at least a snog on the doorstep she had felt nothing but the urge to run away?

Intellectually she looked at him and found him attractive and his admiration of her was, in its own way, intoxicating. But when it came to his actual touch, the gentle caress of his hand over the small of her back as he helped her on with her cloak, or the firm feel of his arm under hers when they had Apparated together, it left her cold. She wondered if Lucius had ruined her for life. If he had somehow overused her synapses so that they were no longer capable of firing. If all the pleasure she was due to have in her entire lifetime had been crammed into their few encounters and she would be forced to lead a beige life bereft of tactile stimulation for the next hundred years or so. Whilst mentally she rejected that hypothesis it was hard not to give it some credence.

She had given a dumbstruck looking Blaise a quick peck on the cheek and disappeared through the door of her flat before he could try and persuade her into anything more.

She started out of her reverie and looked around at the three expectant faces of her friends. They were waiting patiently for her to describe her date.

“It must have been pretty amazing from the look on your face.” Ron broke the silence.

Hermione felt herself blush. “I wasn’t really thinking about Blaise,” she admitted.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Malfoy?” she asked, leaning over to slosh more wine into Hermione’s glass. “Hermione, this isn’t healthy. You ended things with him, for a good reason. You can’t let his pretty face get in the way of every other interaction you have.”

“I’m not,” Hermione protested.

“Really?” Ginny fixed her with a gimlet eye. “So you weren’t just mentally comparing Malfoy to Blaise and finding the poor boy lacking? Seriously, Hermione, when it comes to Malfoy you need to either get back under him or actually get over him, you’re never going to find someone else otherwise.”

“I think you were a bit hard on the bloke actually.”

Three pairs of eyes incredulous eyes swivelled to look in Ron’s direction.

“Did our mother drop you on your head as a baby?” Ginny’s tone was scathing.

Ron shrugged. “George did drop a table on my head at one point I think. Anyway, look at her.” He gesticulated in Hermione’s direction with a piece of shredded chicken. “She’s not interested in Blaise or anybody else; she’s clearly still keen on Malfoy.”

Hermione wondered why Ron had never displayed this level of insight when they were actually together, it could have really improved the standard of birthday presents he gave. Unaware of Hermione’s inner commentary and turning to face her Ron continued to speak.
“I know Malfoy did a lot of weird stuff, really weird.” He paused and they all thought about Camomile Jones for a moment. “But he did it because he liked you. I can’t understand why a man like Lucius Malfoy would feel he had to behave in that way. He’s got everything hasn’t he? Looks, money, massive house, pretentious cane for keeping his wand in…” his voice tailed off as he considered Lucius’ assets. “…but under all that, I suppose he’s just like any other man and, with good reason, he obviously thought he wasn’t good enough for you.”

“He wasn’t good enough for her,” Harry finally interjected. “Hermione deserves someone who tells her the truth.”

Ron’s ears went pink and Hermione felt a twinge of sympathy. She knew he still felt guilty over their own breakup. He had behaved with perfect chivalry. He had promised her, and she believed him, that there had been no hint of a physical relationship between himself and Tatiana until after they had broken up. That didn’t change the fact that he had fallen in love with someone else whilst still dating her, untruth had been implicit in their relationship for quite some time before he had ended things. Ignoring Ron’s blush she nodded emphatically at Harry’s words. “Harry’s right. I need someone who’s honest with me and Lucius wasn’t capable of that.” She sighed heavily. “But I don’t think I’m ready to see other men yet, I can’t help comparing them to him and he always comes out on top.”

She ignored Ginny’s leer at her unintended innuendo and picked morosely at her food. She didn’t exactly regret her date with Blaise. It had been wonderful to be the focus of his attention, but she wished the entire incident hadn’t been splashed quite so liberally across The Prophet. Why couldn’t they just leave her in peace? Would she be forced to lead the rest of her life in the public spotlight? Her friends eventually left, promising to see her again soon. Ron kissed her warmly on the cheek as he departed and Hermione smiled at the memory, glad that they had been able to spend a comfortable evening together once more. She pottered around her flat for a while putting away dishes and rinsing out the takeaway containers. She couldn’t understand why she felt so melancholy. She had everything, wonderful friends, a career with a stellar trajectory and, if she wanted him, a boyfriend who was one of the most sought after bachelors in the Wizarding World, why then did she still feel so bloody empty? She reluctantly picked up the Prophet Ginny had discarded on the coffee table. Lucius’ stern countenance looked up reprovingly at her and she frowned and quickly closed the newspaper. Lucius Malfoy had been an anomaly in her otherwise blip free existence. The sooner she forgot him the better.
Lucius buried his face in his hands. He had just re-read the same foot of parchment for the fourth time and, yet again, he hadn't taken in a single word. What in Merlin's name was wrong with him? The project was perfect. A friend from the department of linguistics at the Wizarding University of Michigan had sent him a copy of a scroll which appeared to be written in an entirely new Trollish dialect. So far none of the experts in the US had managed a full translation and Lucius was honoured to have been asked to attempt the impossible. As a gifted amateur, he longed for recognition of his abilities. The association of his name with this translation would really put him on the map when it came to Trollish linguistics.

He had been working non-stop for three days now and unfortunately, his abilities seemed to have completely left him. He just couldn't stop thinking about that bloody, infuriating woman. Every time he decoded a snippet he would immediately wonder what she might think about the information contained within. Would she be horrified or intrigued by the possibility of female trolls eating the smallest of the cubs in order to sustain them over the winter? Would she be at all interested that this particular pack of trolls appeared to have invented an entirely new tense, or did her interest in Trollish culture extend only as far as their potion making abilities?

He returned to the top of the scroll, his quill poised in his cramped hand, fresh parchment waiting for his translation. His eyes strayed to the corner of the library where he had dumped The Daily Prophet into the wastepaper basket. He should summon a house elf to come and take the hideous rag away forever. The message contained within was clear. Hermione had well and truly moved on. The picture of herself and Zabini spoke for itself. Lucius might have deluded himself that this was yet another Skeeter hatchet piece if it weren't for the fact that Hermione now owned the Prophet. She had complete editorial control over everything that went into it—which begged the question why hadn't she reined in Skeeter's sharp tongue? Even if she had wished to rub his face in her new relationship. Which, judging from the photo spread, she had. Why would she allow Skeeter to defame her character in such a manner? Indeed why was Skeeter even still employed there? Lucius had briefly considered staging a second hostile takeover, forcing Hermione to sell out all the stock he had given to her before he decided he was an idiot. He was far too old to be hurt by words printed on paper. Whatever game she was playing he would simply ignore it.

He cast an Incendio in the direction of the wastebasket. It would be a lot easier to ignore her new relationship if it wasn't staring up at him every time he walked over to that side of the room.
Once more he returned to the scroll in front of him. He couldn't believe he had told her he loved her. He had visited a healer the following day, convinced he had some sort of brain tumour, or that perhaps had been the victim of a dark curse. The healer assured him he was in the rudest of health. Lucius had returned home to stew in his own bemusement. Of course, the girl was correct. He could not possibly be in love with her. He had been married to Narcissa for twenty years and had never achieved anything close to romantic love. Detached fondness was about as much as he was willing to concede and Hermione was much more irritating than Narcissa had ever been. She was also warmer, kinder, more compassionate, more intelligent, more stimulating and sexually much more adventurous—

He cut himself off abruptly from that train of thought. He had strict rules regarding Miss Granger. The first was that he was absolutely not allowed to think about her in a sexual manner and he was most definitely not allowed to think about her when he was masturbating, and he was absolutely and definitely not allowed to masturbate in the middle of the day when he was supposed to be working no matter how vivid his memories of her spread across his kitchen table might be.

Perhaps it was unhealthy to abstain though? He took a slug of Lapsang Souchong, almost spitting it out when he realised it had gone cold hours ago. Merlin's beard he was even drinking her preferred brand of tea now, was there no depths to which he would not sink? No. He consoled himself with the thought that he absolutely would not pleasure himself to thoughts of the girl, what had he been thinking about. Ah yes, he remembered, he had been wondering if abstention was dangerous. Of course, it couldn't be. He had gone through a four-year dry spell before Miss Granger had waltzed into his kitchen and sent a Rennervate through his libido. But he hadn't refrained from masturbating during that time. Perhaps restricting his solo activities was a step too far. His mental health was already compromised, it wouldn't do to jeopardise his physical well-being too.

His hand was just creeping south to the fly of his trousers which were already becoming uncomfortably tight as his impatient cock informed him that it had no compunctions over objectifying Miss Granger for the next four years of abstinence when he felt the wards shift as somebody Apparated into the foyer.

His heart gave an unpleasant lurch and for just a split second he was convinced it was Hermione. Of course, the idea was ridiculous. Whilst he had altered the wards to allow her to freely access his home he hadn't actually informed her of such a change and he had no intention of doing so. She would probably take it as an invitation to break in and set the Manor on fire. He assumed it must be Draco and hastily placed both of his hands in plain sight on the writing desk. It wouldn't do to be caught with his hand in his trousers by his son, or anyone for that matter.

He bent over the parchment, determined to at least look busy.

"Ah, Lucius, I knew I would find you in here."

He stifled a jump at the ringing bell-like tones.

"Narcissa," he drawled, rather pleased at his display of sang-froid. "To what do I owe this pleasure?"

She came further into the room, removing her traveling cloak and gloves, both of which he considered rather an affectation for a warm day in September.

"You look dreadful, Lucius."

"Why thank you, it's so kind of you to say." He ran a hand over his face, feeling stubble he hadn't known he was growing rasp under his fingers. He couldn't quite remember when he had last shaved…or washed for that matter.
"You're not drinking again are you?" Narcissa picked up his teacup and gave a delicate sniff. Lucius removed it from her hand.

"Only tea, Narcissa. I don't recall inviting you."

"Hmm." She gave a disapproving sniff and settled herself on the low sofa he and Hermione had slept on so many weeks ago. Within seconds a house elf popped into the room carrying a tray of tea and scones.

"Mistress has returned," it simpered as it set out the tea things.

"Only temporarily, Hibby." Narcissa smiled beatifically at the hapless creature as if she had never been just as guilty as him of taking her frustrations out on the elves. The elf gave a little moue of displeasure before it disappeared with a subdued pop.

Lucius gave a heavy sigh and joined his ex-wife on the sofa. Long experience informed him that she was unlikely to leave until she had achieved whatever it was she had come to achieve and at least he would get a fresh cup of tea out of her visit.

"What are you working on?" Narcissa handed him a cup of the delicately flavoured tea she favoured. Lucius took a sip, realising he had genuinely grown to love the more smoky tones of the Lapsang Souchong.

"I'm translating a new dialect of Trollish," he replied, thinking that she had never shown any interest in his translation works before. From the delicate curl of her lip, he didn't think much had changed.

"How interesting," she said politely. "You're obviously very involved with the project, I shan't keep you long."

"Good." Lucius buttered a scone, wondering how long it had been since he had last eaten.

Narcissa took a sip of her own tea, ignoring the scones. She had never been much of an eater and judging from the razor sharpness of her figure she hadn't suddenly started eating vast quantities in the months since their divorce. She looked well, he thought. She was as beautiful as ever, her fragile features almost ethereal and her glowing blond hair perfectly coiffed but there was something different about her, something softer. She looked…happy. He bit down a pang of jealousy. She had been content with him, at best. I was glad she had found happiness with someone else, or on her own, he didn't particularly care.

She ignored his barbed comment and continued to sip her tea as he inhaled one scone and started on another.

"I need you to come to my charity ball."

He couldn't believe he was about to have this argument again with a woman who was how his ex-wife.

"Absolutely not." He was so hungry he committed the cardinal sin of speaking with his mouth full.

Narcissa's wince was almost imperceptible. "I'm sorry, Lucius but I shan't take no for an answer." She rose and began to pace in agitation. At least that's what it looked like she was doing. In fact, Lucius knew that she was giving him a chance to admire her enviable figure in the artfully draped silk dress she wore. "It's a terribly important charity."

"I'm sure." He gazed out of the window, waiting for her to stop talking.
"It provides scholarships for Muggle-born witches and wizards to attend Hogwarts and access further education." His ears pricked up just a little. He wondered if there were enough scholarships to support the children in Dennis Creevy's orphanage. He forced his face to remain blank. He would find the charity and make a sizeable donation once Narcissa was safely out of the way.

"I can't think why you would think I would be interested in such a cause." He examined his fingernails and wondered if it would look greedy to eat another scone.

"I don't think you're interested." Narcissa stopped her pacing, apparently realising that Lucius was infinitely more interested in ogling the scones than her backside. "I simply want the largest number of high profile guests possible. Potter is coming, you know and his wife, she's quite the Quidditch star, although too pregnant to play at present."

"How fascinating." Lucius took a third scone; he didn't think he'd eaten that day.

"And Kingsly of course, he's been very supportive of my endeavours." Narcissa coloured a little and Lucius raised an eyebrow. "Severus is coming too although he refuses to bring a partner. I had hoped he might bring Miss Granger—" Lucius' ears pricked up "—I was so disappointed when I found out Draco was seeing Astoria Greengrass and not Hermione. It's so on trend to have a Muggle-Born spouse at the moment." She paused for breath apparently unaware of her ex-husband's suddenly rapt attention. "Anyway, dear Hermione is coming with Blaise Zabini. I'm pleased she's coming though; she's created quite the stir with her potions research. I'm surprised you haven't snapped her up for Malfoy Pharmaceuticals." She shot Lucius an arch look. "You could speak to her about job opportunities at the ball, couldn't you?"

Lucius shook his head, absolutely confounded by Narcissa's words.

"Narcissa," he asked carefully. "Where have you been?"

To his surprise, she blushed deeply. "I've been away in the Caribbean for the last month or so." She raised a self-conscious hand to her cheek. "Do I have a suntan; I did try to keep to the shade?"

"No, you don't have a suntan." Lucius placed his teacup carefully onto the coffee table. "So you haven't seen the Prophet for a while then?"

Narcissa shook her coiffured head vehemently. "Of course not, you know I never read that filthy rag — why are you asking," she interrupted herself.

"No reason." Lucius drummed his fingers on his knee, wondering if Narcissa was the only person on the planet not to have seen Hermione's underwear courtesy of himself and the Daily Prophet. He supposed her friends must have refrained from telling her about his involvement with Hermione in order to spare her feelings. "Anyway, Miss Granger is not suited for Malfoy Pharmaceuticals."

"Really, Lucius," Narcissa adopted the lecturing tones of the reformed racist, "it really is time we left these old-fashioned prejudices behind us. It would do the company's image the world of good if we were seen to be employing a Muggle-Born witch, particularly one with as high a profile as Hermione."

"Thank you Narcissa, when I need your business advice, I shall ask for it."

Lucius pressed his fingers to his temples where he could feel a headache beginning to brew. When had he last slept, he couldn't quite remember.

"Well, at least consider dancing with her." Narcissa reached out and patted his leg. "A picture of the two of you on the dance floor would do wonders for my charity and for stock prices, I'm sure."
He hesitated. He had never succumbed to her requests for him to attend her charitable events before. It would be ridiculous to give in solely because she had mentioned that Hermione would be there.

Pathetic.

Puerile.

Laughable.

"If I agree to go will you leave me in peace?"

"Oh absolutely." She rose gracefully to her feet and bent to plant a delicate kiss on his cheek. "Thank you, Lucius, you won't regret this, I promise."

Lucius was already regretting it.

"You will take a bath and shave before the ball won't you?"

"I shall think about it." He picked up the final scone from the tea tray and returned to the scroll at his desk, keeping his eyes fixed on the Trollish runes until he was certain his ex-wife had left the building.
Chapter Summary

In which Hermione wallows in self pity a bit more!

Chapter Notes

A/N I’m so sorry this has taken so long to post. I haven’t abandoned this story, I’m thinking about it all the time, I promise and I will do my best to get the next chapter up in better time. Thank for your comments I really do appreciate them and I'm sorry I'm so rubbish at replying.

Hermione stared at herself in the full length and thankfully not enchanted mirror or her wardrobe. She resisted the juvenile urge to cross her arms over her chest. What on earth had she been thinking when she allowed Ginny to talk her into this gown? She had been swept up in the enthusiasm of her vivacious friend. As Ginny described her current body habitus (with self-deprecating accuracy) as a tomato with legs, the redheaded witch had made it clear that she wished to live vicariously through her friend. Thus Hermione had ended up in a dress that she would never normally have chosen.

It wasn’t that she didn’t like nice clothes. On the contrary, she enjoyed pretty skirts and dresses as much as the next girl, as long as they were reasonably practical too. However, she didn’t enjoy flaunting all her wares at once which this dress certainly did. The tobacco yellow silk draped dangerously low leaving her entire back exposed and making the wearing of underwear completely impossible. Hermione could only be grateful that she was a witch and therefore able to charm her breasts in place rather resorting to the painful looking sticking tape contraptions adopted by Muggle woman.

And it was a good thing her breasts were charmed in place because the precarious placement of fabric at the front of her dress did not leave much margin for error. One false move and her entire humble cleavage would be spilling out of the artfully cowled neck line. As if all of that wasn’t bad enough there was a daring split down one side which left her right thigh bared to the elements whenever she tried to walk. As far as Hermione could see crossing the room without the world seeing her arse, her thigh, or her breasts would be impossible. In the shop she had merely preened and postured as Ginny clapped excitedly and egged her on to make the frighteningly expensive purchase. Now, in the harsh light of her own living room, Hermione was beginning to realise just how impractical the gown really was.

She looked longingly at her pyjamas and slippers. How she wished she could change back into them and lounge on the sofa with Crookshanks and a good book. If Ginny was responsible for the dress then Draco was responsible her actual attendance at the event. He knew she didn’t like these sorts of dos. She always felt out of place and uncomfortable amongst the wizarding elite, and usually Draco was understanding of her aversion to high society. Not this time. This time he had cajoled and badgered. He had insisted that his mother was desperate for her to attend.

“Doesn’t your mother want to scratch my eyes out?” Hermione had asked, thinking it highly unlikely
that Narcissa Malfoy would be willing to concede Lucius to a Mudblood without a fight.

“Oh no!” Draco had waved his hand flippantly. “Mother has almost forgotten Father exists, I’m not sure who this week’s toy wizard is, but believe me she was absolutely delighted when she saw the story about the two of you in the Prophet. The only thing that would make her happier would be if you two got back together.”

“Really?” Hermione had been sceptical.

“Of course. Having a muggle-born in the family would be such a social coup!” His impression of Narcissa had been eerily accurate.

She still wasn’t sure why Draco had been so desperate for her to attend, or why she had given in to his pleas, but she had agreed and Blaise was coming to collect her in less than ten minutes. Like it or not, she would go to the ball.

At least Draco had assured her that Lucius would not be in attendance. “He hates these sorts of things,” he had confidently told her. “He’d rather rip off a limb than attend.”

Hermione, whose anger at Lucius, had not much subsided rather thought she would like to see him minus a limb and bleeding on the dancefloor, but overall she was relieved that she would not have to see him again. Lucius Malfoy was like a particularly bad case of the flu she hadn’t quite been able to shift.

Whenever she thought she had totally cleared the infection she would find herself awake in bed at night and running a fever.

She was still angry with him. Livid. Fuming. But that didn’t mean that she didn’t still miss him. With every job offer which had come in to her wondered what Lucius would think. Sometimes she found herself about to send a consultary owl to Camomile before she remembered that the old witch did not actually exist. She had longed to discuss her thought process with Lucius as she created her potions formulae, but it was more than that. She thought of a thousand tiny things each day which she wished she could tell him. She woke at night replaying over and over again the look on his face as he told her he loved her.

She had thrown it back at him so viciously; she couldn’t believe she was capable of being so cruel.

And of course there was the sex, or the lack of it. She had never experienced such as sexual high as Lucius was capable of providing for her. She had never felt the same sense of connection with a partner as she did with him, the sense that maybe they were truly compatible in what they desired from each other. She worried that she might never experience such a feeling again. Yet she could not go back. He had damaged her trust too deeply. Their relationship was inexorably broken in which case she could only move forward with her life however much she might wish she could live in the past.

She patted her hair which was arranged on top of her head in a series of intricate braids. You are an attractive, intelligent woman with a bright future, she told herself, and you do not need Lucius Malfoy.

The ball was already in full swing by the time she and Blaise entered. The venue was one of the finest Wizarding Hotels in the world and Hermione gazed around feeling slightly awestruck. The entire room seemed to glitter. Floating chandeliers hung just overhead, flocks of tiny gold birds flew between them occasionally perching on the light fittings or, even more occasionally, on the shoulders of the guests. Hermione found herself wondering if they were guilty of leaving little gold droppings on the guests too but she kept her mouth shut regarding that particular thought.

Opulently dressed witches are wizards were mingling between the tables, glasses in hand, and Hermione suddenly felt considerably less overdressed and very grateful to Ginny for steering her in the direction of her gown. As soon as she thought her friend’s name she saw Ginny and Harry frantically waving in their direction, and she led Blaise through the crowd to greet her friends.
“Hermione, you look beautiful.” Harry stared slightly bug eyed at her breasts.
“Thanks, Harry, you look very handsome.” Hermione ignored her friend’s roving eye and his already creased dress robes and sticking up hair. “Gin you look—“
“Like a tomato, I know.” Ginny wrinkled her nose.
“I was going to say gorgeous actually.”
“Pah.” The redhead dismissed her compliment with a wave of her hand.
“Actually, Gin you do look very—“

They never got to hear whatever ham-fisted compliment Harry had been about to bestow on his wife because his eye was suddenly caught by a flash of dark robes entering the ballroom.

“Hey Severus!” He stuck his arm in the air and waved with the complete lack of self-consciousness only someone extremely used to living in the public eye is able to pull off.

Severus turned his head in their direction. Hermione willed him with all the power her mind could muster to ignore Harry’s summons, but it seemed that Severus had disengaged his skill as a Legillimens. Either that or he wished to torment her.

He glided up to their group and greeted them all more or less cordially.

“Potter, Mrs Potter, Zabini —your last batch of Strengthening Solution was distinctly sub-par, and Miss Granger, what a pleasure to see you all at this worthwhile and not-at-all pointless function.”

“It’s a pleasure to see you too, Professor.” Ginny surprised Hermione by hauling herself up on her tiptoes and planting a kiss on Snape’s cheek. “I wish you would accept one of our dinner invitations, Kreacher’s cooking is almost edible these days.”

“Thank you, Mrs Potter, I shall bear that in mind, it’s my way to decline the first hundred or so invitations proffered but I fear I may eventually run out of excuses.”

“He certainly can’t say he’s washing his hair,” Blaise hissed in Hermione’s ear. She elbowed him hard in the ribs. The flash of movement seemed to draw Snape’s obsidian gaze.

“Ah, Miss Granger, it really is a pleasure to see you again, might I have this dance?”

Hermione’s jaw dropped almost to the floor. Normally Snape resented even the intimacy of sharing a cup of tea, let alone a dance.

“He certainly can’t say he’s washing his hair,” Blaise hissed in Hermione’s ear. She elbowed him hard in the ribs. The flash of movement seemed to draw Snape’s obsidian gaze.

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“Go on, Hermione, he won’t bite.” Harry gave her a gentle shove in the direction of her ex-potions master and before she quite knew what was happening Hermione found herself maneuvered onto the dance floor.

Snape’s hands were warm and dry, his fingers slightly calloused from years of potions making. His scent was familiar, parchment and spices, with a faint hint of woodsmoke. It made her feel strangely homesick.

“I thought our contract had a strict no touching policy,” she griped at him as he steered her into a waltz.

“That was to prevent your Gryffindorish outpourings of emotion; I remembered your penchant for friendly hugs and hair ruffling as a teenager. Having no desire to be subjected to such foibles I felt that clause was justified. I have no objection to us touching under formal circumstances such as on the dance floor.” He paused for a moment. “Besides, as you so rightly pointed out our contract is now null and void.”

“That’s true,” Hermione agreed. He was a good dancer, confident and fluid and he lead her easily, for which she was grateful, she would never admit it but Hermione was in possession of two left feet. “Besides.” Snape looked distinctly uncomfortable. “I wished to get you away from the scrutiny of your dunderheaded in friends in order that I might apologise.”

Hermione tripped over his foot.” In order that you might what?

“I wish to apologise for my part in Lucius’ deception of you.”

“Oh.” Hermione was rather lost for words. “What I don’t understand is why you helped him at all—and please don’t tell me it was because of the life debt. I’m sure you knew his intentions long before he brought that into play.”

“I did,” Snape agreed. “But, to be quite honest, I didn’t take them much to heart. I didn’t for a minute believe that you would be stupid enough to fall for Lucius’ rather questionable charms. By the time I realised that you had succumbed like every other brainless woman on the planet it was too late for
me to be of assistance—"
“Worst apology, ever,” Hermione interjected.
“T’s not a competition, either you’re sorry or you’re not.” She began to pull away from him only to
have him tighten his hold.
“I am sorry,” he hissed, his dark eyes flashing. “I am truly sorry. As I said, I did not expect you to
succumb to Lucius and I certainly did not expect for you to develop feelings for the man. By the time
I realised how much power he wielded over you it was too late for me to do anything to help you. I
wish I had taken more drastic action. I should have defended your honour; it was cowardly of me not
to do so.”
Hermione gazed at him in surprise as they continued to circle the dancefloor. Not only had she heard
Severus Snape apologise but he had called himself a coward, she was pretty sure this was not
something he did easily.
“I don’t think you’re a coward,” she said after a long time. “I’m sorry too. It was too much to expect
you to side with me over one of your oldest friends.”
He let out a long sigh. “Perhaps. If it is any consolation I do believe that Lucius’ feelings however
unstable they may be were genuinely engaged.”
Hermione let out a snort. “Your ability to insult me whilst apologising is quite remarkable.”
“Thank you.” Snape smirked at her. Hermione moved a closer and risked laying her head on his
shoulder. He tensed a little but did not pull away. “I’m sorry I cheated you out of your share of the
patents.” Her voice was a little muffled by the fabric of his coat.
“It is of no matter.” She could feel the vibrations in his chest as he spoke. “Your infamy has done my
business no harm whatsoever; I have been approached by hundreds of witches and wizards actually
willing to pay to be my next apprentice.”
“Oh.” Hermione pulled back her head to look up at him.
“This makes you unhappy because…”
She frowned. “I was hoping I could come back to work. I’m not sure I’m ready to be an international
research chemist yet, and besides I want to finish my dissertation and become a certified potions
master.”
Severus looked down his nose at her. “I suppose that would…acceptable. You do realise that you
will be on cauldron cleaning duty for the next week in order to make up for your gross
insubordination?” The song ended just as he finished speaking and Hermione flung her arms around
his neck nodding vigorously as she hugged him tightly. “And you will also please remember that the
no touching clause is still very much a part of your contract,” Snape’s voice was slightly strangled as
he removed her arms from his neck.
He escorted her back to the table where Blaise had been joined by Draco and Astoria. The two
women were chatting whilst Draco and Harry appeared to be making extremely awkward small talk.
“I shall leave you children to play.” Severus managed to look down his nose at all of them at once. “I
plan to stand in the corner and look intimidating so that nobody dares to speak to me. Until Monday
morning, Miss Granger.” He made a very short bow and disappeared in a swirl of black robes.
“What was all that about?” Ginny asked as Hermione sank into a seat next to her. She looked
enviously at the champagne glasses littering the table. Why did everyone except her have a drink?
“He wanted to apologise.” She paused allowing the words to sink in. Both Ginny and Astoria gaped
at her.
“I didn’t know he knew how to apologise,” Astoria said after a moment’s silence.
“Me neither.” Hermione shrugged. “He said I could have my job back too.”
“Oh thank Merlin!” Ginny’s exclamation was loud enough to draw the attention of the boys.
“What is it?” Harry asked.
“Hermione’s taken her job back.” Ginny grinned across at her husband. “That means you’ll stop
moping around trying to convince us all how misunderstood Snape is, and Hermione will stop
talking to us all incessantly about potions. I couldn’t ask for better news.” She leaned forward and
placed a kiss on Hermione’s cheek.

Hermione couldn’t help but smile at her irrevocable friend. Her estrangement from Snape had felt intrinsically wrong and she was relieved to have mended her fences with him. She glanced across at Blaise who gave an exaggerated sigh.

“Well I suppose my reign as favourite is over then. Never mind, Granger I was getting tired of milking Botubers all alone anyway. Now, since I’m officially your date are we going to dance or not?”

“No, I’m afraid.” Draco cut across his friend. “It’s nearly time for the auction, Hermione.”

“The what?” Hermione’s sense of warm contentment evaporated as she stared at Draco.

“The charity auction, I definitely mentioned it to you last week.”

“You most definitely did not.” Hermione smelled a rat in fact she smelled a whole mischief of them.

“Oh—” Draco gave an elegant shrug of his shoulders “—it must have slipped my mind. I’m afraid you’ll have to participate anyway, the programmes are all drawn up.”

“I don’t give a fig about the programmes.” Hermione slammed a palm down on the table. “I’m not taking part in any sort of auction. What exactly am I supposed to be selling?”

“Only a dance,” Draco said in a mollifying tone. “And it is for a good cause, you can’t deny that. Don’t be a stick in the mud Hermione; mother was so excited when I said you’d participate. You’re her main attraction.”

“I’m not a prize cow!” Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. “You Know I don’t approve of this sort of thing, Draco, it’s sexist and misogynistic.”

“It’s a bit of fun for charity,” Harry interjected to Hermione’s horror.

“I am your friend and I’d love to put you off just to spite Malfoy but seriously, Hermione would it hurt, it’s only one dance?”

“And the humiliation leading up to it.” She widened her eyes in a pleading manner. “What if nobody buys me?”

“Of course somebody will buy you.” Draco smirked as he spoke. “You’re Hermione Granger, war hero. The sharks out there will be in a feeding frenzy.”

“If that’s supposed to reassure me it’s not helping.” She crossed her arms over her chest feeling a horrible sense of inevitability creeping over her.

“Look, I’ll buy you, Granger,” Blaise cut in. “It looks like the only way I’m going to get a bloody dance anyway.”

“And I’ll bid against him to make you look popular,” Draco volunteered. “Just make sure you win, Blaise, Father has not been generous lately, I can’t think why.” He gave Hermione a hard look.

“Fine, fine, I’ll do it.” Hermione rose to her feet and allowed Draco to take her arm.

“Just don’t let anyone unscrupulous buy me.” She looked plaintively back at Blaise who gave her a reassuring wink.

Narcissa was as welcoming as Draco had promised. “Do call me Narcissa,” she trilled, planting kisses in the air adjacent to both of Hermione’s flushed cheeks. “I’m so glad you’re taking part, my dear, there’s been a lot of interest in you already, believe me.”

Hermione wasn’t sure whether to be gratified or horrified by the blond witches reassurance. The troupe of society belle’s assembled as the other auction lots looked a lot more polished than she. She wondered if selling oneself for charity was something taught at Pureblood finishing school. The glittering ladies took their place, one by one, on the small dais at one end of the ballroom, posing for the crowd and rewarding the bidders with dazzling smiles. The sums of money changing hands were astronomical. Hermione felt her palms growing sweaty and fought the urge to wipe them on the sides of her dress. Every other witch sold had been a Pureblood debutante. What if nobody wanted her?

“You’ll be fine.” Draco gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

“What if nobody buys me?” Hermione couldn’t keep the note of insecurity out of her voice.
“Blaise is going to buy you.” He reminded her with a roll of his eyes.
“I don’t think Blaise can afford the sort of money your mother is expecting.”
“Don’t worry about that. Blaise is almost as rich as me.”
“You know I’m never going to forgive you for this,” she shot over her shoulder as she began to walk out onto the dais.

Compared to the dim recess in which she had waited, the ballroom lights were dazzling. She blinked under their glare and stood, looking awkward and uncomfortable as Narcissa extolled her virtues to the enormous crowd before them. The irony was not lost on Hermione. She had been tortured in this woman’s drawing room, hated for her blood status, and now the very same woman was whipping the crowd into a frenzy with her descriptions of Hermione’s value, her beauty, and her magical ability. It was bizarre.

The crowd obviously didn’t think so. Hermione was surprised when the first bid came; it was almost twice that of the amount the previous highest seller had sold for. She didn’t know any of the wizards who were bidding. They were generally older, most of them long haired and sombre looking gentlemen in black robes. Blaise had entered the fray and then dropped out rapidly. Presumably even the Zabini fortune couldn’t compete with years of accumulated wealth.

Hermione felt herself begin to tremble. She hated this. Of course no real harm would come to her. At worst, she would have to spend five minutes in the arms of a man with halitosis and body odour whilst he criticised her blood status. More likely, she would have to endure the sexual advances of a Pureblood wizard keen to up his social cache by his association with a famous young Muggle-born witch. Still, she hated the feeling of hundreds of hungry eyes burrowing into her flesh. Harry was the one who was used to the limelight, not she. She had always deliberately avoided it.

The bidding had slowed now with most of the buyers dropping out. There were only two competitors left. One was a small squat wizard with unkempt black hair and large fat fingers. Every time he raised his bidding paddle she looked at those fingers and imagined them roaming over the unfortunately exposed skin of her body. It made her feel physically sick. She preferred his competitor, an austere, upright looking gentleman who reminded her a little of Severus, however his expression was so stern, so unrelenting that she felt no desire to dance with him either. It seemed that even he was not prepared to pay as much as the smaller wizard though. He dropped out of the bidding despite the imploring look that Hermione shot him. She glanced over at Blaise who had been re-joined by Draco and gave him a look of supplication. He only shrugged his shoulders and mouthed ‘sorry’.

“Going once,” Narcissa’s cut glass tones rang out.
Hermione looked at Harry, he was loaded, why wasn’t he helping her? Her friend raised his glass in an exaggerated manner, clearly missing the message she was desperately trying to convey.
“Going twice.”
Severus? She sought out her employer, but he was nowhere to be seen.
“Going three times.” Fuck, fuck, fuck, could she buy herself?
“Fifty thousand galleons.” A ripple of surprise spread through the crowd as the winning bid was more than doubled. Hermione’s initial feeling of relief turned to absolute horror as she stared across the whispering ballroom to the blond wizard who had just entered.

He was magnificent. His blond hair shone in its usual flawless cascade down his broad shoulders. His midnight blue robes were heavily embroidered with glittering gold snakes, their eyes picked out in emeralds and rubies. Every inch of his lean taut body radiated privilege and authority. Hermione could not help but tremble as his possessive gaze fixed upon her. There was absolutely no doubt in Hermione’s mind that Lucius intended to purchase her, no matter the cost.
It seemed that Narcissa shared this viewpoint.
“Any further bids?” she asked weakly, clutching her auctioneers hammer whilst glancing nervously between her ex-husband and Hermione.

“No? Then Miss Granger is sold, to Lucius Malfoy, for the record breaking sum of fifty thousand galleons. And that concludes our charity auction, thank you all for your generosity. Gentlemen if you would like to claim your prizes.” The other lots filed onto the dais, smiling benevolently down at the wizards who lined up to claim them.

Hermione was briefly distracted by the wizard who had managed to procure three witches. She wondered how that was going to work on the dance floor. Then Lucius was standing before her and she couldn’t think about anything else.

“Miss Granger.”
God, how she hated those plummy, aristocratic tones. And she hated herself even more. Hated herself for inhaling deeply as if she could drink him in through her nose. Hated herself for the way the tiny hairs on her arms stood on end at his presence as she shivered despite the warmth of the room. Hated herself for the pooling of heat low in her belly as he took her hand in his much larger one. Hated herself for every carnal lascivious memory which floated through her consciousness as he led her onto the dance floor. Hated herself for sinking into his arms as if she had come home.

“What are you doing?” she hissed. Trying to conceal her body’s complete capitulation to him. “I would have thought that was obvious.” He looked smugly down at her. “I’m saving you from a fate worse than death.”

“What?”
Other couples were assembling on the dance floor, waiting for the orchestra to start playing. Every head in the ballroom seemed to be turned in their direction; perhaps they were waiting for her to hex him again.

“The wizard I bid against is one of the most unscrupulous characters I know. He’s staunchly anti-Muggle.” He ignored her raised eyebrow. “He’s also currently between wives, number five died recently, I imagine he’s looking for a new one.”

“Well, he’d hardly be looking in my direction if he hates Muggleborns would he?” Hermione fought the urge to pull her hand out of his. He was far too warm and tingly for her liking.

Lucius shrugged. “It’s apparently very fashionable to have a Muggleborn spouse in the current political climate.”

Hermione glowered at him. “Well maybe you should run off and look for one instead of bothering me.”

The orchestra chose that moment to begin playing and without further retort, Lucius pulled her fully into the circle of his arms and swept her out onto the dance floor.

If Severus had been a good dancer then Lucius was sublime. He moved with such grace and fluidity that Hermione ought to have felt like a baby elephant floundering in his wake. Somehow though, he managed to bring her along with him, and she danced as she never had before. In his arms, she felt like a princess. She reminded herself firmly that this was no Prince Charming. No matter how warm his hand felt against hers, or how firm his shoulder was beneath her fingers she could not allow herself to forget what he had done. However enchanting it might be, caught up in the magic of the ball, to remember that this beautiful creature had once declared his love for her, she must remember too that she had rejected that declaration as false. Nothing had changed. The feel of his palm against the naked skin of her back might be driving her wild with desire and her eyes might be constantly drawn to his slightly fuller lower lip but sensual pleasure and physical beauty were not the things that truly mattered. Not to her at least, she couldn’t trust him she reminded herself, and she couldn’t live without trust.

“You must be disappointed your beaux didn’t see fit to rescue you yourself.” Something hard glittered
in Lucius’ eyes and she pulled back infinitesimally from him.
“I don’t know what you mean.”
“I mean Blaise Zabini, your new paramour.”
“Do you have any terminology that wasn’t invented in the 1800’s? Blaise is neither my beaux, nor
my paramour, nor is he my boyfriend.”
“I find that hard to believe after your little expose in The Prophet. Tell me, Hermione, did you think
to make me jealous?” He spun her round so swiftly that she momentarily lost her balance and fell
against his hard frame.
“Of course not.” She untangled herself from him, slightly breathless from the impact.
“Then what? You thought if I saw you with somebody else I would leave you alone, that I would
cease my unwelcome declarations and give you the peace you so desired?”
“No!” she raised her voice enough that several of the dancing couples looked over at them in
curiosity. “The article in The Prophet had nothing to do with me.”
“But you’re their major shareholder, how can they publish anything without your say so? And why
is that damned woman still working there?” Hermione stared over his left shoulder unwilling to answer. She suddenly sympathised with Draco for all the times his father had chastised him in public. “You know I never wanted you to give me The
Prophet. I never really did anything with the shares. They don’t even know I own them. My lawyer
handles any communications. She bit her lip suddenly feeling embarrassed. “I just kind of forgot
about it.”
“You are the major shareholder of the largest newspaper in Wizarding Britain and you forgot?” his
voice was incredulous.
She nodded dumbly and watched in a mixture of fear and fascination as he stared at the back of the
ballroom, his jaw set. She didn’t think she had ever seen him this angry with her before.
“I’m sorry,” she ventured, not really sure what she was apologising for.
“Why are you apologising?” He scowled down at her. “If you wish to ignore my gifts, or donate
them to charity or shred them into pot pourri that’s your prerogative.”
Hermione felt a flash of guilt at her cavalier treatment of him, it instantly made her defensive. “Well I
would stop abusing your gifts if you would stop sending them. I may not be with anybody else,
Lucius but that doesn’t mean I’m ever going to be with you.” She ignored the way his left hand
tightened around her right and the flash of pain that raced across his usually blank countenance. This
was not her fault, she told herself, he was the one who had yet again backed her into a corner. She
was right to come out fighting.
As soon as the music drew to a halt she pulled herself out of his arms.
“Thank you for the dance, Mr Malfoy.” She gave him a brief curtsy and fled the dance floor. Draco
was waiting for her with Harry and Ginny. Blaise was nowhere to be seen. Hermione surmised he
was off finding a partner who would actually dance with him.
“How did that go?” Draco looked eagerly at her. Hermione’s mouth fell open as he brain whirred
into gear. “You—”she stuttered. “You…this…all along…you…and your mother?”
“I really don’t know what you mean.” Draco took a sip of champagne and avoided her gaze. “You
lured me here on purpose.” Hermione poked his chest. “The auction, everything, it was a set up
wasn’t it? Did he put you up to this?”
“No.” Draco’s insolence vanished in an instant. “No, I swear, Hermione, he didn’t know anything
about this. Mother and I just wanted to give him a chance. Well, me mainly, but Mother helped. He’s
not been himself since you two broke up, he misses you, I just wanted to give him a chance.”
“A chance?” She forced herself not to shriek. “Draco, last time we spoke about this you were busy
spurring me on to get revenge on him, what happened?”
Draco looked uncomfortable. “I saw him, Hermione; I saw how much he regrets messing things up.”
He clasped her hands in his. “I genuinely think he might be in love with you.”

It was too much. Bad enough to have one Malfoy man declaring his love, but to have another doing
it on his behalf…she couldn’t cope. She wrenched her hands out of Draco’s gasp and stormed away across the ballroom. Much to her relief her eyes lit on a tall elegant figure holding court amidst a bevy of giggling witches.

“Ah Blaise, there you are.” She slipped her arm through his and relieved him of his drink in a single motion. “Do you think you could find us some more of these? I’m suddenly feeling terribly thirsty.” She knocked back the glass of champagne in one. Her night had taken too many crazy turns for her to comprehend and she felt that the only sensible course of action was to get extremely drunk.
As soon as he walked into the ballroom Lucius knew he’d been had. The whole set up absolutely reeked of bloody Narcissa. He blamed too little sleep and too many scones causing the blood to pool in his belly and distract him from what was (in retrospect) obviously a deception. In what universe would Narcissa have failed to glean that he and Hermione had been intimate? There was no piece of gossip too small for his formidable ex-wife to whittle out, and if there were then one of her carrion seeking friends would have taken great pleasure in drawing her attention to his misdemeanours. Without a doubt, Narcissa had played him, but what bothered him more than his ex-wives obvious perfidy was his complete lack of understanding as to her motives. Certainly, from the shocked look on her face as he had stupendously overreacted and paid far more for Hermione than the chit deserved she had not been expecting such a grandiose gesture. The only person more surprised than Narcissa had been Hermione herself.

He didn’t know what had come over him. He had observed the auction quietly from the side-lines, his lip curled in disgust as he watched a bunch of wealthy middle-aged wizards fawning over a gaggle of girls less than half their age. Then he had promptly abandoned every principle he thought he had by throwing in his lot with the lecherous bunch and spending an insane amount of money on a dance with a witch who clearly couldn’t stand him.

He hadn’t been able to help himself. The thought of that older wizard putting his chubby hands on Hermione’s smooth skin had caused his blood to boil and his stomach to lurch in a most uncomfortable manner. In addition to his own discomfort, there had been the expression of abject terror on Hermione’s face as she had looked desperately around the room, her brown eyes widened in desperate appeal, as she searched for someone, anyone, who could help her. He could no more refuse her than he could deny himself oxygen, and behind the mask of animosity that she had pulled on as soon as her eyes met his, he was sure he had witnessed a flicker of relief.

The dance had been nothing but torture. If torturers came wearing dresses of yellow silk that brought out the gold flecks in their eyes, or dungeons smelt of lavender and honeysuckle and just a little of ink. She had held herself rigid in his arms, as if his touch seared her skin. She had been nothing like the abandoned creature he knew her capable of becoming. Yet, in spite of her obvious rejection and ongoing animosity, he had still found his body responding desperately to hers as his heart pounded in his chest like a teenager experiencing his first dance with the witch of his dreams.
Then there had been the relief. The shear and utter relief when she had denied any relationship with Zabini. She had claimed to have forgotten all about her shares in The Prophet, and Lucius knew her well enough by now to know that she was the worst of liars. There had not been a hint of ingenuity in her eyes as she had faltered through her explanation. The story about herself and Zabini had been just that; a story made up like everything else. Or at least it had been. Lucius flicked his eyes across the room to where Hermione was now hanging off Zabini’s arm, smiling warmly up at him as if she had not just spurned Lucius only moments before.

He made his way wearily to the bar and ordered a Firewhisky. The harsh liquid caught at the back of his throat and he almost choked. That was the worst of these events; a man couldn’t even get a decent cup of tea.

“Ah, Lucius, you’ve taken to the bottle I see.” Severus materialised right by his shoulder causing Lucius to jump and slosh Firewhisky over his hand and onto the bar.

“Severus.” He glared at his friend and took another gulp of his drink hoping the potion’s master would leave him in peace. Severus ignored his less than effusive greeting and lounged against the bar, surveying the dance floor.

“Tell me,” he said after a moment. “Why it is that out of all the silly girls here you have chosen this particular one upon which to fixate?”
Lucius followed Snape’s line of sight to Hermione and quickly looked away. To give himself something to do he signalled to the barman for another round of drinks.

“I imagine it’s her lack of silliness that I find so appealing.” He passed Severus a tumbler of whisky. The dark-haired wizard deliberately turned his back to Hermione and Zabini and fixed his obsidian eyes on Lucius.

“She is no more immune to foolishness than any girl of her age.”

“What do you mean?” Lucius put down his own glass; quite sure that he didn’t want any more of his drink.

Severus continued his unnerving scrutiny from between the greasy curtains of his hair. “I mean the girl no disrespect, Lucius. I like her as much as I am capable of liking anybody, but did it ever occur to you that she is not entirely blameless in this entire debacle?”

“Not really.” Lucius flicked a strand of hair over his shoulder, trying to feign a nonchalance he didn’t feel.

“Miss Granger has been no more honest with regard to her feelings than you. Perhaps if she had encouraged you a little more you might not have felt that you had to go to such drastic lengths to impress her.” Severus knocked back the rest of his drink before giving Lucius another of his piercingly direct stares. “I’m not excusing your deplorable lack of judgment and frankly juvenile behaviour, but I can see that everything you did was, somewhat misguidedly, done to impress her. She has refused to accept your apologies which I imagine have been heartfelt and numerous.”

Lucius nodded dumbly.

“I find that most disappointing. For one who claims to be such a stubborn proponent of the underdog she has been most unwilling to hear any side of the story but her own.”

Lucius sighed. He felt bound to defend Miss Granger, despite Severus’ accusations. “I can’t blame her, Severus. What I did was inexcusable.”

Severus shook his head. “No, Lucius it wasn’t. It was inadvisable and frankly quite beneath you, but I personally find it wholly excusable. Particularly if you acted with the best of intentions. Are you going to finish that?”

Without waiting for a response he plucked the glass from Lucius’ numb fingers and swallowed the rest of his drink before leaving as abruptly as he’d arrived.

Lucius stared after his friend for a long time as he drummed his fingers on the bar top. He found Severus’ condemnation of Hermione, and his own response to it, mildly disturbing. When had he placed her on such a pedestal that he could not stand anyone to criticise her, especially when they
might actually have a point?

He was jolted out of his musings by an excited voice at his elbow.

“Mr Malfoy?”

He turned uncertainly to face a small brown haired wizard who was staring up at him with a look of fear and reverence.

“Oh it is you, Mr Malfoy; I thought I recognised your hair and your cane of course. Oh, I’m sorry, we haven’t been introduced, but I feel as if I know you so well already, Sir—“

“And you are?” Lucius cut in smoothly.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot to introduce myself in all the excitement—“ the small wizard seized Lucius’ hand and began to pump it enthusiastically “—I’m Dennis Creevy…from the orphanage…you’ve been helping with our accounts, well…with everything really, I can’t say how grateful we are…you’ve done so much for the children.”

“It’s been no trouble,” Lucius lied, it had actually been quite a lot of trouble.

“Really?” Dennis beamed up at him and Lucius was filled with a sinking sense of dread – perhaps that had not been the right answer. “Well, if it’s really no trouble then I have some friends who are dying to meet you. Herb, hey, Herb.” To Lucius’ utter horror Dennis shouted across the room to a blond-haired wizard who was engaged in an energetic foxtrot with a buxom young witch.

The wizard in question turned his head at the sound of his name.

As soon as his eyes lit of Dennis and Lucius he abandoned his partner and almost sprinted off the dance floor.

“Herb, this is Mr Malfoy, you know, the one who’s been helping me with the books and everything?” Dennis didn’t give Herb a chance to answer. “Herb runs a school for Muggle-born kids, helps them control their early magical impulses and learn about the wizarding world before they go off to Hogwarts. He could really use some advice couldn’t you Herb?”

“Yes.” Herb was still out of breath and could only gasp his response, but he gazed up at Lucius with a sort of dewy-eyed wonder which made him feel most uncomfortable. “We’ve been given five years of funding by an anonymous donor but we don’t know how to invest it—maybe you could make a few suggestions?” A notebook and pen miraculously appeared in Herb’s hand and Lucius stifled a groan, it was going to be a long night. What he wouldn't give for a good cup of Darjeeling.

“Father, may I have a minute of your time?” Lucius only just remembered that he was still absolutely livid with Draco and hastily turned his relieved smile into a glower.

“Excuse me, gentlemen.” He gave a short bow and turned to leave the excited group of wizards who had been hanging on his every word for the last ninety minutes. A headache was brewing behind his eyes and his mouth was dry from so much talking. These third sector workers were insatiable. He felt as if he had been targeted by a particularly rapacious vampire; drained of every last drop of wisdom and intellect by their incessant incisive questions and thirst for knowledge. He was monumentally grateful to his son for rescuing him, although he would not show it.

“What do you want, Draco?” He scowled, pleased to see that he still had the power to make his son quake in his expensive shoes.

Draco squared his shoulders. “I need to ask for your assistance, father.”

“Really? And you think after this evening’s debacle I will be inclined to offer you my help?”

“We were trying to manipulate you back into her good graces actually.” A spark of anger lit Draco’s pale countenance. “It’s not our fault if you messed it up, yet again.”

“I did not—“

Lucius was not allowed to finish his rebuttal as Draco interrupted him. “It doesn’t matter, Father. I need to take Astoria home, she has one of her headaches.” Draco’s gaze strayed across to one of the
tables where Astoria sat slumped in her chair with her elder sister holding some sort of cold compress against her brow. Lucius felt his irritation fade at the look of genuine concern on his son’s face.

“Is this a regular occurrence?”
Draco nodded. “They seem to be getting worse too. This wouldn’t be the first time she’s ended up in St Mungo’s because of them.”

“Then, of course, you should go.”

“I know that, Father, but I need you to take Hermione home.”

“What?!” Lucius was certain he must have misheard.

“I need you to take Hermione home, she’s—“ Draco paused, clearly searching for a word “—a little under the weather,” he finished lamely.

“Surely Zabini can take her home.” Lucius set his jaw. He was going nowhere near the little harridan again that evening or perhaps ever. He had no desire to endure more of her insults.

“You don’t understand, Father. I’m worried that in her condition—“Draco gave an elaborate eye roll which Lucius felt certain he was supposed to interpret “—Blaise might take advantage of her.”

Lucius rubbed his brow as the jigsaw pieces began to click into place. “You mean that she’s drunk and you are worried that your friend will take advantage of her lowered inhibitions in order to have his way with her?”

“I suppose so, yes.” Draco’s cheeks had stained with red.
“Because it would go against everything you ever taught me.” Draco stood a little straighter and the blush vanished from his cheeks. “You might not have set the best example during my formative years, but you at least taught me how to behave respectfully towards a woman.” He patted Lucius on the arm. “Come on, Father, I need to get Astoria home and I don’t want to leave Hermione with anyone else.”

“What about Potter?” Lucius trailed behind Draco, trying to conceal his secret pleasure in his son’s positive view of his morals.

“Taken his pregnant wife home hours ago.”

“Severus?”

“Finished skulking and went home, probably to skulk some more in his dungeon.”

Lucius rolled his eyes. His fate seemed inevitable.

Hermione did not look at all under the weather. She was draped around Zabini like a particularly well-fitting set of robes, laughing uproariously at whatever witticism the handsome wizard had recently uttered. Lucius felt jealously curl like a snake in his guts at the sight of her. It was ridiculous. She was not and had never been his, yet a possessiveness of which he had not known himself capable reared its head and threatened to overwhelm him.

“Draco!” Hermione turned a dazzling smile on his son. “Where have you been? We’ve been having so much fun. Have you tried the champagne? It’s really very bubbly!”

Both Draco and Lucius stared at her for a moment, quite overwhelmed by her vacuousness.

“Yes, I’m sure it is,” Draco responded. “Hermione, I’m afraid it’s time to go home, Astoria isn’t well.”

“Oh no!” Hermione’s smile slid off her face and she released Blaise to give Draco her full attention. “Is there anything I can do, I’m quite good at healing spells you know.” She reached for her wand, swaying slightly on her heels as she did so.

“No, no,” Draco said hastily, reaching out to steady her. “I think she just needs to get home and rest, why don’t you say goodbye to Blaise?”

“Hold on, Malfoy?” Zabini was glaring at Draco. “No need to spoil Granger’s night as well as yours, I can take her home when she’s ready.”

“I think she’s ready now.”

Hermione was staring vacantly around the ballroom, leaning against Draco like a fallen tree in a tightly wooded area. Draco patted her hand. “Come on, Hermione, let’s get you home.”

She appeared to snap back into life like an animated doll. “But I don’t want to go home yet, I can
stay with Blaise and have a lovely time.” Her head swivelled in Lucius’ direction. “Why is your father scowling at me?” she asked in a very poor stage whisper.

“I don’t know that’s just his resting expression. I thought you had some research you wanted to work on tomorrow; you wouldn’t want to be out too late now would you?” Draco began to apply gentle pressure to her arm as he twisted the knife further. “Wouldn’t you like to have something spectacular to show Severus on Monday morning?”

“Severus!” Hermione looked around wildly as if her employer might appear dramatically from behind a plant pot. “Yes, I do want to impress him. You know he’s given me my job back, Draco, isn’t that nice?”

“Yes, it’s very nice. Shall we go?” Draco increased the pressure on Hermione’s arm and to Lucius’ surprise, she followed docilely after him although throwing Lucius a very dark look as she did so.

“You’re father’s following us,” she hissed in Draco’s ear. Unfortunately, her volume control appeared to be severely inhibited and Lucius could clearly hear her. “I think he’s quite angry with me,” she continued. “I don’t absolutely remember but I may have been quite rude to him.”

“Don’t worry.” Draco continued his inexorable journey across the room. “Father is extremely forgiving, I’m sure he’s forgotten all about it already.”

Lucius, who had not forgotten any of Hermione’s stinging insults not to mention the pink hair episode, glared at the side of his son’s head. He was sick of being manipulated by his own flesh and blood. Of course, he was proud to have raised a Slytherin, but surely he, the patriarch, ought to have had the upper hand?

“He looks very handsome tonight doesn’t he?” Hermione appeared to either not realise or care that Lucius could hear every word and she looped both arms companionably through Draco’s leaning against his shoulder as they walked. “It’s a shame he’s a reprehensible human being – you’d think that someone so pretty should be a bit more…well…nice.”

“You would, yes.” Lucius was fairly certain than Draco’s shaking shoulders were down to mirth rather than grief.

Their odd little caravan finally reached the table where Astoria was slumped.

“How is she?” Draco released Hermione’s arm and squatted beside his girlfriend, his arm protectively across her shoulders.

“She needs to go home.” Daphne looked at Hermione and Lucius with a slight frown.

“Of course.” Draco straightened up. “I’m ready to go when you are.”

“Wait!” Hermione was digging frantically in her small handbag. “Give her this.” She proffered a small purple bottle and then frowned at the expression on Draco’s face. “Oh don’t look at me like that, I was stone cold sober when I brewed it.”

“I’ll give anything a try.” Astoria raised her pale face from where it had previously been buried against her arms and took the proffered bottle. She uncorked it and downed the contents with a surprisingly unladylike gesture. “Merlin, Hermione, that tastes disgusting.”

“Severus says the worse a potion tastes the more effective it is.” Hermione furrowed her brow. “I’m not actually sure there’s any scientific basis behind that.”

“Probably not.” Draco began to help Astoria to her feet. “Are you ready to go?”

She nodded gingerly. “Yes, please. You know I do think that potion is helping.”

“Good.” Draco turned to Daphne. “Are you coming with us?”

“I may as well hitch a ride.” The dark-haired witch wrapped her arm around Astoria’s waist.

“Hang on!” Hermione looked wildly between the three of them. “Where are you going?”

“I’m taking Astoria home, I told you.” Draco leaned in and pecked her on the cheek. “Father will see you home safely. Goodnight, Hermione.”

“But, Draco—“ Whatever she was about to say was cut off by the crack of Apparition.

Hermione stared into space recently vacated by the now departed trio before she turned to Lucius her hands firmly on her hips.
“Well,” she said. “That was just plain rude.”

Lucius adjusted his cuffs. “Draco’s primary responsibility is to Miss Greengrass, I would say he is only fulfilling his duty.” He wished he didn’t sound quite so pompous.

“I suppose.” Hermione let out a brief sigh and then appeared to collect herself. “Anyway, you needn’t see me home, Mr Malfoy, I am quite capable of making my own way.”

“I couldn’t possibly allow that.” Lucius tried hard not to feel hurt by her latest dismissal. “I assured Draco that I would see you home safely and I intend to do so. Now—“ he held out his hand “—if you supply me with the coordinates to your home I shall Apparate us both there.”

To his surprise, she began to giggle. “Co-ordinates…Lucius, do you really think I know the coordinates of my home?”

“It does not seem unreasonable, how else would you direct somebody to the address?”

“Oh I don’t know,” she stifled a hiccup. “A map maybe or I side along them there, I’ve never been asked for the coordinates before.”

She reached out and placed her small hand in his. “If it won’t insult your manly pride I’ll Apparate us both there and then you can tell Draco you’ve fulfilled your duty.”

“Absolutely not.” Lucius removed his hand swiftly from hers. “I have no desire to be splinched in a drunken Apparition attempt.”

“I am not drunk,” she stated with the indignation of the inebriated. “Look—“ she held out her hand in front of her “—steady as a die…whatever that means.” Her hand was indeed admirably steady. Unfortunately, the rest of her body undulated gently with the effort of keeping her arm still. Lucius gave a disparaging sniff.

“Well, I can see we shall need to seek out an alternate means of transportation.” He took hold of her upper arm and propelled her impatiently from the ballroom.

“Where are we going?” Hermione demanded as they emerged onto the pavement outside the hotel.

Despite her indignation, she had not pulled her arm out of his grasp and Lucius was acutely aware of the softness of her skin beneath his fingers.

“I am escorting you home, as my son so chivalrously insisted I do.”

Hermione dug her heels in pulling them booth to an abrupt halt. “Well I’m sorry to disillusion you, Lucius but unless you plan on carrying me there’s no way I’m walking home in these shoes.” She lifted one small foot off the ground to demonstrate the vertiginously high sandal which adorned it. This caused her to become unbalanced and she fell heavily against Lucius almost knocking him over. He automatically wrapped his arms around her waist in order to steady them both. Instead of instantly pulling away or stiffening as she had when they danced together she returned his embrace.

“This feels nice.” She rubbed her face, cat-like against his chest.

“Miss Granger!” He removed her from his person, placing her at arm’s length and stepping into the street with one arm outstretched.

“What on earth are you doing?”

“Taxis don’t hail cabs, they call taxis and you’d be much better phoning one than standing around with your arm in the air…wait a minute…how do you even know what a taxi is?”

Lucius ignored her question and the fact that he was blushing. He was absolutely not going to confess to Miss high and mighty Granger that, on the advice of his son, he had attended the Muggle cinema. Draco had insisted that it was a good way to get a handle on Muggle culture and Lucius had developed rather a fondness for afternoon matinees.

Before Hermione could question him further a black cab drew up beside them it’s yellow light flicking off.

“It seems that regardless of the terminology the technique remains the same,” Lucius said a little smugly before he gallantly held the door open. Hermione glared at him as she swept into the vehicle. Some of her dignity was sadly lost as she tripped on the step and Lucius was forced to wrap an arm around her waist in order to prevent her from face-planting onto the floor of the taxi.
He took his seat and looked around with interest as Hermione gave her address to the driver. The vehicle looked nothing like the yellow cabs he had seen in films, it was much more spacious with fold-down seats to allow additional passengers to sit facing backwards and enough room inside for even the extensive luggage he needed for every trip. He must remember this mode of transportation on the off chance of him becoming stranded in Muggle London again.

He was drawn from his preoccupation with his surroundings by the warm press of Hermione’s thigh against his own. She was sitting surprisingly close to him considering the spacious interior.

“Is this your first time, Lucius?”

“I beg your pardon?”

Her tone had become flirtatious, and if he was not very much mistaken one of her small hands had descended onto his upper thigh.

“In a taxi?” He could hear the smile in her voice despite the dimly lit interior, and before he knew quite what was happening he felt the press of her warm lips against the skin just below his ear. He suppressed a shiver.

“Miss Granger, what on earth are you doing?”

“Kissing you.” She nipped at his earlobe. “I would have thought that would be obvious.” Her tongue snaked out to trace the shell of his ear and this time he did shiver. The bloody witch was using his own tricks against him.

“This is most inappropriate, this is a public conveyance.”

“Mmhmm, you’re right.” She leaned away from him for a second in order to draw her wand and murmur a quick, “Confoundo,” in the direction of the driver.

“If it really safe to Confound the man piloting this contraption?” Lucius looked with concern at the driver who so far had not swerved off the road.

“Oh yes, it’s quite safe.” Hermione replaced her wand in the holster at her thigh. Unwittingly, or perhaps not so unwittingly revealing rather a lot of leg as she did so. “Now, where were we?” She paused for a moment as if to think, before climbing bodily into Lucius’ lap and pressing her lips against his.

For several moments Lucius was too dumbstruck to respond. Her small hands buried themselves in his hair and her soft lips mounted a fevered assault on his as she ground herself quite shamelessly against him. His cock responded whilst his brain was still coming to terms with what had happened. It reared into action, informing Lucius in no uncertain terms that it was more than ready for whatever adversity lay ahead, despite their slightly unconventional settings. He wondered if he had actually fallen asleep mid boring conversation with Dennis Creevy and this was all some sort of delicious dream in which all of his carnal fantasies were about to come true. Had Hermione not been holding him so firmly in place he might have looked around for a bowl of melted chocolate.

The sudden blare of a horn as their Confounded driver swerved to avoid the oncoming traffic, jerked him back to reality.

“Miss Granger.” He disengaged his lips from hers with some difficulty. “This is highly inappropriate.”

“Why? I don’t really think you’re reprehensible—” she frowned “—or maybe I do, but I don’t seem to care very much right now.” She had insinuated a hand between the buttons of his shirt and her warm fingers were tracing the sensitive skin of his stomach.

“Because—” he ignored his baser instincts and lifted her bodily off of him and back into her own seat “—it would be most unchivalrous of me to allow you to travel without your safety harness.” He drew the seatbelt across her body and secured it firmly before rapidly retreating to the far side of his own seat.

Hermione pouted at him, an expression he had never seen on her before and had no real desire to see again. She began to fumble with her seatbelt, which Lucius had already secured with a locking jinx. She pouted even harder and spent the remainder of the journey berating him and trying


unsuccessfully to free herself so she could do Merlin-knew-what to him. She was so preoccupied that she didn’t even notice when the taxi pulled up on a quiet, tree-lined street made up of small houses converted into even smaller flats.

“That’ll be £26.70.” The driver’s voice came from a speaker on the side of the cab which gave Lucius quite a fright. He removed a money clip from his pocket and peeled off two notes. “Keep the change.”

His interaction with the driver had finally grabbed Hermione’s attention, and by the time he had circled the cab in order to release the locking jinx and open her door, she was brimming over with questions.

“How do you have Muggle money?” she demanded, swaying once more in the cool night air as the taxi pulled away.

Lucius was no more going to tell her that he had taken to frequenting the Muggle supermarket than he was going to admit to his penchant for Jackie Chan films. He merely shrugged. “I find it useful to have about my person in case of unseen circumstances,” he said, trying to sound blasé and non-committal. Also unwilling to admit that the silver, snake-headed money clip he had treated himself to a couple of weeks previously had contributed a great deal to his willingness to carry Muggle money. The notes were much easier to deal with than heavy bags of gold.

Hermione stared at him for a long moment before turning away and teetering unsteadily up the short path that lead to the nearest house.

“Thanks for seeing me home, Lucius,” she called back over her shoulder.

Lucius stood at the bottom of the path watching with some amusement as she failed to gain access to her own home. She had brought down the complex wards with a flick of her wand, but the Muggle lock and key seemed to be giving her some trouble.

“Allow me.” Before he quite knew what he was doing Lucius found himself standing over her. He took the key from her fingers and inserted it easily in the lock. Seconds later the door swung open and Hermione crossed the threshold before standing, swaying once more, in the darkened hallway.

With a long-suffering sigh, Lucius stepped in after her intending only to light the candles before he made his getaway. Hermione sprang into action with a speed he would not have thought her capable of in her current state. She slammed the door shut and, with a shout of triumph, pinned Lucius solidly against it, her small body holding him firmly in place as she dragged his lips down to hers.

It was like being attacked by a determined but slightly inebriated octopus. No sooner had Lucius removed one grasping limb from his person then it appeared to be replaced by another. He would swear that the girl had four arms. Before he knew what was happening she had hooked a surprisingly limber leg over his hip bone and was once more undulating against him as her open, gasping mouth pressed hot kisses to the skin of his neck and jaw.

“Oh, Lucius.” Somewhere along the line, he had stopped fighting her, his hands had come up to grip her waist and she had insinuated her own hand between their bodies where it made its way south in order to stroke his erect cock.

“I want you so badly.” She fastened her lips over his once more, but this time he allowed it, even opening for her demanding tongue. “No one makes me feel the way you do.” His cock swelled harder along with his pride. “I want you to fuck me now, right here against the wall.” She was wanking him through the material of his trousers, it was wonderful and painful and frustrating all in one glorious combination.

“I know things didn’t work out between us.” She continued to whisper her hot inflammatory words against his neck. “But we can still do this, nobody needs to know.”

“What?” He managed to connect his brain and his mouth just long enough to ask. “This is what we’re made for—“ she began to fumble with the buttons of his fly “—we were never meant to be friends, that’s where we went wrong, but it’s okay, I see that now, we can just fuck
instead, as long as nobody finds out it doesn’t matter.”

Whilst her actions were certainly inflaming his libido her words were having an equally strong counter effect on his ego.

“Miss Granger.” He finally managed to remove her from his person, reversing their position and pinning her against the wall using his superior height and arm length to ensure that their bodies were no longer touching. “I find your insinuations most offensive. I am not some sort of gigolo to be used for your sexual pleasure and then discarded like yesterday’s newspaper.”

In response, she lunged for his lips once more and Lucius was forced to pull away. He wondered what had come over her. She had been responsive before, but never like this, he had always been the instigator. He supposed it must be the influence of the alcohol. His ego took another hit. He might still desire her, in fact, his whole body throbbed with arousal after her flagrant titillation, but he did not want her under such unwholesome circumstances. There was something distinctly wrong about sleeping with a woman who only desired you because she was drunk.

“I like it when you’re masterful.” Her eyes glittered as she began to advance towards him. Lucius found himself backing away down the narrow hallway. “Everyone tells me I’m bossy, and a know-it-all. You’re the first person who’s ever taken control. It feels so good, so…so…freeing.” She paused in her pursuit, shaking her head and leaning against the wall her eyes screwed up as if in confusion.

After a moment she looked up at him and pressed her free hand against the back of her mouth.

“Lucius, I don’t feel too good.”

He approached her warily, conscious that she was not above tricking him back into her proximity. Although she did look rather green around the gills.

“What’s the matter?” He placed a cautious arm around her shoulders and she sagged against him, her head against his chest.

“Feel sick,” she muttered into his lapel. Lucius barely contained his shudder. Nobody had vomited on him since Draco was a baby and he had no desire to break that twenty-year streak now. Nonetheless, he couldn’t exactly abandon her in her moment of need.

“Shall I take you to the bathroom?”

“No.” Her curly head shook. “I just need to lie down, that’s all. Bedroom’s through there.” She gestured vaguely toward the end of the hallway. Lucius wrapped his arm more securely around her and half carried her in the indicated direction.

Her bedroom was small and compulsively neat, dominated by a large brass bed with a homemade bedspread in the middle of which lay a large, ugly ginger cat. The feline gave Lucius a most disparaging look as he assisted Hermione across the room and helped her to sit on the bed. She sat slumped where he had deposited her. Lucius, a veteran of many an alcohol-induced spell of nausea, piled up the pillows and gently urged her to lie back. He began to believe her symptoms were genuine when she didn’t even attempt to pull him into a compromising position. He lifted her legs up onto the bed and smoothed an unruly curl from her forehead.

“Should I fetch a basin?”

“No, s’okay.” Her drunken slur had become more pronounced. “The room’s spinning.” She looked around before closing her eyes with a tired sigh. Her small hand unerringly found his. “Will you lie down with me for a bit, I promise not to ravish you?” She awkwardly shuffled back across the bed, encroaching on the feline’s territory: it let out an aggrieved meow but grudgingly made space for its mistress. With some trepidation Lucius arranged himself carefully on the bed facing Hermione, ready to spring away at a moment’s notice should she begin her assault again. She reached up and tangled her fingers in his hair, petting him like a cat. “We’re really not going to have sex are we?”

“No,” he said firmly.

She sighed softly. “I did so want to see you naked one last time.” She cranked open an eyelid. “I don’t suppose you’d consider taking your clothes off?”

“No,”

She sighed again, then wriggled her head forward a little to press her nose to his chest. “You smell so
good. I feel so stupid now…Camomile always smelled good too…” Her voice tailed off and he thought she had fallen asleep. “Tell me what you’re reading about,” she suddenly demanded. “What?”

“You’re always reading something clever and interesting. I bet you’ve got some fascinating translation on your desk right now.” Her fingers moved gently through his hair. “Tell me about it, like a bedtime story.”

There was a strange constricting feeling in his chest. He couldn’t help but imagine what it might have been like. If he hadn’t fucked things up so monumentally. Perhaps he would have held her thus every night; lulled her off to sleep with tales of research that only she found interesting while her fingers gently stroked through his hair. There was no point in regret. What was done was done. He opened his mouth and began to tell her everything he knew about the Trollish marriage ritual; a strangely moving series of customs from such a brutish race. Her eyes pinged open, lit with academic fervour and, at first, she questioned him eagerly. Before long though her lids drooped against her cheeks, her fingers still in his hair and her breathing slowed and evened out. Still, Lucius continued to talk, whispering about the engagement procedures, the endless paperwork and the importance of the alpha female in the clans acceptance of any new mate. Finally, he found he had talked himself hoarse and he lapsed into silence, his own eyelids growing heavy.

He forcibly roused himself after a few minutes. He couldn’t allow himself to fall asleep here. The girl had been extremely intoxicated. Whilst she might have been welcoming in her drunken state he doubted she would be nearly so pleased to see him in the cold light of day. He had felt the sharp side of her tongue too many times recently to have any desire to be on the receiving end of her ire again.

Reluctantly, he levered himself off of the bed. Hermione gave a brief murmur of protest as his warm body was removed from hers but she quickly settled, one hand coming up to rest under her cheek. Lucius used his wand to reposition the bedspread over her. After a moment’s hesitation, he lifted the hem of the blanket and gently unfastened her gold sandals. He ran his fingers tenderly across the red marks they had left on her delicate feet before placing them neatly on the floor beneath the bed and tucking the bedspread carefully around her once more.

In her pin-neat kitchen he found a glass which he filled with water, and in the bathroom cabinet, he located a dusty, half-full bottle of hangover potion. He set both of these offerings on the bedside table. He lingered over Hermione’s sleeping form; strangely unwilling to leave. He stroked his fingers across the soft skin of her cheek, before pressing a chaste kiss to her forehead. The strange feeling twisted in his chest once more and he turned away quickly and Apparated directly out of her flat longing for the tranquillity of his own home and a strong cup of tea.
Hermione had never been fortunate enough to suffer the alcohol induced amnesia experienced by so many of her friends. She rarely drank heavily, her unwillingness to imbibe due, at least in part, to her photographic memory. Every cock up and slur was dutifully catalogued by her prodigious brain. The-morning-after more often than not found her a quivering mass of humiliation and regret. Not only was she embarrassed by even the smallest of transgressions (she was after all defined by her common sense) but alcohol seemed to do nothing to soften the memory.

She was therefore unsurprised, but no less mortified to remember every moment she has spent with Lucius Malfoy the previous evening. She tried everything to banish the flood of memories. She buried her aching head beneath her pillow and, when that was unsuccessful, in Crookshanks’ warm soft fur. Still she saw herself groping the aristocratic pureblood as if she were an amorous teen at their first Yule Ball. In fact, she thought with groan of mortification, she didn’t think she has ever witnessed behaviour as bad as hers even during the most drunken of occasions at Hogwarts.

She rather welcomed the splitting headache which threatened to cleave her brain - it was providing something of a distraction from the unwelcome memories of Lucius gently disentangling himself from her determined assault. Why on earth had he been so nice to her? It would be so much easier to accept if he had responded boorishly, or even taken advantage of her in her inebriated state. Instead he had treated her with a kind of old world chivalry she did not feel she deserved after her earlier sniping.

She sat up slowly and clutched her forehead in order to prevent her brain from oozing out of her eye sockets. A wave of nausea threatened to overwhelm her and she took several deep cleansing breaths; vomiting in her own bed would be the absolute worst way to end a terrible evening. Her eyes lit on the bedside table where a glass of water and bottle of hangover potion stood next to a pile of textbooks. She shook her head slowly—she was certain she hadn’t laid them out before she passed out the previous evening. In which case there was only one possible conclusion; Lucius must have placed them there while she was sleeping. With a horrified start she clawed the duvet away from her body; her sudden panic that she would be naked underneath was rapidly assuaged. Her yellow dress was hopelessly crumpled, but otherwise intact.
The rapid movement had sparked another wave of nausea and she leaned her head back against the headboard taking a number of long slow breaths through her mouth. Not daring to risk opening her eyes again she groped blindly for the hangover potion. Her fingers almost upset the glass of water and threatened to knock the vial of medicine over the edge of the table before they closed firmly around the bottle. She brought it to her lips, draining the vile tasting potion in one lusty swallow. The effect was instantaneous. It was as if someone had gently placed her under a cool shower. Her entire body felt cleansed and the nausea was banished as quickly as it had appeared. She sighed with relief and opened her eyes thinking that if it were possible to produce a Muggle version of the potion the creator would be made for life.

Sadly, without the distraction of her hangover Hermione was once more left with nothing to do but ruminate on the previous evening and her utterly appalling behaviour. Of course, she wasn’t the only one to have behaved badly. What had Draco been playing at trying to match make her with his father? She had thought that the younger Malfoy was firmly on her side when it came to her spat with Lucius. She didn’t like the flicker of regret that niggled at her consciousness whenever she remembered the look on Draco’s face as he’d spoken about his father. Did he really miss her? Had he really been in love with her? Surely if he had been he would have jumped at the opportunity to sleep with her the previous evening….Or not. Hermione couldn’t help but wonder if Lucius’ reluctance to succumb to her advances might have been further evidence of his regard for her. Was it possible that she had misjudged him? She shook her head; Hermione Granger was rarely wrong.

She had plucked up the courage to climb out of bed and remove her dress in favour of tartan pyjamas and a dressing gown when she heard the whoosh of the floo activating in the living room. She hurried out of her bedroom and was genuinely unsure whether she was relieved or disappointed to see Ginny Weasley brushing soot from her hair.

“Hoping I was someone else were you?” Ginny clearly knew Hermione better than she knew herself.

“Maybe.” Hermione’s hungover nose detected the scent of warm pastry and freshly brewed coffee. “What’s in the bag?”

Ginny grinned and crossed through to the kitchen where she began to unload her spoils. Within minutes Hermione was sipping a flat white and trying to decide between a croissant with jam and a pain au chocolate.

“You went to a Muggle bakery?”

“Yup.” Ginny looked immeasurably proud of herself. “You always say the coffee’s better and I have to agree.” She sipped her own decaffeinated latte with a beatific look on her face. “So, I almost brought an extra cup in case Blaise was still here.”

Hermione felt herself blush. “Well he’s not, I can assure you. Feel free to check the bedroom.” She gestured in the direction of her room.

“I believe you.” Ginny took another sip of coffee. “You seemed pretty keen on him last night though. Harry was worried about leaving you.”

“I know.” Hermione buried her face in her hands as she remembered how rude she had been when her well-meaning friend had tried to suggest she come home with him and Ginny. “Please tell him I’m sorry for being so horrible. I had far too much champagne.”

“It’s ok.” Ginny reached out patted her friend’s arm. “Harry knows it’s impossible to get you to do anything when you’re drunk, he says it makes you even more stubborn than usual.”

“It does,” Hermione sighed. “I’m surprised Draco managed to peal me away.”

“You went home with Draco?” Ginny’s mouth hung open around a bite of Danish pastry.

“No, Lucius brought me home. Draco just engineered it.”

“Lucius?” Ginny’s mouth gaped even wider before she scrambled to her feet and rushed to the bedroom door as quickly as her enormous baby bump would allow.

“He’s not there,” Hermione called after her. “Can you imagine Lucius Malfoy agreeing to hide in the bedroom?” she added as Ginny returned to the table at a slower pace.
“Probably not,” Ginny retook her seat and crammed some more pastry into her mouth. “So what happened, did he try to seduce you?”
“No.” Hermione avoided her friend’s eyes.
“Really?” Ginny chewed slowly. “Then why are you blushing?”
“Because—‘Hermione hid her head in her hands again ‘—I tried to seduce him”
“You what? I thought you hated him.”
“Not hate exactly, I’m certainly very angry at him. But I was drunk, Ginny and you know what it’s like; he was all blond and handsome and he kept calling me ‘Miss Granger’ in that voice of his, and then I got too close and remembered how good he smelled and how soft his hair feels…. .” She tailed off miserably.
“He certainly does have very nice hair,” Ginny ran a thoughtful hand through her own fiery locks.
“You said you tried to seduce him, what went wrong?”
“He turned me down.” Hermione put down her croissant as her appetite evaporated. “He kissed me back a bit, but then all of a sudden it was like somebody flicked a switch and he wasn’t having any of it……then I felt sick……and then….. oh no……” she hid her face again.
“Then what, were you sick on him? The suspense is killing me!”
“Then I lay down on the bed and I made him lie down next to me and tell me all about Trollish marriage rituals until I fell asleep.”
“Sweet Nimune.” Ginny reached over and grabbed the half eaten croissant from Hermione’s plate.
“The two of you are well suited aren’t you?”
“What do you mean?”
“I’m sorry, Hermione, but how many other men do you think go home with a beautiful witch and are content to tell her bedtime stories about trolls? Malfoy is clearly as obsessed with academia as you are and head over heels in love with you.”
“I’m sure he’s not.” Hermione avoided Ginny’s eye.
“So what, even if he is?” she finally asked when Ginny maintained her deafening silence.
“Maybe you should give him another chance, that’s what.” Ginny poked her finger against the table to emphasise her point.
“Don’t be ridiculous, after all the things he’s done.” Hermione gazed defiantly at her friend. “He’s done nothing but deceive me, Ginny, barely a word he’s said has been the truth.”
“That’s not fair,” Ginny said in an irritatingly adult tone.
“What are you laughing at?”
“Lucius Malfoy turned himself into a woman to try and impress Hermione Granger, I mean really, who would ever believe it?” Ginny began to hoot with laughter. Hermione tried desperately to keep a straight face, but Ginny’s laughter was infectious. Before she quite knew what was happening the corners of her lips were turning up and she began to giggle too.
“What are you laughing at?”
“Oh come on, Hermione, you have to admit it is kind of funny.”
“What is?”
“Lucius Malfoy turned himself into a woman to try and impress Hermione Granger, I mean really, who would ever believe it?” Ginny began to hoot with laughter. Eventually the two stopped laughing.
“I should be getting home.” Ginny was clutching her sides
“Thanks for coming round.” Hermione felt infinitely better than she had done in weeks. She helped Ginny to her feet and wrapped her in an enthusiastic hug.

“Just think about what I said, okay?”

“Okay,” she agreed “but don’t tell Harry about the piles.”

“I’ll try not to.” Ginny looked as if she were about to start laughing again as she disappeared into the floo.

Things went decidedly downhill over the course of the afternoon. Having decided that a night of debauchery should not excuse her from some good honest hard graft Hermione had set to work on the first of a series of new potions she hoped to develop. She wanted to have something completely new to show Severus when she arrived at work on Monday. Something so exceptional that he would fall at her feet and thank her from the bottom of his heart for deigning to return to him. Or at least something good enough to inspire the rare and crooked half smile which he occasionally bestowed upon her when she had done something particularly clever.

Sadly, it seemed not to be. Hermione had forgotten that whilst the hangover potion might remove the physical symptoms of a hangover it did not actually relieve the underlying ailment. Her hands shook, her vision blurred from time to time and, most irritatingly, the alcohol appeared to be leaving her body by any means possible. She was slicked in a fine alcoholic sweat, a sort of unpleasant greasy membrane which left her feeling distinctly unclean despite her shower that morning. Her focus was off, her senses were dulled and, try as she might, she was not up to brewing the simplest of bases let alone a complex potion.

She had just vanished the ruined contents of her cauldron for the fourth time when she heard the floo flaring into life once more.

“What do you want?” she snapped at the disembodied bunch of flowers which staggered onto her living room rug.

“I come in peace.” Draco’s somewhat muffled voice came from behind the roses.

“Well you can bloody well go in peace too; I’m not talking to you.” Hermione set her hands on her hips and glared at her erstwhile friend. She was almost certain that he was responsible for most, if not all of her woes.

“I thought you might say that—” Draco set his floral tribute down on the floor and brandished a bulging paper bag “—so I took the liberty of purchasing a few additional items.”

“What sort of items?” Hermione asked, craning her neck in the direction of the bag despite her intense annoyance.

Draco ignored her and headed into the kitchen where he began to unload his purchases onto the table.

“Butterbeer.” He placed two bottles on the table. Hermione felt her stomach roil. “You’ll have to do better than that.”

“Cauldron Cakes.” Undaunted, Draco placed his next offering on the table. “Sugar Quills.” He proffered a beautifully wrapped Honeydukes gift box. “And Honeydukes’ finest chocolate.” Hermione’s mouth began to water. By the time Draco produced a large flagon of ice cold pumpkin juice she was unable to restrain herself. She snatched it from his hand and drank greedily from the bottle.

“What else have you got?”

Draco dug in his bag once more, a sly smile playing across his lips. “A bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich, a pork pie and—” he paused for dramatic effect “—these.”

“Fine, you’re forgiven.” Hermione put down the pumpkin juice and grabbed the tube of barbecue flavour Pringles.

“Astoria’s fine, by the way.”

“Oh, Draco, I’m sorry.” Hermione stopped, her hand poised between the tube of crisps and her mouth. “I should have asked. What happened?”
Draco took a seat at the kitchen table and popped open one of the Butterbeers. “That potion you
gave her seemed to help a lot actually. She was already feeling better by the time we got to St
Mungo’s. They admitted her overnight for observation but she was allowed out this morning. She’s
with Daphne now.”
“That’s good.” Hermione took a seat opposite him, still clutching her crisps. “Do they know what’s
causing the episodes?”
“Some sort of blood curse I think.” Draco looked pained. “The healers in their research department
are looking into it, but they haven’t made much progress so far.”
“I’m sorry.” Hermione reached across the table to squeeze his hand.
“Me too.” Draco’s pale face looked even paler before he resolutely shook his head and fixed his
steril grey eyed gaze on Hermione.
“Anyway, we’re not here to talk about me. Judging from my father’s mood this morning you two
didn’t kiss and make up?”
“No we did not.” Hermione punctuated her words by slamming the Pringle’s tube down on the table.
“What were you thinking sending me home with him, Draco? I made a total arse of myself.”
“What did you do?” Draco perked up instantly.
“Father wouldn’t say anything, just banged around
the kitchen and burnt our breakfast.”
“He made your breakfast?” Hermione was momentarily distracted.
“Badly—“Draco glared at her “—I’m sure you were about to tell me what you did to make a fool of
yourself.”
Hermione gave a deep sigh. “You know when I drink I sometimes get a little…amorous?”
Draco nodded.
“Well it turns out that after two bottles of champagne I find your father almost irresistible. I pretty
much threw myself at him.” She pushed the tube of Pringles aside and started on the Honeydukes
Chocolate, barely stifling a moan of pleasure as the rich flavour hit the back of her throat.
“What did he do?” Draco broke off his own chunk of chocolate and began to nibble on it as he
watched her avidly.
“Nothing, Draco, he did nothing! He spurned my advances and put me to bed, like a child. What?
Why are you grinning like that?”
“Because I knew that’s what he’d do.” Draco took a triumphant swig of Butterbeer. “I knew he’d be
the perfect gentleman. Merlin’s balls, Hermione, if I’d let you go home with Blaise you’d be walking
like a cowboy right now as well as dealing with the hangover from hell.”
“What did he do?” Draco continued to
eat his chocolate and look smug.
“Nothing, Draco, he did nothing! He spurned my advances and put me to bed, like a child. What?
Why are you grinning like that?”
“Absolutely. I knew his old fashioned values would prevent him from taking advantage of drunk and
amorous Granger. Admit it; don’t you admire him just a little bit for turning you down?”
“Maybe,” Hermione admitted. “Draco, I really don’t see why you’re suddenly trying to throw us
together. I thought you disapproved of me and your father?”
“No,” Draco immediately denied. “I didn’t disapprove of you and my father it’s just…” He tailed off
and stared into the middle distance for some time. “My parents were never faithful to each other.” He
hesitated and Hermione reached to place a hand over his.
“I’m sorry.”
“Don’t be.” Draco gave her a cheeky grin. “I wasn’t. I had a great childhood. Everything I could
possibly want, parents who adored me, glamorous parties and not quite enough supervision, it was
fantastic. Until that flat faced maniac intent on social cleansing moved into the ballroom anyway.”
He grimaced and Hermione squeezed his hand again.
“As I said, they were never faithful, but…I don’t know…it’s hard to explain, they were always
together, if you know what I mean.”
Hermione frowned. “Not really.”
“It didn’t matter who they’d been sleeping with they always came home to each other. They were
never jealous. Their partners were always extraneous – like something that added to the marriage rather than detracted from it.”

“Okay,” Hermione allowed, struggling to understand what Draco was saying. Her own parent’s marriage had been rather more conventional.

“Anyway—” Draco waved a hand, as if Hermione’s failure to grasp the concept was irrelevant “—when I was a kid my father could have any woman he wanted. Honestly, it was uncanny, he just had to look at them and they came running.”

“Uncanny,” Hermione muttered, not meeting his eye.

Draco ignored her.

“I never saw him hesitate. He was never unsure of himself, if he wanted something he just took it. I admired him, who wouldn’t? But believe me, he was insufferable.”

“I can imagine.” Hermione poured some of the pumpkin juice into a glass and took a more dignified sip.

“After the war though everything changed.” Draco worried the label of his bottle with his thumb.

“Father fell apart; you saw what he was like even before the battle.” He lapsed into silence and it stretched awkwardly between them for several moments. By mutual agreement they had never discussed Hermione’s brief visit to Malfoy Manor during the war.

“What was he like after?” Hermione finally prompted.

“Different.” Draco shrugged. “At first he drank. Then he seemed to snap out of that, but he was vague, listless, he didn’t really seem to care about anything. He would hide away in his library for hours. The only thing he was interested in was his books. Mother tried desperately to bring him out of himself, nothing worked. Then all of a sudden you came along and he seemed like his old self again.” He took another swig of his butterbeer. “I couldn’t stand it. I didn’t think he deserved you, not if you were just going to be another notch on his bedpost. So I encouraged you to shake things up a bit.”

“Hmm.” Hermione said non-committaly. She wasn’t really sure what to think. She didn’t really have the heart to be angry. Clearly interfering in the lives of others was a Malfoy trait. “So what changed your mind?”

“I realised I’d been an idiot.” Draco set down his empty bottle and buried his face in his hands. “It wasn’t the same at all. I should have realised that Father was completely besotted. Before the war he wouldn’t even walk across a room in pursuit of a woman—they came to him or they weren’t worth the effort. But the things he did for you, Granger! Disguising himself as a woman, buying the Prophet; shopping in a Muggle supermarket — he must have been crazy; and that’s nothing compared to his actions since you broke up.”

“What actions?” she hardly dared to ask.

“You don’t know?” Draco raised an eyebrow. “Helping Dennis Creevy with the Muggle orphanage, going to the cinema to get a better idea of Muggle culture, insisting on doing all his own food shopping in the local Tesco. Honestly, he’s gone quite barmy. I wish I’d seen it sooner, I only realised after you’d ended things. This is the real deal for him.”

“Are you sure?” Hermione managed to force the words out despite the sudden dryness of her tongue. After the discovery of all Lucius’ other deceits it had seemed easy enough to disregard his affirmations of love. But perhaps she had been too hasty. Maybe he really did care for her. Maybe his insane, ridiculous actions had, in fact been the actions of a man desperately in love rather than a nefarious user set on having his own way.

“Of course I’m sure.” Draco nodded adamantly. “And to top it off he went out in public last night, for the first time in four years for the sole reason of seeing you.” He paused for a moment before asking, “What about you, Granger? I can’t imagine you just leaping into bed with your arch enemy because you suddenly realise what nice hair he has; surely you must have felt something.”

Hermione shook her head distractedly. “Yes, no…I don’t know, Draco. I’m so confused.”

“Well stop being confused.” Draco got to his feet and planted both hands firmly on the kitchen table. “I know my Father’s made mistakes in the past but he’s doing his best to pay for them now. He adores you and I think you have feelings for him too. You owe it to both of you to be honest with
The rest of the day was a wash out. Hermione retired to her sofa with an extremely well-thumbed copy of Gone with the Wind and the remainder of Draco’s junk food haul. She didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Ginny had finally made her see how ridiculous the entire situation with Lucius had become. Then Draco had come along and destroyed her new found levity. For the first time she doubted her own high ideals. Was Lucius’ deceit really the deal breaker she had thought it to be? Could she still care about him in spite of all that he had done?
If Hermione had expected her return to work to be met with any sort of fanfare she would have been sorely disappointed. As it was, she was more than happy to slip into the apothecary and straight back into her old role. Severus greeted her with a grimace (which she interpreted as a grin of delight) grunted something about brewing and disappeared into the lab leaving her to deal with the morning rush of customers. Blaise was allegedly in the library. Hermione suspected that for Zabini library and bed were synonyms. Nonetheless, she was happy. In between customers she pottered around the shop tutting self-righteously over dusty shelves and poorly arranged displays. She made a mental note to discuss her succession with Severus. The man would not just need another apprentice when she finished her training; he badly needed a shop manager too.

Skilled in the art of self-delusion, she kept herself suitably busy until lunch time at which point she was forced to shut the shop and seek sustenance. Almost of their own accord her legs carried her back to the café where she and Camomile had met so many times. Hermione took a seat and sipped morosely at her Lady Grey (her stomach was still too delicate for the full bodied Earl). How could she miss somebody who didn’t really exist? Except Camomile did exist and, as Ginny had pointed out, Lucius—disguised as Camomile—had listened sensitively to all of Hermione’s woes. He had sat patiently through tales of period pain, writers block and sexual frustration. Would he have been an equally good confidante without the aid of Polyjuice potion? She hadn’t given herself the chance to find out. Hermione left the café having eaten less than half of her lunch and returned to work.

As soon as she entered the apothecary she smelt it. The rich, heavy scent of cologne hung in the air. Jasmine, sandalwood and the scent of the sea, strangely mingled with old books and fresh parchment. Her heart began to hammer in her chest. She would know that smell anywhere. “Has Lucius been here?” She burst into the lab surprising Severus who was in the midst of stirring a potion. “Of course not.” Severus looked up from his task and pushed his lank hair out of his eyes. “Lucius is far too much of a coward to set foot in your vicinity.” “Oh.” Hermione frowned. The scent still hung heavy on the air. “Then what’s that…?” She and Severus turned their heads in unison to stare at the gently bubbling cauldron on the opposite side of the room. Steam rose from it in lazy spirals and the surface almost seemed to glow with sheen reminiscent of mother of pearl.

“Fuck!” “Language, Miss Granger.” “I’ll bloody well swear if I want to, Severus.” As if drawn by an invisible hand Hermione crossed the room and peered into the cauldron. There was no denying the identity of the potion within, nor how it smelled to her. “Did it really take a love potion to convince you of your feelings?” Severus appeared silently beside her and Hermione almost fell into the cauldron as she jumped in shock. “I can’t be in love with him,” she said. Then, pleadingly, “can I?” Severus sighed deeply. “Hermione, what I know of love could be written on the back of a postcard in rather large script. I have no useful advice when it comes to matters of the heart.” He paused and
peered into the cauldron. “Potions however, are quite another matter. I have never known a case in which Amortentia has been wrong.”
“I was afraid you’d say that.” Hermione bit her lip before her insatiable curiosity flared. “What do you smell, Severus?”
“Never you mind.” He turned to glare at her and Hermione quickly looked away.
“I’m going to open up the shop.” She fled the laboratory and pulled the door firmly behind her even going so far as to place a draught excluder along the bottom of the doorway in order to prevent the intoxicating scent from following her.

She spent the afternoon in something of a daze. It didn’t help that the scent of Lucius still lingered heavy in the air despite the fact that Severus had already bottled the potion. She wondered what he was doing with such a large batch of such a potent brew, he didn’t normally approve of such frivolities.

By five o’clock she felt on the brink of insanity and she nearly sprinted out of the apothecary. She almost risked Apparating directly from the street outside the shop only her common sense and natural inclination to avoid arrest preventing such a foolish action.

She pulled open the door to Grimmauld place and barrelled into the dimly lit hallway. Relief coursed through her as she heard voices on the staircase.

“Hermione!”
Ginny, Harry and Ron were clustered on the landing from which they had all tried to spy on the Order meetings so many moons ago. It was Ginny who had spoken.
“What a nice surprise. We were showing Ron the nursery, it’s all decorated now.”
“That’s great, Ginny.” Hermione bounded up the stairs two at a time. “Maybe you could show me too.” She grabbed her friend’s arm and pulled her through the nursery door, slamming it in the bemused faces of Harry and Ron.

“Hermione, what the…”
“I’m in love,” Hermione panted.”
“What?”
“I’m in love with Lucius Malfoy.”
“Oh.” Ginny leaned against the nursery door, one hand absent-mindedly stroking her bump. “Well of course you are. What made you see it?”
“Bloody Snape brewed up a monster batch of Amortentia.”
“Professor Snape,” Ginny corrected smugly.
Hermione rolled her eyes inadvertently taking in the cheerful yellow walls which were brightly painted with birds, flowers and magical plants.
“Hermione really does look nice.” She gestured around the room.
“It does doesn’t it?” A dreamy smile flitted across Ginny’s face but was quickly replaced by a frown.
“If you’ve just realised Malfoy’s the man for you what on earth are you doing here. This is a strictly snake free zone.”

Before Hermione could answer the door burst open and Harry tumbled through almost flattening Ginny.
“Sorry love.” He righted his wife and pushed his glasses up his nose. “What’s going on?”
“Hermione’s in love with Malfoy.”
Harry raised an eyebrow. “Senior or Junior?”
“Senior, of course.” Ginny elbowed him in the ribs. “Keep up, Harry this has been obvious for weeks.”
“Only to people who are obsessed with medalling in the lives of others.” Harry turned to Hermione.
“Is this really true?”
Hermione nodded.
“If you’ve just realised you’re in love why aren’t you happy about it?”
“Because the last time I was in love it was with my best friend and even then it didn’t work out. Let me remind you that whilst Ron and I were happily planning our wedding he managed to fall in love with someone else.”

Ginny and Harry stared at Hermione open mouthed. Clearly, neither of them had expected quite so much honesty.

“That is true…” Harry began before tailing off uncertainly.

“…But it doesn’t reflect badly on you,” Ginny took up the refrain.

“Yeah, it’s not your fault that Ron’s an idiot.”

“But he isn’t an idiot!” Hermione finally managed to interject. “We were miserable together; at least he had the good sense to see it.”

“But just because you and Ron didn’t work out doesn’t mean you can’t be happy with somebody else.” Ginny said kindly. “I love you both but I’ve never seen a more poorly matched couple in all my days.”

Harry nodded enthusiastically. “Ginny’s right. You and Ron were a disaster waiting to happen. The only thing you had in common was trying to keep me alive and once it stopped looking like I was about to be murdered what was supposed to keep you together then?”

Hermione frowned. They had a point. She had known deep down that she and Ron were poorly matched, but had simply been too pig headed to admit it.

“But…” She never finished her question as the door flew open once more and Ron crammed himself into the tiny room.

“It’s rude to leave a bloke standing outside on his own.” He looked around the trio. “What’s going on?”

“Hermione’s in love with Lucius Malfoy,” Harry responded.

Ron’s jaw dropped.

“And she’s too scared to tell him how she feels because you broke her heart running off with another woman.” Ginny poked him hard in the chest.

“I didn’t….” Ron began, his cheeks flaming.

“Yeah, it’s not your fault that Ron’s an idiot.”

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Hermione frowned. They had a point. She had known deep down that she and Ron were poorly matched, but had simply been too pig headed to admit it. She still rather admired him for having the guts to end the relationship, no matter how painful it might have been for her.

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“And she’s too scared to tell him how she feels because you broke her heart running off with another woman.” Ginny poked him hard in the chest.

“I didn’t….” Ron began, his cheeks flaming.

“I know, Ronald,” Hermione interrupted quickly before the Weasleys could begin rehashing their old argument. She had been deeply touched when Ginny had instantly taken her side following the break up. “I know nothing happened with Tatiana until you had ended things with me. It doesn’t change the fact that even my best friend didn’t want to be with me though.” She looked into the concerned faces of her friends. “What if I tell Lucius that I love him and he doesn’t reciprocate?”

“Would that really be so bad?” Ron shrugged. “At least you’d know for sure.”

“It would be a disaster.” Ginny smacked her brother across the back of her head. “Hermione doesn’t want to put herself out there unless she’s sure of Malfoy’s feelings do you?”

“No.” Hermione shook her head.

“Maybe you could get Malfoy to smell the Amortentia,” Ginny suggested.

“I don’t think that would work. Even if it smells like me how would I get him to tell me that? I’ve rejected him so many times already, I think even his ego is in tatters by now. Unless…” Hermione stopped abruptly and stared into space her eyes wide. “I need to talk to Severus.”

She fought her way past her friends and out of the tiny nursery.

“Didn’t you just come from work?” Harry asked her retreating back.

“Yes, but I need to go back there. Thanks for your help guys.”

She vaguely heard Ron mutter, “Flippin’ mental,” over the sound of Walburga Black’s enraged screams as she thundered down the stairs and Apparated once more off the front step.
Maki

Chapter Summary

Finally, the lovers reunite!

Chapter Notes

There's smut aplenty here and some very very mild sort of slash - just thought I should add a warning!

Lucius dampened his hands before he placed a nori sheet over his sushi mat. His brow furrowed in concentration as he took a small handful of the cooled rice and spread it over the sheet. The rice stuck to his fingers and he shook his hand in agitation. Wasn’t dampening his hands supposed to prevent this? He used his wand to turn on the tap, succeeding in sticking globules of rice to the wood as he did so. He stifled a sigh; generations of Malfoys were no doubt turning in their graves at his abuse of his wand. He added a generous helping of chopped cucumber and lightly seared tuna (he still could not countenance raw fish) to the centre of the rice. Hardly daring to breathe, his bottom lip firmly clenched between his teeth, he took hold of the lower edge of the bamboo mat and painstakingly began to roll it up.

The magical equivalent of a slap in the face took him completely by surprise and his fingers slid forwards sending rice and fish flying in every direction. He cursed and reached for his wand, only succeeding in covering it with yet more food as he attempted to vanish the mess he had inadvertently created. Severus Snape had yet again breached his wards and Lucius vowed that as soon as he was rid of his unwelcome guest he was going to engage the best security wizard money could buy and strengthen the enchantments surrounding his home until it was impenetrable as Azkaban. He would not have his private time interrupted by greasy haired, big nosed wizards who could not mind their own business.

He had just laid out another nori sheet when Severus billowed into the room in a dramatic flurry of robes and hair. Lucius merely rolled his eyes, when would his friend learn that such affectations were entirely wasted on Lucius? There was a time when he had been rather afraid of Severus, but seeing a man exsanguinating on the floor of a haunted building after having had half of his neck ripped out by a giant snake had a way of highlighting the humanity of even the most powerful wizard.

“What do you want?” Lucius was in no mood to pander to Severus today. “What on earth are you doing?” Snape came to stand behind Lucius, peering down his long nose at the debris which littered the worktop. “I’m making sushi.” Lucius gestured proudly at the three pieces of maki he had successfully created. “Really?” Severus gave the maki a doubtful prod. “It doesn’t look like any sushi I’ve ever seen before.”

“Well,” sniffed Lucius, “I doubt there was much call for the finer aspects of Japanese cuisine in Cokeworth, was there?” “Not really—” Severus picked up one of the maki rolls between thumb and forefinger and popped it
into his mouth. He chewed thoughtfully. “This doesn’t taste nearly as bad as it looks.”
“I wouldn’t know.” Lucius fought the desire to hex his friend on the spot. “I haven’t actually tasted any of them yet.”
“You should.” Severus ate another piece. “The art of good cooking is in the tasting.”
“What would you know about good cooking?” Lucius grabbed the last roll before Severus could requisition that too and placed it in his mouth. It really didn’t taste bad.
Severus shrugged. “Cooking is much like brewing isn’t it? Anyone with half a brain can be good at it.”
“Hmpf.” Lucius did not dignify that statement with any more of an answer choosing instead to focus on his sushi making.
“I think you need less filling,” Severus said after several moments of silence.
“And I think you need to mind your own business,” Lucius snapped back before grudgingly removing a little of the cucumber from his latest attempt.

“So what have you been doing with yourself besides mastering Japanese cookery?” Severus crossed the kitchen to the spice rack and began to remove the lids from various jars.

“Nothing much.” Lucius eyed his friend suspiciously. Severus was being rather more congenial than usual, he must want something. “I discovered rather an interesting scroll pertaining to Trollish marriage customs.”

“Fascinating,” Severus sounded thoroughly bored. “Your mace is off.”

Lucius ignored him.

“Have you seen Miss Granger?”

Lucius looked up sharply at the unexpected question. Severus still appeared engrossed in the spices; he was making a little collection of jars on one side of the worktop. The house elves would not be impressed.

“No, I have not seen Miss Granger, and I have no plans to do so. She has made her feelings toward me perfectly clear. I have decided to retire with dignity from our relationship.”

Severus stifled a snort. “If you will pardon my saying so, Lucius, I feel the time for dignity has been and gone.”

“Perhaps.” Lucius was rather proud at his ability to sound nonchalant. “However, a man knows when he is beaten. After her most recent exploits I have finally decided that perusing the girl further would be nothing short of detrimental to my mental health.”

The glass jar in Snape’s hand smashed.

“Bloody hell, Severus.” Lucius added a further layer of rice to his wand as he used it to clean up the shards of glass and clouds of cinnamon which now permeated the air.

“I apologise.” Snape gave a sneeze. “I hadn’t realised my own strength, do forgive me.”

“It’s fine.” Lucius handed him a handkerchief.

“Anyway.” Severus dabbed his nose. “You were telling me of Miss Granger’s latest exploit.”

“Was I?” Lucius frowned. It was not like Snape to be so interested in affairs of the heart. “Well, if you must know, she tried to seduce me.”

“Was she?”

After the charity fundraiser, I took her home and she…well, to put it bluntly, she molested me.” Severus gave a derisive snort. “You must be mistaken. I thought you and Miss Granger were not on speaking terms.”

“We’re not.” Lucius pushed his sushi mat aside as a bad job. “I don’t think she had any intention of us talking, Severus, and believe me, I know when I woman is initiating sex. I could barely prevent her from having her wicked way with me.”

“But why on earth would you wish to prevent such a thing, I thought you were fond of the girl?”

“Fond of the girl? Fond of her!” Lucius felt his voice rise to a shriek and carefully modulated his tone. He had no desire to lose his cool in front of Severus. “I am more than fond of her, Severus. I adore her. I genuinely believe she may well have been the love of my life.”
Severus’s jaw actually dropped.
“But,” continued Lucius, completely oblivious to his friend’s response, “I am not prepared to allow her to use me as some sort of gigolo just because she is intoxicated and I happen to be a convenient penis. She has made it abundantly clear that she is not able to forgive me and if she doesn’t want me when she is sober and I am offering her a committed relationship then she certainly can’t have me when she is drunk and looking for Merlin knows what. I do have some self-respect.” He stopped for breath and reached for a tea towel upon which to wipe his hands.

“I’m so sorry, Lucius.” He had never heard Severus speak so gently before. “I had no idea you felt so strongly.”

Before he quite knew what was happening Lucius found himself wrapped in the arms of Severus Snape. He stiffened. Theirs was not a tactile friendship. Beyond the occasional handshake they had managed to avoid physical contact for the last twenty-five years and Lucius wasn’t quite sure why Severus had chosen to abandon this habit now. But it seemed rather rude to stand stiff as a board whilst Severus gently patted his back, so Lucius awkwardly returned the embrace, allowing his head to rest briefly on Severus’ shoulder. Snape was all sharp angles and harsh lines, his embrace, even had it been welcome, was thoroughly uncomfortable and he didn’t smell quite as Lucius might have expected. His scent was surprisingly feminine. There was definitely a hint of potion’s ingredients, but these were strongly overlaid by lavender and honey. Something in the back of Lucius’ mind gave a violent tug.

Before he could follow the thread of consciousness all the way to its conclusion Lucius was distracted by Severus’ chest as it rose and fell against his own.

“Severus Snape, did you just inhale the scent of my hair?” He reared away from his friend, his wand already in his hand.

“No,” Severus denied hotly. “Of course not, why on earth would I do a thing like that? Honestly, Lucius does your vanity know no bounds? Anyway, I must be going.” He backed away towards the door.

“Where’s your wand?” Lucius demanded.

“It’s in my pocket, of course.” Severus continued in the direction of the door.

“Show it to me.” Lucius had not lowered his own weapon. The fact that Severus had not managed to draw his first was already confirming his rapidly forming suspicions.

“Why on earth would I do that? You’ve seen it a thousand times.”

“Humour me,” Lucius’ voice was flat.

“Fine.”

Severus reached into the pocket of his robes but before he could come close to drawing his wand Lucius had shouted, “Expelliarmus!” A wand flew into his hand. Not the unbending ebony he had seen his friend wield on so many occasions but a length of flexible vine wood with an intricate pattern of leaves carved on the handle. Lucius stared from the wand to Severus for several seconds.

“Well, I really should be off.” Severus turned on his heel and sprinted for the kitchen door only to be brought down by Lucius’ rapidly thrown stunning spell.

“Rennervate.”

“That was uncalled for.” Severus frowned as he reached up to rub his head.

“Not as uncalled for as breaching my wards and entering my home without an invitation.” Lucius stared unsmilingly at his friend.

“I always breach your wards uninvited.”

“No.” Lucius squatted over the crumpled body of his guest. “Severus breaches my wards uninvited. You, Miss Granger, should wait for an invitation.”

Snape reached up to run a hand through his hair.

“Oh don’t worry your Polyjuice is still intact.” Lucius rather grudgingly extended a hand towards Snape. “It’s your acting abilities that let you down.”

“Oh.” The figure of Severus Snape got to its feet. It wore an abashed look that Lucius had never seen before. “What was it that gave me away? Besides my wand, I mean?”
“You smelled my hair.” Lucius ran a hand through his own blond locks. “Severus usually manages to refrain from doing so.”

“Oh,” she said again in a small voice.

They stared at each other in silence. Now he knew her secret Lucius couldn’t believe it had taken him so long to realise that someone else inhabited Severus’ body. His facial expressions were all wrong, his stance was off, and even his movements were considerably less fluid than usual.

“How did you get through my wards?” he finally asked.

Hermione gave a half smile. “Severus told me how he does it.”

“Brute force?”

Her smile broadened. “Pretty much.” She fiddled with the side of her robes.

“What are you doing here, Hermione?”

She looked downwards. “I wanted to know how you felt about me.”

Lucius rubbed his forehead. Hermione’s expressions on Severus’ face were beginning to give him a headache. “But I’ve already told you how I feel about you, numerous times.”

She shrugged. “I needed to hear it again, when I knew you didn’t have an ulterior motive.”

“Why?”

“Because you only tell me you love me when you’re trying to get your own way.” Her snarl was rather Snape-like.

Lucius sighed. “I mean why did you need to know how I felt about you?”

“Oh.” She looked down again and bit her lip, it looked bizarre. “Because—“she took a deep breath as if sucking in a lungful of courage “—I think I love you too.”

For several seconds Lucius’ world stood completely still. He desperately needed to sit down, or a cup of tea, or perhaps both. He shook his head in disbelief. Finally, the business man in him shouldered his way to the fore.

“You think you love me or you actually know it?”

She took another deep breath. “I know it. I’ve had my suspicions for some time, but they were confirmed when I accidently inhaled some Amortentia earlier today. It’s changed…” She blushed. Lucius had never seen Severus blush before, it was disconcerting.

Lucius took a cautious step toward her, wishing fervently that they might have this conversation whilst she was inhabiting her own body and not that of his best friend.

“And you don’t mind that I’m manipulative and deceitful and vain?”

“Of course I mind!” She mirrored his action, cautiously closing the distance between them. “Nobody sets out to fall in love with a conniving, controlling, ex Death Eater who spends far too much time thinking about his hair.”

Lucius frowned again, this was not how he might have imagined such a scenario playing out.

“But I can’t help the way I feel.” She closed the distance between them and placed a long fingered hand on his chest. “Are you willing to give me another chance?”

Lucius struggled to look magnanimous in the face of his immense suffering at her hands when inwardly his heart was turning cartwheels and he wanted to grin like an idiot.

“If you think you can accept me as I am then I believe that may be acceptable… What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

She paused, her lips inches from his. “I was about to kiss you.”

“Not in that body you’re not.” He took hold of her shoulders and set her away from him.

“Oh for goodness sake, Lucius don’t be such a prude.” Snape’s eyebrow disappeared into his hairline. “Don’t tell me you haven’t kissed a man before, I’ve heard all about the Death Eater revels.”

She advanced on him again.

“Those events were sorely overrated.” He nipped behind the kitchen island.

“There was very little in the way of debauchery and I was almost always relegated to paperwork and supplying the wine. I’m afraid the closest I’ve come to kissing a man is when I attempted to give Severus mouth to mouth
“Oh,” she said again. “What on earth did you do that for? I didn’t even think wizards knew how to do CPR.”

“I’d read it in a book.” Lucius moved backwards as she stalked him across the kitchen. “I didn’t have a wand at the time, I was rather desperate.”

“Hmm.” She didn’t really seem to be listening to him. “Well I’m sorry, Lucius but I want to kiss you, I think after everything you’ve put me through it’s the least you can do.”

“I really don’t think…”

“I’ve hugged you plenty of times when I thought you were Camomile.”

“Yes, but a hug and a kiss are two completely different—”

“I shared a bed with her…”

His conscience twinged. “Just a kiss.” He forced himself to stand still as she approached. “Surely the Polyjuice will wear off soon.”

“I really hope so.” Hermione advanced into his personal space once more and placed her hands on his shoulders. It was extremely disconcerting. Snape was slightly taller than he and Lucius wasn’t used to looking up at the person about to kiss him. He screwed his eyes tightly shut. “Don’t look so worried,” she said in Severus’ silky baritone, “I won’t bite.” And before he could make any sort of witty response her lips came down on his.

It was both familiar and alien; both horrific and wonderful. The entire experience really left Lucius more than a little discombobulated. Severus’ lips were surprisingly soft considering how thin they looked and, despite the unfamiliar contours of her male body, there was still a general sense that it was Hermione that he was kissing. Perhaps it was because she still tasted the same. In spite of her borrowed body and recent consumption of sushi there was still an essence of Hermione about her, an intoxicating flavour which was uniquely hers. Lucius found his lips parting in response to the gentle press of her tongue against them and, quite before he knew what was happening he was engaged in a full on snog with the body of Severus Snape.

As long as he kept his eyes tightly shut it was rather pleasant. Hermione’s soft noises of encouragement, albeit uttered in a deeper tone than that which he was used to, spurred him on to reciprocate her kiss more fully and the gentle tug of her fingers in his hair and the scrape of her nails against his scalp almost distracted him from the reality of their situation.

Hermione seemed completely unconcerned by any strangeness. She wound her body around his, pressing herself against him in a most wanton fashion which Lucius actually found quite arousing until he became aware of a distinct feeling of pressure against his belly. He froze once more as Hermione ground her growing erection against him.

“Oh.” Hermione reached down to palm the bulge in her trousers. “Oh, my god.” She tightened her fingers around it, giving a soft moan of pleasure as she did so. “Oh, Severus I’m sorry.” She snatched her hand away only to have it creep back of its own volition. “It’s so hard.” The look she gave Lucius was desperate. “And tight…and…and…so full. Is this how it always feels?”

“I imagine so; I’ve never had the pleasure of inhabiting Severus’ body.” Lucius averted his eyes feeling as if he were somehow violating his friend.

“I want to stick it in you!” Hermione declared, looking helplessly at him.

“Absolutely not.” Lucius retreated once more behind the kitchen island. “If there is any sticking of body parts in orifices to be done please rest assured that I will be the sticker and not the stickee. Now, how about a nice cup of tea while the Polyjuice wears off?”
“No!” Hermione wailed. “I’m sorry, Lucius but I don’t think I can wait. I really think I might die if we don’t have sex right now!”

“My dear girl, please believe me when I say that, contrary to popular myth, no man has ever actually expired from thwarted sexual ambition. Now take a seat while I make the tea.”

He had only just located a teapot and the box of Lapsang Souchong when Hermione gave a low groan. He whirled round, ready to fend off another round of her advances only to witness the peculiar sight of Snape’s normally limp hair literally writhing on his head. Wild curls began to shoot out in all directions and Hermione clutched at her skull, whimpering with obvious pain as Snape’s nose began to retract and his skin took on a healthy glow rather an it’s usual deathly pallor. With a final rush the transformation appeared to complete itself and Hermione stood before him, dwarfed in Snape’s voluminous robes.

“Oh thank Merlin,” she muttered before hurling herself bodily at him. Lucius caught her and staggered backwards against the kitchen island as she kissed him frantically. This time he felt no need to show any restraint. The soft press of her breasts against his chest and the feel of her buttocks beneath his palms was enough to wipe every memory of his tussle with Snape from his memory. He thrust his tongue into her mouth eager to hear her whimpers of pleasure and to taste every inch of her. She scrabbled helplessly at his shirt, her lips still fused with his as she attempted to undo his buttons.

Finally, Lucius unsealed his mouth from hers for long enough to ascertain exactly what the problem was. He almost laughed out loud at the sight that met him. Hermione’s diminutive stature meant that Snape’s jacket completely swamped her coming down almost to her knees and completely covering her hands which she seemed unable to free. Lucius felt a smirk appear on his lips. The evening’s events had been more than a little disconcerting for him but it seemed as if he might finally have the upper hand.

“Allow me,” he murmured against her kiss swollen lips as he reached down to unfasten the cravat around her neck. He took his time untying it making sure his fingers caressed the line of her jaw and the curve of her neck as he did so. Eventually, he slowly he pulled the silk free allowing it to slip sensuously against her skin as he did so.

“Lucius, please…” Her eyes were wild and she pawed once more at his chest her desperation only causing him to smirk harder. With slow deliberation he undid the top button of her jacket. She gave a low groan and arched her spine towards him as if the few centimetres of additional proximity would be sufficient to entice him into increasing his pace. It wasn’t. He carefully undid each button, pausing between each to press his lips against hers or to run his nose along the line of her jaw drinking in her unique fragrance. By the time he had undone the final button and eased the jacket from her shoulders she was quite literally panting with desire.

The sight awaiting him beneath Snape’s severe jacket was enough to make Lucius pant too. Whilst Hermione was diminutive in stature compared to the potion’s master, she was infinitely better endowed in the chest department and her ample bosom pressed against the thin fabric of Severus’ shirt. Her peaked nipples were clearly visible through the material and her heaving chest looked set to burst open the buttons at any moment.

Lucius allowed himself a moment of indulgence and ran his thumbs over the taut peaks gratified as they hardened even further under his caress. Hermione whimpered, reduced to nothing more than inarticulate pleading. Still, he took his time with the buttons of her shirt. He released them with steady efficiency, not once allowing his fingers to stray to the enticing bounty on either side. Hermione seemed incapable of such restraint. No sooner had he bared her navel than she ripped the shirt form her shoulders, discarding it on the floor in her haste to get her newly freed hands onto him.
She scrabbled at his shirt front for only a few seconds before, with a growl of frustration, she ripped it open sending buttons flying in every direction. She paused for a second then, gazing with rapt admiration at his chest before she was back in his arms once more, her lips hot and hungry against his, her bare skin searing his own.

Lucius’ attempt at slow undressing was completely overturned. They were reduced to animalist tugging and tearing as they ripped at each other’s clothes; Lucius’ belt was discarded next to Hermione’s shirt. Severus’ belt was vanished by an impatient Lucius and Hermione stepped out of her hugely oversized boots and trousers to stand before him dressed only in a pair of black silk boxer shorts. She looked down with an exasperated sigh.

“One of these days,” she declared, “you’re going to strip me naked and I will actually be wearing nice underwear.”

Lucius was beyond caring about such trivialities. He pulled her up against him and pushed the boxers down her narrow hips before he hoisted her onto the worktop. Hermione needed no urging to wrap her legs around his waist and she was soon grinding herself against his cock which was now painfully erect and still partially imprisoned in his trousers. He fumbled between their bodies, his fingers mashing against her dripping wet labia as he struggled to free himself. With a gasp of triumph which was swallowed by her kiss he managed to position himself at her entrance and thrust up hard inside her.

Hermione wailed against his mouth, her body going rigid, and her fingers digging into his shoulders with painful intensity. Then she began to move against him, the thrusting of her hips so frantic that he was propelled backwards taking her with him. He staggered for a moment under her weight and the sudden loss of power in his legs, no doubt caused by his entire circulating blood volume being fully engaged in maintaining his erection. Then he reeled backwards his back and shoulders coming up hard against the kitchen dresser. He didn’t care if the impact left him bruised and battered; he was only relieved to have something solid against which to brace himself as Hermione impaled herself again and again on his cock. The cupboard swayed behind them and he was vaguely aware of the sounds of smashing crockery. Then a door flew open and numerous boxes and pots of tea began to rain down on them. A full box of Assam bounced off Lucius’ head to smash on the floor and finally, a caddy of Earl Grey erupted all around them. Hermione suddenly stilled in his arms, took a deep breath and began to sneeze.

She sneezed nine times and with each expulsion the walls of her sex clenched tightly around Lucius’ cock. It was like nothing he had ever felt before. The spasm of her body was the most pleasurably brutal caress he had ever experienced and, on the final sneeze, he gave a roar of dismay as he felt himself beginning to empty inside her.

Realising he had not given a good account of himself Lucius gently lowered her to the ground; she stood naked before him, a glorious goddess with tea leaves in her hair. He quickly knelt at her feet and buried his head between her thighs, the smell of her sex almost eclipsed by the pungent aroma of Bergamot which permeated the air of the kitchen.

He could taste his own seed as it trickled out of her; the bitter semen mingled with her rich musky flavour. He felt an immense sense of pride. Pride that he should be the one to bring her pleasure and that she had chosen to accept his body into her own. The taste of their combined essence was somehow a stark reminder of their recently declared affections.

She moaned as he lapped at her. Shaking fingers threaded through his hair and he smirked again as he moved upwards flicking his tongue back and forth against her clitoris. It was engorged and ready for him and at his first touch she bucked against him her fingers tightening almost painfully in his hair.
“Don’t stop, don’t stop, don’t stop.” She chanted the mantra somewhere above his head. Lucius heeded her words, his fingers once more digging into her buttocks as he held her in place rapidly flicking his tongue over the over sensitised bundle of nerves. Under different circumstances he might have teased, would have taken pleasure in bringing her repeatedly to the edge and then dropping her down again, but not today. Today there would be no game-playing, no sexual one-upmanship; he simply wanted to bring her pleasure as rapidly as possible.

As if she were party to his thought process she stiffened and came screaming his name as she did so. He looked up over the flat, convulsing plane of her belly, past the engorged peaks of her breasts to meet her eyes which were wide with wonder. Her mouth hung open and spewed forth almost incoherent words of praise and gratitude. He kept his sealed over her clitoris until her eyes fluttered closed and she gently pushed at his head. Then he got to his feet and pulled her into his arms. Her head fitted perfectly under his chin and he tucked her against his body enjoying the way they seemed to fit together like two halves of one whole.

Gradually, he came down from the intense sexual high he had been orbiting and surveyed the room around them. Broken china and spilled tea littered the floor adding to the disarray of his sushi making station which had been disrupted during their earlier tussle. He pressed a kiss against Hermione’s head.

“I don’t suppose,” he began, relieved to find his voice more steady than he might have expected, “that you might consider allowing the elves to tidy up for us, just this once.” She wearily raised her head and looked around for herself. “Will you give them a day off tomorrow as compensation?” “Only if you’ll cook for me instead.” She smiled. “That sounds like a deal.” “Good.” He gathered up both their piles of clothing, wrapped his arms around her waist and Apparated them straight into his bedroom.
They landed, entirely by his design of course, in the middle of his extravagant bed. Lucius quickly dropped the pile of hopelessly crushed clothing and concentrated on getting himself back on top of Hermione as quickly as possible. He couldn't deny the tingle of nerves in the pit of his belly or the desire to pin her down just in case she might think about running away again. This deal, he felt, was by no means sealed.

Hermione didn't appear to object to his manhandling. She twined her arms around his neck, her soft warm body pressed invitingly against his, one of her lower legs snaking around his calf as she kissed him deeply.

"Tell me again." He pulled his lips away from hers for long enough to make the demand.

She gave him a coy look. "Tell you what?"

"You know." He waited and tried desperately to ignore the buzz of nerves in his stomach. This all just seemed too good to be true.

"I love you." She blushed slightly as she said it, her skin turning the colour of a ripe peach. He ran his nose over her cheek and planted a kiss on the angle of her jaw.

"Would you care to enlighten me as to what changed your mind? I'm not sure my ego can stand this change of heart being entirely down to a love potion." He was lying of course. He would take her any way he could have her; under the influence of a love potion, confounded, confused into thinking he was actually a decent human being, he really didn't think he cared as long as she loved him.

"It wasn't just the Amortentia." She wriggled a little and he eased his weight off her, still keeping her wrapped tightly in his arms. "I'm not going to run away."

It was as if she could read his thoughts. "Certainly not if I keep hold of you. He tightened his grip a little."

She smiled indulgently, her fingers stroking the skin at the back of his neck.

"You were going to tell me what changed your mind?" he prompted. Not quite admitting to being vain enough to wish for a list of his most loveable attributes but rather hoping that was what he would hear nonetheless.

Hermione smiled again. "I suppose some of my friends helped me to see sense; Draco, Ginny, Harry, even Ron, in his own way."

"What did Draco do?" Lucius bit down a surge of jealousy at the mention of his sons' name. He should be grateful to the boy for putting in a word on his behalf.

"He helped me to see how much you'd changed and how our relationship was different to those
you'd had in the past." She looked up into his eyes, a hint of uncertainty in her soft brown ones. "It is
different, isn't it?"

"Entirely." He kissed the tip of her nose.

"Good. Then Draco told me about all the wonderful things you'd been doing. Like helping Dennis
Creevy—"

"You weren't supposed to know about that."

"Why? Because it might make me like you more?"

"No." He looked away for a moment. "Because I didn't want you to think I was doing it to impress
you."

"Were you doing it to impress me?"

"Of course not. I'm doing it because it needs to be done, there's no greater travesty than a poorly run
business."

"Well I'm impressed anyway." She kissed him again, just a brush of her lips against his, enough to
make his stomach turn over. "It's one thing running charity balls and glamorous fundraisers. It's quite
another to actually get your hands dirty."

"I've hardly been sweeping the floors of the orphanage myself."

"I know." She seemed determined to think the best of him.

"Tell me about the Weasley girls' role in all this." He attempted to distract her from her alarming
vision of him as some sort of charitable crusader.

"Ginny," Hermione said firmly. "Her name is Ginny and if we're going to be together you'll have to
get used to calling her that. Besides she hasn't been Weasley for about three years now."

"Very well." Lucius rolled his eyes. "What sage words of wisdom did Mrs Potter confer upon you?"

"She made me laugh actually." Hermione smiled at the memory. "She pointed out how ridiculous
some of things you'd done really were. She made me realise that I was behaving like a prudish old
woman and that only a man who was truly desperate to win a woman's affections would be willing
to regularly masquerade as Camomile Jones."

"Hmph." Lucius wasn't sure he liked the idea of Hermione and the Weasley girl laughing at him but
if it had brought her back to him he supposed it was to be borne. "And Mr Weasley? What was his
part in all this?"

"Ah, Ron." Hermione looked a little sad. "He helped me to realise that you have to take risks in life.
Just because he stopped loving me it doesn't mean that you will."

"Of course not, I am much less fickle than that boy."

"I'm glad to hear it." Hermione reached down and with some difficulty pulled a blanket over them.
"Anyway, I was already beginning to realise how much I cared about you when I smelled the
Amortentia."

"What did it smell like?"
"Your aftershave." She nuzzled his neck. "And your hair, it smelled wonderful."

Lucius made a mental note never to change his aftershave or shampoo again.

"But after I smelled it and realised that I really did love you I panicked. I was so worried that I'd thrown everything away and that there was no way you could still love me after the way I'd treated you. So I convinced Severus to give me a hair and lend me some of his clothes."

"How on earth did you convince him to do all that?"

"I gave him one of my patents. Severus Snape is a very mercenary man."

Lucius didn't say anything. He suspected that Severus' reasons had been far more altruistic than he had revealed to Hermione but who was he to destroy his friend's reputation.

"And what did you hope to achieve by masquerading as your employer?"

"I wanted to know how you felt about me. I thought if you were going to be honest with anyone it would be with Severus."

"I would have been honest with you, if you'd just asked me."

"Would you?" A hint of doubt flickered in her eyes before she looked away.

Lucius tightened his grip a little more just in case she was thinking about leaving.

"Tell me something." She rested her head on his shoulder and traced circles across his chest with her fingertips.

"What sort of something?"

"Something about you, something I don't know…tell me how you became such an expert in Trollish linguistics."

Lucius smiled indulgently down at her. "Very well, it's quite a long story."

"That's alright; you have your entire refractory period to tell it!"

Lucius began to talk, going back to his childhood and his fascination with his father's small collection of rare books. He realised as he did so that he had never told anybody about this part of his life before. He and Narcissa hadn't really talked, not like this, not idle talk about what made them tick. As he spoke Hermione explored his body, her gentle fingers caressing lightly across his chest, arms, neck and stomach. She applied just enough pressure to be pleasant but not ticklish. Lucius couldn't remember ever having felt so cared for before. She was petting him as if he were a beloved familiar instead of a fully grown man and ex-Death Eater. It was…pleasant.

Eventually though, the closeness of her naked body and the gentle caress of her hand wrought a different effect and as she rested her palm on his belly his erect cock tapped her on the back of her hand. Lucius was relating how he had first travelled to Romania to begin studying Trollish texts in one of the larger libraries there and had been invited to visit a small community of Trolls in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. He paused in his narrative as Hermione wrapped her fingers around his rapidly hardening shaft.

"Keep talking," she encouraged as she held him gently in her fist. He continued to speak, albeit his voice almost a full octave higher as she ran her hand up and down his length. Then her fingers
dipped lower and she caressed the sensitive skin on the sides of his thighs before she gently cupped his balls. He stifled a groan and fell silent. Her hand drifted back to his stomach. As soon as he began to speak again he was rewarded by her fingers once more stroking down the length of his cock. The rules of the game were easy to discern. He forced himself to continue talking; reciting the driest facts regarding Trollish daily routines as Hermione slithered down the bed and traced the length of his cock with her tongue. She lapped indulgently at the tiny puddle he had made on his belly and flickered her tongue against the weeping tip of his member. He allowed himself a full groan this time and bucked his hips up toward her, all the while continuing his tale.

She rewarded him by taking his cock in her mouth and he wondered if he would forever connect in his mind the four rules of Trollish syntax with the feel of her hot wet mouth engulfing the head of his cock. Her tongue swirled around the shaft and she made soft sounds of appreciation in her throat as one of her hands continued to explore his balls even venturing further south and pressing on the sensitive skin behind him. He almost cried out then, his cock impossibly hard, almost painfully so. He was speaking through gritted teeth now, terrified that he was going to come for the second time without her.

His fears were allayed when she suddenly released him with an audible pop and slithered up the bed to straddle his thighs. She gave him no time to collect himself before she took him in hand and lowered herself onto him. They both sighed with relief and Hermione's mouth against his own effectvely silenced him, evidently the time for talk was over. She kissed him for a long time, her tongue gently teasing against his mouth while she remained motionless on top of him. Lucius wasn't sure whether to be grateful for the respite or frustrated by her lack of motion. He desperately wanted to pound into her and at the same time he wanted to allow her this slow exploration of his body. Finally, when he was actually beginning to fear for his sanity she began to move.

At first it was just a gentle rocking of her hips against his as she continued to kiss him. Her hardened nipples gently abraded his chest as her whole body moved against his. Lucius clutched the sheets on either side of him to prevent himself from grasping her hips and directing her movements; this was Hermione's show. Slowly her pace increased and he tilted his hips making sure his pubic bone rubbed against her clitoris. Her kisses had become unfocussed, she was gasping against his mouth now, giving forth little cries of pleasure as she continued to move.

Lucius released the sheets and careful wrapped his arms around her waist enjoying the feeling of her smooth skin beneath his fingers. Beads of sweat were forming in the hollow of her spine and their skin was slick where their bodies joined.

Lucius had never experienced sex like this before. No matter how debauched or erotic his previous experiences might have been nothing could compare to this slow intense lovemaking. He was wholly and entirely focussed on his partner's pleasure. He felt as if they were joined; two parts of a single organism, as if they strove together in perfect harmony towards a common purpose. He convinced himself that Hermione felt it too. She kept her eyes fixed on his as she gasped his name and her body went rigid with pleasure. There was a depth of emotion between them that could not be ignored, a connection that he could never previously have imagined. In that moment he felt as if he truly understood every soppy love song and floridly written poem he had ever come across. Hermione Granger of all people had enlightened him. Even as her tight walls contracted around his shaft he didn't allow himself to thrust, the only external indication of his climax was his own grunt of pleasure and the tightening of his fingers at her waist as he spilled himself inside her. Their combined orgasm went on and on as they were caught up in a chain reaction of each other's aftershocks. Lucius was wrung out, exhausted and exhilarated by the experience and as Hermione flopped weakly against his chest he speared his fingers through her hopelessly tangled curls and spoke almost without thinking.

"So when do you want to get married?"
"Married?" Hermione went from post coital bliss to post proposal panic in a matter of seconds. She shot out of bed as if Lucius had suddenly turned from good looking Slytherin into fully fledged snake. Then, realising that she was now standing naked in the middle of the rather chilly bedroom she snatched a blanket from the bed and clutched it against her bosom with maidenly outrage.

"Yes, married." Lucius lounged on the bed propping himself up on one elbow and looking supremely unconcerned. "What on earth are you doing? Do you have cramp?"

"What, no." Hermione backed up another few steps just in case he had a vicar concealed under the covers. "Lucius, I don't want to get married."

"Oh." A confused frown marred Lucius' handsome face. "Why ever not?"

"I'm only twenty-one." Hermione tried to gesticulate with one hand but realised that she was on the verge of losing the blanket concealing her breasts, she tightened her grip. "I'm much too young to get married."

"Really?" Lucius' tone was smooth. "And yet you were engaged to the Weasley boy—"

"Yes, but—"

"So when you say you do not wish to get married what you mean is that you do not wish to marry me?"

"No, yes—" Hermione screwed up her nose "—I think Ron was a bit of a lucky escape to be honest. I just think having avoided marriage once it might be a good idea for me to take my time before becoming engaged again."

Lucius sat up allowing the blankets to puddle around his waist. Hermione wondered if he did it on purpose, a subtle exposure of all that would be hers should she capitulate to his wishes. It occurred to her that if she capitulated now there might be rather a lot more capitulation coming her way in the years to follow.

"Why don't you come back to bed?" Lucius pulled back the covers and patted the sheet next to him invitingly. "I absolutely promise not to tie you to the bedposts whilst I fetch a celebrant."

Hermione gave him an arch look. She wasn't sure she would put anything past him but it was cold and she did feel faintly ridiculous. She grudgingly sat down and swung her legs up onto the bed, allowing Lucius to tuck the rumpled blankets around her but refusing to relinquish her hold on the green silk throw covering her breasts.

"Now," Lucius had adopted a tone of fatherly patience, one Hermione suspected he had never used on Draco, "why don't you tell me why it is you don't want to marry me?"
"For starters we don't really know each other that well." Hermione avoided his gaze, the last thing she wanted to do was hurt his feelings.

"But you told me you loved me?"

"I did, I do," she quickly amended seeing the look of hurt in Lucius' eyes and surprised at his vulnerability. "But that doesn't mean I want to rush into marriage. Really, what's the hurry?"

"The hurry?" Lucius frowned again. "Hermione, I've been courting you for weeks." He gestured vaguely at their naked bodies. "We've been intimate on a number of occasions. I have already taken liberties with your person which are, to be honest, most ungentlemanly. I would have proposed weeks ago, except you weren't speaking to me."

"But…" Hermione was genuinely lost for words. She realised she was staring into the deepest darkest depths of a cultural divide so immense she had absolutely no idea how to cross it. "But," she tried again, "in the Muggle world couples are often together for years before the question of marriage is raised, if it's even raised at all."

"How unseemly." Lucius gave her a very Malfoy-esque look. "I should never allow a daughter of mine to be treated in such a matter."

"Well it's lucky you don't have any daughters isn't it?" Hermione raked a hand through her hair. "And that's another thing. What about children? We haven't even discussed those."

"Well of course, I assumed you didn't want any, you're much too ambitious. I already have an heir and I'm a terrible father." Lucius looked only mildly contrite at this statement.

Hermione remained silent as she digested his words. Did she really not want children? She hadn't ever given it much thought – although it had been a given that if she married Ron she would be expected to produce at least a couple of offspring.

Lucius shifted nervously beside her. "I am perfectly capable of fathering a whole horde of half-bloods if that is what your heart desires."

Hermione still didn't respond and he reached across to take her hand in his. "Whatever you want, Hermione it's yours."

"Don't be ridiculous." Hermione didn't like this new and accommodating Lucius, she didn't find him entirely trustworthy. "You can't just offer me whatever I want without even knowing what that might be."

"Why not?"

"Because at some point you'll come to your senses are realise you don't want to spend the rest of your life pandering to me. Lucius, we should take our time, get to know each other better."

Lucius looked genuinely confused. "But what on earth would we do?"

"We'd do all the stuff we've been doing already. We can talk about books and your work and my research, we can go for dinner and actually try to finish a meal without one of us storming off, we can cook together and shop and go on holiday and have sex." She placed a hand on his arm. "Just because I don't want to get married doesn't mean I don't want to be with you."

"Hmmf." Lucius made a petulant sound which reminded her of Draco at his worst. "Not that all those things don't sound very appealing—" he had somehow closed the gap between them and was
speaking against her ear, his voice low and rumbling and…entirely manipulative.

"Yes?" She had momentarily forgotten what they were talking about.

"—but we could do all those things once we were married too." His hand had somehow insinuated its way beneath the sheets and was creeping up her thigh.

"Lucius!" She slapped his hand away. "Stop it, you're manipulating me."

"Of course I'm manipulating you." He bit gently at her neck. "It's in my nature to manipulate, is it really so bad?"

"No…” what had they been talking about? She couldn't quite remember, he was pressing open mouthed kisses against her collar bone and she had somehow lost her iron grip on the sheet covering her breasts and his finger were stroking the sensitive underside of one of them and… "I don't trust you." She gasped out the words, her hand clamping around his wrist, stopping his exploratory stroking. "I can't marry someone I don't trust."

"Oh." Lucius sat back a little, a wounded look in his grey eyes. Hermione felt terrible, as if she had just kicked a particularly handsome stray dog. She reminded herself for the fortieth time that this stray dog was Lucius Malfoy, not some helpless puppy in need of her nurturing care.

"And what can I do?" He spoke slowly as if choosing his words with infinite care. "In order to win your trust, Hermione?"

She blinked. She hadn't really expected the question. Lucius might be a man who always got what he wanted but she had somehow thought that achieving his aims would come easily to him. That any conquest requiring more than the minimum of effort would be considered beneath his effort. When she considered his efforts in wooing her so far she felt rather ashamed that she had once again misjudged him.

"You could start by telling me the truth," she suggested.

"But I've already agreed to do that." Lucius perked up immediately. "I promised myself that I was done with lying to you.

"But you have lied to me since then?"

"Well, yes, a bit, not much though." Sheepish was not a look that sat well on Lucius.

Hermione sighed. "I'm looking for something better than not much."

"Of course. I can do it, Hermione. Now I've won you I won't see the need to lie anymore."

Hermione frowned again. She wasn't sure she followed his logic. "But how will I know," she said half to herself, "how will I know you're telling me the truth?"

Lucius didn't respond and the two stared at each other in silence before the idea hit Hermione out of the blue.

"I've got it!" She felt around her neck from the fine silver chain and quickly undid her grandmother's locket. "Lift up your hair." Lucius complied and she fastened the locket around his neck. He cradled the worn sliver ornament in the palm of his hand and examined it carefully.

"I'm honoured," he said eventually. "But I hardly see how this solves anything."
"Just wait." Hermione tapped her wand several times against the locket. It enlarged and a coiled snake motif appeared on the casing. Lucius pursed his lips approvingly but continued to look bemused. "I need one of your hairs" Hermione held out a hand and, when Lucius did not move quickly enough to suit her, she reached out and plucked a hair from his head.

"Ouch!" His expression was one of pure affront. "What on earth are you doing, you little savage?"

"You'll see." Hermione coiled his hair around the tip of her wand. "This is a spell I thought of a while ago, I adapted it from the technology in a pocket sneakoscope…" she lapsed into silence, biting her lip in concentration as she completed her wand movements. Then she opened the locket and placed the hair inside.

"Now," she looked up at Lucius, "tell me something true."

"My name is Lucius Abraxas Malfoy." There was barely contained irritation in his voice.

"Good." She opened the locket and they both looked at the platinum blonde hair coiled innocently inside. "Now." She sealed the locket with a click, "tell me a lie."

Lucius scowled. "I have infinite patience with this process."

The locket glowed briefly green before returning to its original silver colour. Hermione opened it and drew out the hair. When she unwound it the very tip had turned a bright, acid green.

"It works." She turned to Lucius with a triumphant grin.

"What exactly works?" Despite his grumpy tone Lucius held still as she wrapped the hair once more around her wand, removing the green discolouration and placed it back in the locket.

"Every time you lie to me a little more of the hair will be turned green." She fastened the clasp. "The locket is spelled to both of our magical signatures; only I can remove it or open it."

"I see." Lucius' tone was as bland as his countenance.

Hermione bit her lip; he was unnerving her a little. "You don't have to wear it," she began and reached out to unclasp the locket.

"No, I'll wear it." Lucius closed his fingers protectively around the locket. "And if the hair is still white in a month then you'll marry me?"

"I was thinking more like three years."

"Six months." A strange light gleamed in Lucius' eyes and Hermione had a sudden vision of what it must be like to sit at the negotiating table with the head of the Malfoy empire.

"Two years," she said firmly.

"One." Lucius extended his hand across the bed, a triumphant look upon his face which Hermione thought to be wholly premature.

"Alright." She clasped his hand in hers. "If the hair is still white in one year's time then I'll marry you."

Lucius used his grip on her hand to send her sprawling across the bed and Hermione knew she should hate the look of smug satisfaction which now graced his countenance and yet, she couldn't. Not when her whole body was singing with excitement at the mere touch of his hands on hers and
her heart was pounding at the thought of what was to come.

"You do realise this won't be easy?" she felt as if she were running a marathon and being severely outclassed.

"Miss Granger," Lucius' lips hovered millimetres from hers, "I anticipate that this will be the easiest thing about you so far!"
Petit Fives

Chapter Summary

And finally - the last chapter!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Five years later

The fish looked balefully up at Lucius. On one side of the worktop two of its compatriots regarded him with fishy disdain; their mangled carcasses evidence of his failure. Lucius ignored them. He didn't care how many fish he had to butcher he was bloody well going to get this right. He sliced off the head with one decisive stroke and then, with a surgeon's precision, made an incision from the centre of the fish from the head to the tail. Moving confidently, as if he hadn't spent the last three hours mired in abject failure he slid the tip of the knife beneath the bones, removing them from the delicate flesh. He let out a sigh of relief as the spine finally came free and set about chopping the fish into fillets.

As he began the laborious task of basting the fondant potato in butter he looked around the kitchen with satisfaction. The table was beautifully set, the Malfoy crystal twinkling in the light of the three large candles he had set down the centre of the scrubbed pine table and the family silver glowing gently in the same light. Two emerald green silk napkins were folded with painful elaboration into the shape of peacocks which were enchanted to fly up and settle themselves on the lap of the diner at the right moment.

Lucius had set the table no less than three times. At first, he had dressed the formal dining room. But it had been too much, too intimidatingly stuffy, not the tone he was hoping for at all. Then he had tried the breakfast room. He and Hermione had enjoyed many a companionable meal in the warm and cosy room even daring to venture down to breakfast dressed only in their bath robes. Surely this would be a better setting for the evening. But it hadn't looked right, the cosy room was too small for his grand place settings and it was morning sort of room…it just didn't have the gravitas for which he was looking.

Eventually, he had reverted to the kitchen table. The kitchen had after all been where the whole thing had started. What better place to finally end things, what better location from which to move on to the next phase of their lives. He had reset the table, re-polished the silver, and re-charmed the napkins before standing back to examine the table with an air of smug satisfaction. It was perfect.

Now the soufflés were prepped, the grapes were peeled, the asparagus trimmed and the crème Anglaise suitably whipped. Everything was perfect, he just needed Hermione.

As if in answer to his summons he felt the wards shift, almost as if they were welcoming her back home and a few minutes later he heard her voice calling his name in the hallway.

"There you are." She burst through the kitchen door in a mass of flying curls and wrapped her arms around him. "I've missed you." She pressed her lips against his and for a moment Lucius was dizzy with familiar pleasure mingled with anticipation.
"Did you miss me?" She looked up at him.

"Terribly." He stroked her wild hair away from her face. "I regretted not coming as soon as you left."

"You had your board meeting." She pressed her face against his chest. "And I wouldn't have got nearly so much done if you had been there distracting me." Her fingers wandered down the back of his robes where they traced the outline of his belt.

"And what did you get done?" Lucius smiled down at her. Trying to avoid his own urge to explore; he wanted to get things settled before he allowed himself to take any liberties with her diminutive person.

"Well," Hermione positively glowed with excitement. "They asked both Severus and me to become cabinet ministers of the Potioneers' Guild. I'm the first Muggleborn ever to be extended the honour and only the second woman. They were particularly impressed with the potion we developed for Astoria; the chairman said it was extraordinary, he'd never seen it's like."

"Of course he did." Lucius dropped a kiss on her nose. "I'm very proud of you."

He pulled away and moved to pour them both a glass of the Sancerre he had chilling. There was a bottle of Moet too, of course, but he would save that for later, hopefully, there would be call for it. Hermione accepted the glass and sipped gratefully. Looking around as she did so she finally seemed to take in her surroundings.

"Lucius, you've gone to so much trouble!" Her eyes widened as she took in the elaborately laid table and the fish cemetery.

"It was no trouble," Lucius said smoothly. He vanished the mess with a flick of his wand.

"Dinner will be ready shortly if you'd like to take a seat." He gestured grandly toward the table. Hermione gave him a slightly shy smile and put down her glass.

"I'm not hungry just yet," she said.

Lucius furrowed his brow. He had very strict plans as to how this evening would go and they were meant to consume a delicious dinner cooked by himself during which Hermione would imbibe several glasses of wine thus leaving her relaxed and receptive to his propositions. Hermione seemed not to have received the script though. Indeed she was creeping closer to him, a determined look in her eyes.

"I've really missed you, Lucius." She stressed the words and he frowned again. She had only been gone for two days, just how badly could she have missed him? Of course, he had found the separation interminable. They were so rarely apart these days and he wasn't used to going without sex. How on earth he had survived that four-year dry spell he just didn't know. Now his mind had turned to sex he realised just how delectable she looked in her Muggle suit; the skirt ended well above the knee exposing a length of shapely thigh and the jacket nipped in sharply at the waist highlighting her curves to their full advantage. He firmly quashed his libido; there would be plenty of time for that after he had this deal sewn up.

Hermione seemed oblivious to his reticence. She sashayed a little closer and Lucius wondered if she had worn those ridiculously high stilettos to the conference she had attended. He hoped not, they were most inappropriate, as were the stockings with the thin back line up the back and, come to think of it, was she actually wearing a blouse under that jacket?

"You know I was very naughty whilst I was away." She walked her fingers up the front of his robes
and Lucius tried to ignore the little darts of desire that she seemed to spark as she touched him.

"You were?" he breathed.

"I was," she confirmed. "I touched myself every night, even though I promised I wouldn't."

"You did?" She definitely wasn't wearing anything under that jacket. Lucius knew exactly what sort of game she was playing and damn it if it wasn't this favourite. It was also extremely inconvenient.

"The fish," he protested, his voice growing more high pitched by the moment.

"I'm sure the fish can wait." She flicked her wand in the direction of the food and the pans ceased their sizzling under her stasis charm.

Lucius swallowed. He needed to pull himself together and fast. Admittedly the evening wasn't going quite as he had planned, but this could still work to his favour. Surely a couple of earth-shaking orgasms would only make Hermione more amenable to his proposal. Besides, it had been two days and he was getting hard just looking at her.

"Take off your jacket." How on earth had he managed to sound so commanding when inside his heart was beating nineteen to the dozen? Hermione wet her lips and began to slowly unbutton her suit jacket. Lucius realised he was holding his breath as she eased it over her shoulders and allowed it to fall to the floor. There was indeed no shirt and her bra was barely there either. Her breasts were supported by the merest wisp of flimsy black lace from above which her rosy pink nipples peaked invitingly. Lucius resisted the urge to touch her. He knew what she wanted.

"The skirt too." He kept his voice cool feigning a disinterest he absolutely did not feel.

Hermione smiled again and reached behind her to fiddle with the zip of her skirt. Lucius tried to ignore the way the action lifted her breast up and forwards as if she were presenting them on a platter for his delectation. Her skirt slid to the ground and she stepped daintily out of it.

Lucius took a moment to bless Muggles and their underwear. As in so many other areas, Pureblood fashion was mired somewhere early in the 1900's. It wasn't that he didn't like a nice pair of bloomers and a well-tied corset but there was something unbearably erotic about the black suspender belt that held up Hermione's silk stockings and the tiny triangle of lace which just and no more covered her public mound.

"Finally," Hermione muttered.

"Finally what?" Lucius was discomfited; he had thought she was enjoying the slow striptease as much as he was.

"Finally, after five years you're going to seduce me in your kitchen and my underwear will actually match!" She smirked at him in an extremely self-satisfied manner and cocked her hip a little as if inviting him to admire her further.

Lucius cast his mind back over the last five years. Had he really never seen her in matching underwear before? It hardly mattered; he couldn't remember a time when he had found her anything less than thoroughly desirable.

"I know what you want, Miss Granger and I believe it's for me to do more than admire your underwear." This time he moved towards her, deliberately towering over her, watching her pupils dilate as he purposefully invaded her personal space.
"And what do I want?" She gazed boldly up at him.

"Turn around." She obeyed so quickly she swayed for a second on her heels. "Hands on the worktop." She flattened her palms on the marble.

"Now, Miss Granger." He leaned over her to speak into her ear allowing his crotch to press against her exposed backside. She gave a slight wriggle as her bare buttocks came into contact with his erection. Lucius forced himself to ignore the pleasure. "What did we agree we would not do while you were away?" He tried to make his voice severe.

"We agreed we wouldn't touch ourselves." She answered promptly, ever the swot.

"And what did you just admit to doing?"

"I touched myself, every night." There was not a hint of contriteness about her.

"Really?" Lucius palmed her naked buttock, his fingers tracing the line of her thong. "And what do you think happens to girls who touch themselves after promising that they won't?" He tried hard to sound disapproving but it was difficult to pull off when she was eagerly undulating her backside into his hand. It was lucky Lucius had no real desire for a submissive partner because Hermione Granger did not fit the bill.

"They get spanked, Sir," Hermione said eagerly arching her back so her bottom was propelled up against his hand.

"You do know you're entirely too eager for this, don't you?" Lucius couldn't keep the humour from his tone. "You might at least pretend to be frightened of me."

"I'm terribly frightened, Mr Malfoy, please don't spank me." Hermione was an even worse actress than she was a liar. With an affectionate roll of his eyes, Lucius brought his large palm down on her creamy white buttock with a resounding smack. Hermione squealed and Lucius smirked as the imprint of his hand appeared, briefly emblazoned on her sensitive flesh. He began to spank her slowly at first, varying the location and intensity of his blows, listening carefully to the timbre of her cries. She whimpered and wriggled but made no attempt to pull away from him as her flesh heated and pinked beneath his hand. It was a beautiful sight to behold, her buttocks shuddering under his blows. With a quick gesture, he vanished her tiny thong wanting to see her labia bloom as her arousal grew. Hermione made a brief sound of displeasure at the loss of her underwear which was quickly lost as Lucius rained down a volley of heavier blows on her quivering buttocks.

She was panting now, tiny beads of sweat standing out like crystals against the smooth skin of her back. The rich scent of her arousal was heavy in the air.

"Was it good?" Lucius asked.

"Was what good?" she slurred drunkenly at him, her face now resting against the worktop, her legs shaking.

"Was it good when you touched yourself?"

"Yes," she panted.

"As good as this?" He inserted two fingers into her slick channel and pressed them forwards, unerringly seeking out the spongey area that would quickly drive her to oblivion.

"No, no," she squealed. "Nothing could be as good as that."
"Good." Lucius added a third finger marvelling at how sopping wet she was just from his spanking. He began to agitate his fingers inside her, all the while rubbing his other hand against her red and glowing backside. The timbre of Hermione's moans had changed now and she was bucking her hips against his hand.

"Don't stop, please don't stop."

He reached his thumb forward to circle around her clitoris, it was standing proud and erect, nearly as hard as Lucius' own aching cock and he only had to give it a desultory flick before she catapulted over the edge into orgasm her sheath contracting around his fingers with almost painful intensity.

They remained frozen, locked together, Lucius' fingers still buried deep within her, Hermione's body weakly contracting around him. Finally, he withdrew his hand and pressed a kiss to her backside, the skin was so hot it almost burnt his lips.

"That was amazing." Hermione turned, beaming up at him her hands reaching towards his flies as she dropped to her knees.

"No." Lucius was surprised to hear himself speak. His cock was aching, his underwear uncomfortably tight and yet he couldn't allow himself to enjoy her again until he had his answer. He unconsciously patted the breast pocket of his robes. Hermione turned her huge brown eyes up at him. He could well understand her confusion. It was most unusual for him to decline oral sex.

"Dinner first." He offered her his hand and helped her to her feet.

She looked quizzically at him and then shrugged good-naturedly. "Alright." Completely unselfconscious in her near naked state she picked her skirt and jacket off the floor and slowly pulled them on before she sat gingerly at the table. Lucius stifled a chuckle at the site of her wincing as her backside hit the cool wood. He would never have guessed that Hermione Granger would have a predilection for being spanked. Of course, like most things, it had to be entirely on her terms but he was more than happy to adhere to those terms. Especially if it brought him closer to his goal. He topped up her wine and removed the stasis spell from the fish.

Three courses later Hermione was definitely relaxed, but although she had eaten ravenously she had barely touched her wine. There was no way Lucius could depend on the alcohol to help his cause. He felt his anxiety ratchet up another notch as his fingers travelled from the breast pocket of his robes to the locket around his neck.

"More wine?" He proffered the bottle, but Hermione placed her fingers over the glass.

"I think I've had enough."

"Very well." Lucius poured himself another glass, he needed the Dutch courage.

It turned out telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth had not been quite as easy as he had expected. He had known within six months that if Hermione's locket truly worked there was no chance of her accepting his proposal. By the end of the first year, the hair inside had been glowing a virulent green and resembling something that Hermione called radioactive waste.

For the second year, Lucius had adopted a policy of painful honestly. He had even told Hermione when he thought her hair looked bad and had advised her against several outfits. By the end of that year, she had barely been speaking to him. He wouldn't have dared propose even if the hair hadn't still been bright green.

Things had definitely improved the third year. Until Ronald Weasley and whatever Quidditch
playing hussy, he was married began to procreate. Lucius had a lot of opinions regarding Weasley, his wife, and child. Under the circumstances, he didn't think honesty would have helped his cause any better than lying through his teeth had.

At the end of year four, the hair had only the faintest of green tinges. Lucius had felt truly proud. He had learned when to hold his tongue and was really finding silence to be just as good as a well-placed lie – some of the time.

This year had been the best though. He hadn't really felt the need to lie. He wasn't nearly as angry and cynical as he had been in the past and even when he did open his mouth and let the truth spew forth Hermione didn't seem to mind. For the first time in his adult life, he felt as if he could truly be himself, could simply ask for his needs to be fulfilled rather than attempting to manipulate circumstances to his own end. It had been something of an epiphany to realise that Hermione genuinely wished to please him and if he were honest regarding his desires she would move heaven on earth in order to meet them. It was for this reason and a thousand others that Lucius now wanted to marry her more desperately than he had ever wanted anything in his entire life.

He had been through every jewel and trinket in the Malfoy vault before he had declared it all worthless tat. He and Draco had visited Tiffany's in New York and chosen Hermione a diamond solitaire which was of suitable proportion to please Lucius and suitable subtleness to please Draco (it had not been an easy shopping trip). Now all Lucius had to do was secure her answer. Surely she would not deny him this time.

He brushed his fingers over the breast pocket of his robes for the hundredth time and took a deep breath.

"Do you realise what day it is today?" He wouldn't it put it past her to forget the anniversary of his first proposal. He had come to realise over the preceding years that Hermione's views on marriage seemed unlikely to change. She smiled at him and licked the last piece of perfectly risen soufflé off of her spoon.

"What day is it?"

In answer, Lucius drew the locket out from under his robes and eagerly cradled it in the palm of his hand.

"It's been a year."

"Has it?" Hermione looked genuinely surprised. "I hadn't realised, the time's passed so quickly." She gave a small private smile as if she were internally replaying the edited highlights of their last year together. She produced her wand from her sleeve. "Do you want me to open it?"

Lucius nodded, his heart was pounding and he felt a dizzying sense of anticipation. He felt like he had as a small boy the first time he had performed magic in front of his parents; proud, excited and just a little anxious. Hermione tapped the locket with her wand and it sprung open with an audible click. She slowly drew forth a long platinum blond hair. Lucius' eyes flew to hers, he was too choked, too overwhelmed with emotion to utter the words he'd been rehearsing all day. He fumbled with his pocket, at least he could get the ring out and show it to her, surely that would be enough to convey his message.

As he glanced up at her once more he realised that something was wrong. The smile had dropped from her lips and she was staring in dismay at the hair which hung from the end of her wand. Lucius' gaze followed hers to the very tip of the hair where the last few millimetres glowed a faint but unmistakable green.
"For fucks sake." He stood up so abruptly his chair toppled backward hitting the flagstone floor with a resounding crash. He pressed his hands over his eyes, willing the scene before him to be somehow different when he next uncovered them; it wasn't to be. The treacherous hair still glowed green.

"I didn't…I haven't…" he tailed off hopelessly. It didn't matter what he thought he had or hadn't done the spell had spoken, he was damned to another year of purgatory.

"Lucius?" Hermione's voice was gentle, but he couldn't force himself to look at her, couldn't stand to bear witness to her pity.

"What?" he snapped.

"How many fish did you fillet for dinner?"

"Three."

"And did the soufflé rise the first time or did you have to try it more than once?"

"I made them twice, you know this isn't helping."

She ignored him. "So how long have you been cooking for?"

He glanced up at the clock. "Around six hours."

To his surprise, Hermione gave a soft laugh. "So when you said that you hadn't gone to any trouble you weren't exactly telling the truth?"

Lucius didn't think he had ever come so close to crying in all of his adult life. Even the moment when he had seen the prophecy the Dark Lord wanted more than anything smashed into a thousand shards and known in that moment that his whole life was about to change for the worse he didn't think he had felt as despondent as he did now. He wanted to beat his chest and howl out his rage. He wanted to smash things, to shout and rail, to take all his disappointment out on something…anything.

He scowled angrily at Hermione who was still looking up at him with a little half smile on her face. He opened his mouth to tell her what he thought of her stupid locket and her entire stupid obsession with honesty, and then he abruptly closed it again and retook his seat.

"Are you alright?" She gave him a concerned look as he poured himself another glass of wine and took a large swallow.

"I'm absolutely fine." The hair wasn't back in the locket, he could lie as much as he bloody well liked before the next year started.

"Are you sure?" she placed her small hand over his and he fought the childish urge to pull away from her with her unwelcome kindness and her ridiculous ultimatums.

"Yes, I'm sure."

She got up and came around the table to sit on his lap. He remained stiff and unyielding beneath her. He couldn't even stand to put his arms around her. He felt fragile as if he might shatter at any moment.

"What's this?" Her fingers probed the bulge in the pocket of his robes.

"It's nothing." He pushed her hand away. He wasn't going to plead and beg. She knew how important marriage was to him; there was no point in reiterating it.
"It doesn't feel like nothing." She ignored his attempts to stop her and removed the box from his pocket.

"Hermione, don't."

"Why not? It's for me isn't it?" She flipped the box open and they both stared at the gently glowing diamond solitaire.

"It's beautiful," she spoke in a hushed voice as if viewing some sort of religious artefact.

"It is, isn't it?" Lucius snapped the box closed. "Never mind, you'll see it again in a year's time."

"Wait!" Hermione's hand closed over his. "Why don't I try it on?"

Lucius sighed. She was being unimaginably cruel. "Do as you wish." He sat back and removed his hand from the box to allow her access to it. She flipped it open and carefully took out the ring. She held it up to the light admiring the way the candle flames were reflected in its many facets before she slipped it onto the fourth finger of her left hand. It fitted perfectly. She turned to stare at Lucius her eyes wide.

"So when do you want to get married?"

He stared at her, aware that his jaw had dropped. "I beg your pardon."

"I said when do you want to get married? You've been waiting for the last five years, I can't believe you don't have everything planned down to the minutest detail."

"I did, I mean I do." He desperately tried to collect his thoughts. "But the hair…"

"It doesn't matter." She pressed her hand to his cheek, the metal band of her engagement ring cool against his hot skin. "I love you, Lucius, and I trust you. I don't need some stupid lie detector to reassure me. I don't even need you to always tell me the truth. In fact, it might be nice if you went back to lying from time to time, especially when you don't like my shoes." She pressed a kiss to his forehead. "I told you I needed time and now I've had it I know I want to be with you."

Lucius struggled to find his voice. "But we haven't even discussed children."

Hermione shrugged. "Do you want more?"

"I don't know," he replied with helpless honesty.

"Nor do I." She kissed him again. "We can just work things out as we go along."

"Are you sure?" He couldn't believe he was trying to talk her out of this. He slipped his arms around her waist.

"Of course I'm sure. I've been planning this day for weeks. I thought you might have changed your mind because I'd made you wait so long and I was going to have to seduce you into proposing."

"How deviant." Lucius looked down at her with pride.

"I know." She took his face in her small hands and pressed her soft lips against his. Lucius closed his eyes allowing the glorious sensation to overtake him. She was his, entirely and eternally his. For reasons absolutely beyond anything, he could understand this wonderful woman had chosen him warts and all (although of course he didn't have any actual warts, perish the thought) to be her husband.
The anxiety of the day began to seep away as he deepened the kiss, pulling her closer to him and thrusting his tongue into his mouth. He reached down to stroke the silky skin of her thighs, inching the tight skirt up around her waist.

"What are you doing?" She broke the kiss, staring up at him wide-eyed.

"I'm removing your skirt."

"Oh." She smiled. "I thought you would want to discuss seating plans and argue over whether the Weasleys would be invited or not?"

He looked down his nose at her as he continued to slide her skirt out of his way. "You may have already forgotten our prior arrangement, Miss Granger but whilst you were pleasuring yourself all weekend I endured a state of tortured abstinence. I absolutely refuse to argue with you about seating plans until you have fully satisfied my needs."

"I suppose that's fair." Hermione began to squirm in his lap, her buttocks rubbing against his erection to an almost painful degree and one of her stiletto-clad feet sailing precariously close to his crotch. Finally, she had turned to straddle him and Lucius fumbled with his flies, desperate to sink into her welcoming heat.

"There is just one thing." She had stopped moving, her small fingers pausing in the act of unbuttoning his robes.

"Yes," Lucius stilled; his hand wrapped around his erect penis.

"It's just a small detail, but very important to me." She placed her hand over his, her thumb gently swiping over the painfully engorged head of his cock.

"Anything," Lucius groaned. Somewhere in the back of his head his inner Slytherin was insisting that this was not a good idea, that Hermione was not nearly as innocent as she looked, that he should never ever give in to her demands, but he didn't care. He just wanted to be inside her, he would deal with the fallout later.

"Good," Hermione spoke against his lips, angling herself forwards and rubbing the tip of his cock against her wet core, "we can iron out the details later. She slid smoothly down on top of him and Lucius almost lost consciousness from pure unadulterated pleasure.

He awoke with a start. He had no idea what time it was, but judging from the inky blackness beyond the undrawn bedroom curtains it must still be the middle of the night. A sudden feeling of panic overwhelmed him and he reached out across the bed, gropping blindly for Hermione. It hadn't, it couldn't all have been a dream, could it? To his great relief his searching hands encountered smooth skin and wild hair. Giving little consideration for the witches' need for sleep he wrapped himself possessively around her warm body.

"Hmm, Lucius," her voice was groggy with sleep, "not again."

He smiled into the darkness. He had certainly made up for his two days of enforced abstinence the poor girl probably wouldn't walk for a week. Even he was a little sore. He settled her against him.

"I didn't mean to wake you," he lied freely, he hadn't really cared if he woke her or not. "Go back to sleep now."

"No, no, I'm awake."
To his dismay, she began to sit up. He really had wanted nothing more than to go back to sleep with her nestled against him, but now she was lighting the candles and conjuring a quill and a roll of parchment.

"We should discuss the wedding." She looked archly at him and nibbled on the tip of her quill.
"Now, as you'll remember you promised me carte blanche over one particular detail."

"That's correct." He struggled to a sitting position, a feeling of impending doom beginning to creep over him.

"Well, it's going to be tricky." Hermione was smiling at him. An adorable dimple had appeared in her left cheek. He wanted to hide under the bed. "Very tricky." She patted his hand. "But, for at least some of the time, I'd really like Camomile to be there!"

The End

Chapter End Notes

I can't believe this story is finished. I'm sorry it's taken me so long. I've really struggled to make time for writing over the last few months but your kind response when I have posted has kept me motivated enough to eventually finish. I'm sorry I haven't been great at responding to reviews - I do read them all on my phone I promise and they mean so much to me.

I'm due to give birth sometime in the next week so things may be rather quiet for the next little while but I'm sure I'll be back with another Lumione or perhaps a Snape/Hermione fic before too long.

Thank you again for all your encouragement.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://wwwarchive.net) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!