A World Not Fit To Live In

by LissaDream, Snowblind12

Summary

The world Hermione feared has come to be. The order has fallen, Harry Potter is dead. The Dark Lord has gifted her to the Malfoy wizards as a spoil of war. Her nightmare has just begun. WARNING: dark, non-con HG/LM, HG/DM
The amazingly talented LissaDream is co-authoring this with me. She and I connected through FF and have become close friends. We were bouncing around story ideas and came up with this as well as the story Master Mine. So, we are co-writing them. Please be sure to check out Master Mine if you haven't already. You won't be disappointed!

Ok, so another Trio story involving the Malfoy men and Hermione. I know there are tons of them, but we like this trio. We also like the Malfoy men Dark for some sick reason. We like their evil streak. But, we also like the stories where they are redeemed. This will be very dark, at least to start. It is a war story. There will be descriptive rape and violence. There will be shock factors. It will be brutal -- but there IS a plot. There is a point to this story. It's not just mindless torture. We're developing characters, back story, relationships. As of about chapter twenty, you'll find the violence taking a backseat to the plot. Not that there won't be ANY violence after chapter twenty, but it won't be as integral to the plot as it was in the first half of the story. If you can make it that far, you'll be fine.

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Warning:

1. Character Pairing: If you don't like a triad pairing, a HG/LM or HG/DM match up then you won't like this story.


3. Non-Con/Heavy M rating – if I could rate this NC-17, I would: This is what I would consider literotica. It has extremely controversial issues such as non-consensual sex/rape, extreme violence/torture, war-time crimes, possible character deaths, heavy lemons (smut), and the list goes on. Rape is a personal journey for each victim. No two rape victims are alike. You will see continuous rape over a long period of time in this story, a magical slave bonding, a touch of Stockholm Syndrome, and more.

Adult Tags: 3Plus, Abuse, Angst, Bi(?), Bondage, Controversial, Dom, DP (?), D/s, Fetish (?), Fingering, Hurt/Comfort, Hand Job (?), Humiliation, Mind Control, M/F, M/M(?), F/F (?), Oral sex, Spanking, Toys (?), Masturbation, sexual intercourse, rape, torture, beating, anal intercourse, rimming, BDSM, extreme emotional situations, and more we may not have thought of yet.

Read at your own risk. LissaDream and I are a bit twisted. We have "funny" triggers for turn-ons.
The smut might not be to your liking at all. If you don't like it - just walk away. We realize this story isn't for everyone.

Thanks for kudos, subscribing, bookmarking, and of course, commenting!!

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Chapter One

Hermione shuddered with fear and disgust as the menacing grip squeezed her upper arm, forcing her to stand. "Stand up and move, little Princess."

She turned and looked up into the leering, amber colored eyes of Fenrir Greyback. Her legs were weak with disuse, her bladder full to bursting, and her stomach empty. The strong werewolf shoved her forward, towards the dungeon door, unconcerned with her plights. Waving his wand, the heavy door opened with a loud and screeching creak. Hermione cringed at the sound on her sensitized ears, it was akin to nails on a chalkboard. After so much time in silence, it was deafening and overwhelming. He pulled her through the door and into a long, dark hall dimly lit by small sconces that were scattered down the walls and popped and cracked faintly. More muted was the sound of dripping water in the distance, the air smelled moldy and damp.

"Where are you taking me?" Her voice didn't sound like her own. It was meek and desperate, husky with disuse, and trembled slightly.

"Never mind you that, little Princess. Best you don't concern yourself with what you have no control over." Suddenly, she was shoved into a small, lighted room. "Be quick, you're expected."

Hermione rubbed her arms and looked around the small room...if you could call it that. The walls looked like planks of wood, scarcely attached. She could see through the large cracks between the planks into the hall she had just come from. Her eyes scanned the dank space, spotting a toilet and a sink. Unable to resist, she stepped to the filthy toilet and slid her jeans down. As she squatted over the bowl, her eyes were met by those of a large rat staring back at her as it perched on its hind legs in the corner. Too exhausted and numb to react, she relaxed her muscles and let the relief of her bladder emptying wash over her. Her eyes darted around the space and, seeing no toilet paper, her attention was drawn back to the rat who was watching her as it chewed and gnawed on what remained of what had been a roll of toilet paper. Of course, she thought bitterly.

"Hurry up, Princess. No need to try to look pretty," the werewolf whispered and then chuckled. The sound of his laugh made her feel dirty.

After letting herself drip dry as long as she could, she stood and pulled up her jeans, zipping them as she considered the sink next to her. It had cobwebs in the basin and mirrored the filth of the rest of the room. She attempted, unsuccessfully, to turn the knob. It had rusted closed...probably long ago.

Closing her eyes and letting out a deep breath, she opened the door. Fenrir was waiting impatiently and grabbed her arm with the same force and brutality as earlier. "Come on, we're late."

He dragged her up a flight of stairs into a small room with no furnishings. There was a wall with small hooks where large keys hung as well as some chains and shackles.

The gruff wizard yanked her again, forcing her into another hallway and through another door which led to a larger, grand hallway. This hallway was decorated with wall coverings, tapestries, and portraits. The sconces were silver and seemed to move. Upon closer inspection, they were modeled
after snakes and clearly charmed to move along the walls. She shivered with revulsion.

She was led into a large foyer with a huge, crystal chandelier. There were ornate and obviously antique rugs throughout the room that covered the dark, hardwood floors. Hermione gazed up, noting the picture railing molding along the walls, close to the ceiling. More portraits were hung about the room, their occupants watching her, some with disgust, but more with what appeared to be trepidation. She wondered who these portraits were. It was an intimidating room and was probably designed to be just that. A large set of double doors to her right opened. Hermione whirled, hand to her heart, to find herself looking into the grey eyes of Draco Malfoy. A sneer on his face as he scanned her form up and down. His eyes then skimmed the various portraits around the room before he said with his condescending drawl. "Come on, Granger, time to pay the piper."

Hermione hesitated only briefly before following Draco into a large sitting room. "Ah, Lucius. Your little prize is here." Hermione looked from the serpentine face of Voldemort to the arrogant gaze of Lucius Malfoy and back to Voldemort once again. Abhorrence continued to build in her and she grasped at it, it was so much better than the overwhelming fear that was trying to suffocate her.

Voldemort kept his steady gaze on Hermione, his red eyes glittering with...bloody hell, humor? "Tell me, Mudblood, are you finally willing to accept your fate? Have the past six weeks of captivity weakened your resolve?"

Six weeks. Is that how long it had been? Hermione had lost track. She had been moved from cell to cell and to different dungeons in what seemed liked many Manors. Always in the dark. Always in silence. This was the first time she had been out of a cell and not blindfolded since her capture.

"Just kill me, already. Why are you putting it off? You know I will never do what you ask. Not ever."

Voldemort smiled gleefully. His humor unnerved her deeply. "You see, Lucius? She still chooses death over cooperation. Such resolve, such mental strength."

Voldemort stood and walked towards her. "Kneel, girl." He demanded as he approached.

"No." Hermione spat. "Kill me. I know you're going to eventually, just get it done with."

With no warning, horrifying agony filled her body and she collapsed to the floor because of it, twisting unnaturally as screams were ripped unwillingly from her body and tears pulled without permission from her eyes. It was over in seconds that felt like hours and she was left panting with the pain. She forced herself to her feet as quickly as possible to regain some dignity, defiance clearly emanating from her eyes. She glared at the snake-faced man before her eyes flitted around taking in the surprised and wary looks of the two Malfoy men.

Voldemort looked at her with a tinge of respect before answering her. "Kill you! Oh, you silly little Mudblood." He shook his head and smiled at her. "I have big plans for you. I have big plans for England! And you, my dear Mudblood, will play a large role." He nonchalantly flicked his wand, forcing her to fall to her knees.

"No. I told you! I will die before I help you." She winced with pain as her knees landed on the hard floor.

Voldemort turned away from her and walked back to his chair. "You will do as I say, Miss Granger. Lucius, and dare I say Draco, as well, will help you understand." The ugly megalomaniac looked from Lucius to Draco and then back at Hermione, an evil smile on his lipless face.
"It's that or you can be a house whore to the boys of Slytherin at Hogwarts." He leaned towards her. "Would you prefer that, Miss Granger? Hmm? Having boy after boy fucking you, rutting you day in and day out?" He leaned back. "I mean, I'm merciful, am I not? I'm giving you a choice."

Voldemort smiled viciously at her as a tremor of fear violently wracked her body. "Lucius has been lonely since the death of our dear, dear Narcissa...and Draco needs a toy. You will keep them happy, and if you cooperate, great things could be in your future. A respectable marriage perhaps?" Voldemort glanced up at Lucius. "A Malfoy marriage? Maybe? You could be the mother of future Malfoy sons, Miss Granger."

He said it as if it should be a reward for her, but her stomach contracted violently at the thought. It was apparent that she wasn't the only one who felt this way. Lucius could not contain the look of shock and utter disgust on his face, and Draco looked as if something smelled bad. The look Voldemort shot the elder Malfoy was withering and Lucius quickly regained his composure and nodded in subservience. "If it would please my Lord."

This haughty man's easy acquiescence to his master, knowing he found the idea revolting, ruffled her deeply. She was unable to contain herself, even knowing there would be more pain. "No!" She screamed. "You're a vile, disgusting, pathetic piece of s...e...t, Tom Riddle. I'll never..." Her words were cut off with a gurgle as she collapsed under the Cruciat...s Cur...e once again. Expecting it this time, she was able to contain her screams.

"You bore me child." He snapped after he lifted the curse, then towards the blond wizard to his left. "Take her, Lucius. She is yours."

Hermione was unable to quench the sob that bubbled in her chest as strong hands once again forced her against her will. She just wanted them to kill her, she wanted it to be over. "Come on, Granger. Let's go." Hermione looked up into the tired eyes of Draco Malfoy. He met her gaze, registering the hatred infused in them. He whispered, his sneer still present and accounted for. "Yeah, yeah, you hate me. I know. Come on."

No will to fight anymore, tears streamed down her cheeks as she was dragged out of the room, clenching her teeth as the residual curse pain hummed through her body.

"Draco, now!" The unmistakable voice of Lucius was pointing into another room. The voice whispered, urgently. "Quickly, before he changes his mind again."

Draco walked briskly, dragging her to where Lucius led them. She felt them both step close on either side of her and the sudden pull of side along apparition almost made her throw up. The supporting hands gripping each of her elbows were the only reason she didn't fall to her knees.

"Tinny!" Lucius said loudly. The house elf entered with a crack.

"Master calls for Tinny?" The small, young, female house elf looked at Lucius reverently, expectantly.

"Take Miss Granger to her prepared suite. Bathe her, stay with her. Do not leave her side. Clean her yourself if you have to. Dress her and then bring her to the master suite."

Hermione's exhausted voice still rang defiant. "I'm right here, you know. I can bathe myself, I don't need any help."

Lucius simply looked down his regal, aristocratic nose at her before turning to sweep out of the room, Draco in tow.
Forty minutes later, a scrubbed-so-clean-she-felt-raw Hermione found herself led by the house elf into an elaborate and airy bedroom suite. A look around the room revealed a lit fireplace done in darkly stained hard wood with a sitting area. A large, dark four poster bed was covered with a light gold spread with hue's of red and burgundy woven through. The bathroom suite entry, that they had just emerged from, was connected to the bedroom with a massive dressing room. Across from the bed French doors that apparently lead to a balcony that overlooked the gardens and a lake. The tapestries were crimson, heavy, and pleated and the rugs were oriental and stunning done in floral patterns of reds and green and golds. Soft Tiffany lamps littered the surfaces glowing with flickering candle light. She walked into the closet where there were dresses, robes, and shoes. All in her size.

Hermione turned to Tinny, eyes wide. "Tinny, whose room is this?"

Tinny looked up at her. "It's your room, Miss." Hermione stared at the elf with shock on her face. "My room?"

"Yes, Miss. Come. We must get you dressed. Master will not be pleased if we delay." The tiny house elf dashed into her closet and came back with a beautiful, soft green gown. Hermione slipped it on and looked at her reflection. She hardly recognized herself. The gown made her look taller than her five-foot four-inch frame. The gown dipped low in the front, amplifying her cleavage, which was assisted by the accompanying silver silk lingerie set the elf had already dressed her in. She was utterly aware of the fact she was being done up in Slytherin colors. Upon closer inspection, Hermione felt she resembled a princess from a King Arthur fairy tale. The dress was snug along her torso and then flared out at her hips. The sleeves began just below the tips of her shoulders, leaving her chest above the swell of her breasts, her collarbone and her shoulders bare. The house elf snapped her fingers and Hermione's hair was instantly tamed into a long, soft braid draping down her back.

"Come, the Masters await." The house elf took Hermione by the wrist and Apparated them to another suite. Hermione swallowed heavily as she took in the space around her. The suite was huge, at least three times the size of her own. The paneling on the walls was dark, the colors deep greens. A brown, leather chesterfield sofa and two wingback chairs faced the intimidating stone fireplace where logs were crackling ominously. An ornate, deep wooden coffee table with marble top in front of the sofa had several books strewn across it. There were bookshelves along the walls, hundreds and hundreds of books. She looked around, noticing the door for bathroom suite and a dressing room, similar to the room she had just left behind. Another balcony with French doors, however the doors were closed with heavy fabric draped over them.

Standing next to the fire were Lucius and Draco. Lucius looked tall and haughty, scrutinizing her as his gaze moved up and down her form lasciviously. She suppressed a shudder and raised her chin defiantly. Draco's eyes stayed on hers, a knowing, smug sneer on his face. Somehow Draco came across more threatening, despite the obvious leering of the elder Malfoy. Both wizards were in dress robes.

Lucius sighed at her insolent look. "You must be hungry. Come." He gestured towards a table with three place settings to this side of the room.

Hermione was actually quite famished, weeks of eating bread, gruel, and water will do that to a person. She slowly walked over and the sight of the elaborate dishes made her stomach growl audibly. It probably should have embarrassed her, especially after the two men exchanged haughty looks. Draco held out a chair for her with sarcastically over-done propriety. After she sat and her seat slid forward, both wizards took their places.

Tinny served each of their plates and filled their wine goblets before disappearing with a pop.
Hermione studied her serving while both wizards waited for her to begin eating. The meal was probably plain for them, but she hadn't seen meat in almost two months. Dinner was a beautiful, baked breast of chicken that was accompanied by rice pilaf and sprigs of freshly steamed asparagus. She picked up her knife and fork and slowly cut into the chicken breast to find it was stuffed with mozzarella cheese and seasonings. She would have moaned with the first bite if two sets of eyes weren't watching her avidly. She wondered what was up with all the pomp and circumstance – the bedroom, the bath, the clothing, the meal – when she knew they were probably going to rape her after dessert.

That thought gave her pause, and she stopped chewing for a moment, her eyes still avoiding her hosts. To think she had saved herself, had stayed a virgin all through Hogwarts and while on the run, because she wanted to be sure she was truly in love with her first man. She didn't want to lose it to a hormone-crazed teenage boy, and that included Ron. Thoughts of her dead best friends caused a small sob to escape her lips. She quickly picked up her goblet and took a swallow, willing herself not to cry. Lucius rolled his eyes, Draco simply ignored her, more interested in the food on his plate. Her stomach turned, and she put down her silverware. She was finished eating. The food was almost too rich, anyhow.

"Stop your crying, girl. It will change nothing. All three of us are pawns in the grasp of the Dark Lord."

Hermione's eyes shot up to him. Hatred laced voice. "You have not been held prisoner, Lucius. You have not been threatened with rape at every turn. You haven't slept with rats crawling all around and over you. You haven't lost everyone you loved to…"

"Enough!" he bellowed, and she was stunned into silence. "You know not of what you speak, Miss Granger. We have each of us at this table paid a price." He took a deep breath and then a sip from his crystal goblet. She could visually see him relax. "Suffice it to say, none of us here have control over our futures. We best keep our noses down; do as we are told and try to stay in his favor. Believe me, Miss Granger, you do not want to be on his bad side."

"Hmph," she snickered. "The sooner I'm on his bad side, the sooner he'll kill me."

Lucius sneered. "Did you not hear his threat, Miss Granger? Do you, in all your naïveté, truly think yours would be an easy death?" He leered at her breasts and then at her face, she felt herself shrink slightly, her shoulders rounding to try and prevent him from looking at her. "He meant what he said about sending you to Hogwarts. Do you know what happened to the last young Muggle-born witch who was captured? Hmm?"

She swallowed, her eyes wide, and shook her head slightly. "She was sent to Hogwarts, Slytherin house to start. She was raped and tortured over and over again by young boys and adolescent teens who fancy themselves young men. First year all the way to seventh year boys, Miss Granger. After a week or two – after they had had their fill - she was sent to Ravenclaw, where she was assaulted all over again. Can you guess where she went next?" Hermione didn't answer, didn't look at him. "Hufflepuff, Miss Granger until she finally ended up at Gryffindor." He leaned back, watching her. "And don't think for a minute any of those boys in Gryffindor were too noble to resist the temptation. The Dark Lord instructed them that it was their right as pureblood wizards to use filthy little Muggle-born whores. The Dark Lord was so pleased with the improved attitudes and cooperative behavior of the Hogwarts boys, that he has promised to send fresh stock as able."

Hermione shivered and sunk back in her chair, her eyes now on her plate. As she thought about what he said, a smirk crossed her face. "I would kill myself, I wouldn't let that happen to me."

"Oh, would you now, Miss Granger?" He looked at her until she lifted her eyes to his, hatred
burning hot. He jabbed a fork filled with chicken at her. "Not if you were consistently Imperiused and charmed with lust potions you wouldn't."

"That's just...that's just...vile."

Lucius chuckled and put the bite in his mouth. After a short silence while he chewed and swallowed he continued. "Draco here can testify first hand to the delights of the Dark Lords gift, can't you my boy?"

Draco sniggered. "The Dark Lord had me take her first. You know...show the boys how it's done." He smiled, his eyes moving to her breasts openly.

Hermione stared at Draco and swallowed. Throwing subtlety to the wind, she brought her arms up in front of herself to shield herself from their deviant leers. "This world...this world is not fit to live in. Not anymore," she said despondently as she looked at her half-eaten dinner. "Why me?" she asked so softly it was almost a whisper.

Lucius snapped his finger for the house elf. "Why what, Miss Granger?" He asked with obvious impatience.

"Why has he...given me to you?" She almost choked on the words. "Forcing you to take me?" She watched as Tinny appeared.

Lucius studied her as Tinny cleared their plates. "The Dark Lord appreciates many qualities besides just blood status. Despite your...unfortunate heritage, you are a brilliant witch. Potter would have never made it as far as the Battle at Hogwarts had it not been for you. The Dark Lord feels that despite your tainted blood, your children will be worthy, if you are bred with a proper wizard." A look of disgust crept across his face. "I am, that is to say, Draco and I are to...help you see the right of things. If you come around and are cooperative, he has suggested the possibility of you becoming a Malfoy wife. He will sully the name of Malfoy for what he says is the greater good of Wizarding England." His look of disgust was barely contained.

Hermione turned her eyes to Lucius, pleading. "Just let me go! Say that I...say that I escaped! I'll run to America, live as a Muggle if I have to. You won't be stuck with me. It's clear you don't want to marry me! You don't want Draco to marry me, either."

Lucius shook his head. "For such a bright witch, you are ignorant of many things, Miss Granger. You would never get away. What's more, the Dark Lord would know that we released you. It would mean our deaths..." Once again, his eyes draped down her body, leeringly. "Besides, just because I don't want to marry you, doesn't mean I don't want to fuck you."

So, this was her fate. Hermione closed her eyes, willing herself not to cry, not wanting to give the Malfoy men the satisfaction of her hopelessness. She collapsed back into her chair wishing she could sink into nothingness. Then a thought came to her. She would kill herself. It was simple. She just had to get through tonight. Just lay still and let them have their way with her. When Tinny returned her to her suite, she would simply break a mirror or a frame. A sharp object and this could all be over.

Realizing she had to get through this hell before they would leave her in peace, she picked up her wine goblet and drank it down in four large gulps. The glass refilled itself at which time she picked it up once again and gulped it down.

Lucius placed his hand over hers, fingers tightening over her wrist painfully. She let out a puff of surprised discomfort. He was preventing her from bringing the now refilled goblet to her mouth once again. "Now, now, Miss Granger. If there's one thing I can't abide, it's sloppy, drunken fucking. I
prefer my witches to be cognizant and aware of every touch...every sensation." He spoke slowly, drawing out each syllable and drawing out the torture of his words and their unwelcome promise.

The older Malfoy turned towards his son. "Wouldn't you agree, son?"

Draco smirked, throwing his napkin on the table and leaning back in his chair. He watched Hermione for a minute and then looked at his father. "Oh, I don't know about that. I find that a little alcohol loosens their inhibitions. They tend to let me do things they might not otherwise allow. Besides, Granger is a frigid bitch and always has been. I doubt she could ever begin to relax and let go...let alone enjoy herself without the aid of a lot of alcohol."

Lucius smiled at his son. "That's a good point, my boy. However, in this case we hardly need concern ourselves with her comfort now do we." He looked at Hermione to drive the point home. "After all, if she doesn't please us, and can't be swayed to make us happy, the Dark Lord will simply send her to Hogwarts where her fate will be far worse."

Draco leaned forward. "You hear that, Granger? You really don't want to know what became of that American Mudblood, Jessica." He sneered at her, then let out an evil laugh. "Oh, alright. I'll tell you," he continued, maliciously, enjoying her misery. "After the boys of Hogwarts, a few professors (Filch and parents as well, I might add) were finished with her..." He paused for effect. "After they had no more use for her, she was given to Fenrir. You remember him, don't you? The werewolves raped her...in their wolf forms. Needless to say, it killed her. So yes, she did eventually die. I would guess she eventually found peace." He leaned back in his chair, a triumphant glare as he watched her blanch.

Unable to hold back any longer, silent tears streamed freely down Hermione's face.

Lucius smiled maliciously. "Look at me, Hermione. It doesn't have to be that way for you." When she refused to look at him, he sighed. "The answer lies right in front of you. Please us. Reform your way of thinking. Join the cause and your life could be very easy." A heavy sigh from Lucius and then dreaded words. "Enough talk, let's fuck...shall we?"
Chapter Two

Warning: This chapter is DARK and depicts rape. Please don't read if this will bother or offend you. Lucius is bad enough, but Draco is truly a nasty piece of work. As the story evolves, so will the dynamic between these three.

Chapter Two

Hermione didn't move. She was frozen to her seat, her body petrified by his words. Join the fucking cause. Merlin, he's dumber than a box of rocks. I am what the cause is against, how am I supposed to join it? She closed her eyes tightly as the sound of chairs scooting back from the table caused her heart to race with dreaded anticipation. What was worse, she could feel the effects of the wine kicking in and it was making her feel a little dizzy and out of control.

When she reopened her eyes, she kept them on the table in front of her. She could feel their approach on either side of her, accompanied by a malicious chuckle from Draco. Her classmate's unmistakable sneer rang loud in her panicked, foggy head. "You know, Granger, this could actually be fun for you…if you'd just get that stick out of your arse." After a short pause, he smirked and added "So that I can shove my stick up your arse."

Lucius reprimanded him with a laugh. "Oh, Draco, how crude."

"Sorry, Father. I just couldn't resist."

Hermione's chest was going to explode, the muscle behind her ribs was ticking at a thousand beats per minute. She closed her eyes again, as if she could pretend it was a nightmare. It was worse than that, though, it was a real-life nightmare. This was it. She was going to be raped and likely tortured by Draco and Lucius Malfoy. Two men whom she hated – and they were laughing about it! All the anxiety she had experienced the past six weeks – every creak of the floor, every turn of a knob, every time she was approached she had feared that would be the moment she would be killed or raped. She had survived all those moments only for this one to arrive. The cruel twist of fate being that instead of some nameless, faceless nobody defiling her, she knew her attackers. She would never be able to get their faces and voices out of her mind.

Deciding there was no use in crying, she opened her eyes and kept her face expressionless as she stood and stepped from the table, moving away from the wizards. An overwhelming sense of panic washed over her as she slowly walked into the center of the room. She was trembling with fear and her movements were hesitant as she glanced nervously around the room. When her eyes landed on the door, her fight or flight impulse took over. Before she had even consciously decided she was going to do it, she was flying across the room, desperately grabbing the knob, willing it open with all her might. She pulled and jiggled it urgently as she heard Draco laugh behind her. "Look Father, she wants to play! Capture and rape the Mudblood princess is one of my favorite games."

Merlin help me! More despair than she had ever felt in her life poured through her. The tears had broke despite her resolve, and they streamed down her face. Her eyes fluttered closed and she willed the door to unlock. Please! She felt a jolt of magic shoot through her as the knob clicked. For a moment, she was stunned. She had just utilized wandless magic! She had never wielded it successfully before despite multiple, frantic attempts.
With no time to dwell on her triumph, she pushed her thoughts aside as adrenaline spiked through her, blood rushing in her ears. *Run!* She dashed through the door and down the hall, feeling a jolt of smugness at the exclamations she heard from the two dumbfounded wizards behind her. She had no idea where to go or which way to turn.

She heard Draco's irritated voice behind her, becoming more distant as she moved. "Typical, stupid Gryffindor – rushing out the door with no plan or knowledge of where she might go." She was feeling dizzy from drink and her legs were heavy as she sprinted. Spotting a staircase at the end of the hall, she headed in that direction. The lure of freedom and escape pushed her to move faster.

She was almost to the steps when her escape was halted by Lucius Apparating right in front of her. In her altered state, there was no way she could stop herself fast enough and she crashed into him with an "Oomph!" It stole the breath right from her lungs. She looked up at him in stunned disbelief at how sturdy he was, running into Lucius Malfoy was like colliding with a brick wall.

His hands shot out to grab her, preventing her from falling over. His arms were very strong. She struggled, attempting to kick and bite, but he held her arms pinned to her sides. He made light work of spinning her around and pulling her close so that her back was pressed to his front. His built arms wrapped around her like a thick, coiling snake, preventing her from getting anywhere despite her cries and frantic struggles.

He leaned down, his breath hot on her ear as he spoke quietly and calmly. "Stop fighting, stop biting, or this will be much worse for you. You cannot escape, there is no way for you out of here. The wards are set so you cannot leave."

She continued to fight, even knowing now that it was completely useless. She was unable to just do nothing, giving up meant letting them win. She didn't want them to win. His strength continued to surprise her. He shifted his arms and pulled her even closer until she was completely pinned and unable to move at all. His body felt warm and hard pressed up behind hers. As ridiculous as it was, his embrace calmed her. She felt a blush of warmth began to spread over her skin as he held her, accompanied by a sense of security she knew was so very false. *It's the alcohol!* She told herself, astonished by her unwanted reaction.

Realizing there was no use in fighting, her body did the only thing it was allowed – it forced sobs up her throat to ring through the air. She crumbled and would have collapsed to the floor had Lucius not scooped her up. He continued whispering words she could barely hear as he carried her back to his suite. "The Dark Lord expects this act to be completed tonight. You cannot win. You *must* relax and go with it. If you continue to resist it will be that much more horrible for you. Either way, you will be taken tonight, by both of us." After a moment, he added. "Perhaps more than once."

Feeling exhausted before anything had really even started, Hermione whimpered and let her head fall onto Lucius's shoulder as they entered the suite. Draco was undressed to just his trousers, a condescending look on his face as he watched her being carried in.

"Impressive bit of wandless magic there, Granger. Too bad it won't do you any good. It won't save you, especially after the bonding."

His words got her attention and her head shot up, her eyes meeting his. The sudden movement caused the room to spin. She scolded herself once again for consuming so much of the wine so quickly.

Draco smiled maliciously. "Oh, did we fail to mention that part? When we fuck you, there will be a slave bonding. It's only temporary mind you, since – you know – we might not be *keeping* you."
"What?" She barely whispered. She hadn't thought this could get any more horrifying. Oh, she had been so very wrong.

Lucius set her down on her feet, near the bathroom suite, giving her a look of warning. She was frustrated her body was still quivering. *Pull yourself together, witch. You are stronger than this.*

"Yes, Miss Granger. The wine you so *eagerly* drank contained a potion which binds you to serve us after certain...*acts* are performed this evening." His gaze wandered to her chest and then back to her eyes. She didn't miss how the ice grey irises darkened slightly. "We will each claim a virgin orifice. I will take your cunt and Draco your arse."

Her expression turned from one of terrified curiosity to mortified horror. She watched as he swallowed hard and looked away from her as if he was embarrassed by what he had just said to her. "If you are, in fact, a virgin," he continued after clearing his throat. "The binding will be very strong. If you have lied, and are actually experienced, the binding will still hold. Regrettably, it won't be as strong." He looked back at her as he began unfastening the front of his robes and he watched her eyes drop to his fingers before flying back to his. She took a couple of steps back towards the bathroom door, fumbling for the handle behind her. She knew she was only prolonging the inevitable, but every fiber of her being was screaming at her to find a way out of this horror show.

"What exactly does the binding do?" she whispered, her voice was shaky and raw. She was afraid to ask for fear of the answer. It fascinated her when Lucius avoided her eyes again. He turned his head and nodded at his son, indicating Draco should take over the dialogue. Draco gave a malicious grin.

"Oh, you're going to *love* this, Granger," Draco spoke up. "It's quite extraordinary, really. According to Severus, fucking you will bind you to us. You will be forced to follow any command – *any* – that we give you. I could tell you to fuck a beater bat, and you'd have to do it." He laughed at her mortified expression before pressing on. "You won't be able to escape or harm us. You won't be able to prevent yourself from doing anything we command. You'll be a right old obedient Mudblood slut, just as you should be. Wandless magic or not, you will be ours to *control*."

*Gods, he couldn't make his glee any more evident, could he? Way to show your hand, you disgusting little ferret.* Hermione's mind whirled with her renewing anger. She much preferred the anger to the hopelessness.

He was still talking and she forced herself to listen. She had to know what she was up against. "You will be compelled to stay in this state until we (or the Dark Lord) finds it is no longer needed or beneficial." He paused for effect. "Or you die."

She forced herself to ignore his last sentence, instead grasping on something he had said at the beginning with the first blossom of hope she had felt in six weeks. "Professor Snape is…alive? How is that possible? I saw him die."

Draco was now down to his boxer shorts. He draped his trousers over a chair with his robes before turning back to her. "Father found him before it was too late. He petrified him to stop the progression of the bleeding and to prevent the spread of the venom. He left him petrified until after the battle." Draco smiled at Lucius, adoration and respect was apparent. "The Dark Lord was most pleased."

*With a slight upturn of the corners of his mouth, Lucius looked haughty once again. "It was 'Cissa's doing, really. She always had a soft spot for Severus. She was the one who found him. After the battle, the Dark Lord was in a marvelous mood, basking in the glory of his easy defeat of the Boy-Who-Died. He was thrilled his trusted servant was still alive, regretful for what he had been driven to do. Severus came very close to dying, but with the expert and quick help of the Dark Lord's personal healer, he is once again in the Dark Lord's favor and inner circle."*
Draco was watching her face carefully and smirked, knowingly. "Don't get your hopes up, Granger. We know that Snape was playing both sides of the game, waiting to see who the victor would be. But the victor was the Dark Lord, Princess, and Snape is more devoted to him now than ever. He will not help you." His smirk turned into a leering sneer. "As a matter of fact, he has his own little…pet."

Draco's eyes lit up suddenly and he looked at Lucius with excitement. "Oh, perhaps ole Sev would be up for our pets playing together? Two Gryffindor pussies tussling in the sandbox?" He grinned evilly, looking back at Hermione. "Or even better – a mud bath?"

Tuning the Malfoy men out, Hermione's mind spun with this news. Perhaps, despite what they said, her old Professor would help her. And who was this pet of his that Draco mentioned? A Gryffindor? Someone Hermione knew? Perhaps they could help each other.

She was drawn out of her thought process by a pat on her bottom. "Freshen up, use the restroom if you need to. Prepare yourself." Hermione looked up at Lucius, he was glaring down his aristocratic nose at her. This time it wasn't fear that overcame her, but a deep-seated feeling of rage. Who was this wizard to pat her on the behind like she was...like she was a mindless little tart?! She shot him a scathing look, eliciting an amused expression from the elder Malfoy. Fuming, wanting to rage against him, but knowing she couldn't, she stepped into the restroom. She took the extra effort to slam the door behind herself. She leaned back against the beautifully carved piece of wood, forcing herself to take deep, calming breaths. After a few minutes to collect herself, the anger began to ebb away and the feeling of dread and hopelessness began to wash over her once again.

She distracted herself by looking around. The bathroom was monstrous. It was done in a beautiful and calming pale blue-grey walls with an unusual black and grey tile flooring. The tile gave the room a very masculine flair. To her right was a massive bath that could easily fit six people. It had stunning Turkish tiles in teals and reds making up the basin and sides of the tub. There was a large picture window beside the bathtub, allowing a leisurely soak while admiring the beautiful view of the vast grounds. She could see a swimming pool, a quidditch field, a barn, pastures for miles, and a lake in the distance. He did not have the same view of the gardens her suite had held. A quidditch field? Really? How ostentatious. She looked to her left where there was a large shower with two frisbee sized shower heads, glass doors, and glass walls surrounding it. In front of her were two sinks with a grey, marble vanity. The mirrors were stunning, ornately carved and gilded. Finally, there was a door on the other side of the shower that she found led to the toilet.

She lifted her skirt as she crossed the room to the loo and slid the silk panties down her legs. She sat down, emptying her bladder as she contemplated what was about to happen. She really had no choice. She realized that fighting would do no good. Tonight wasn't just about sex for them, it was about power. Their power over her...and they already had it. She could continue to fight and make the game that much more thrilling for the evil bastards or she could quietly submit and perhaps end it all that much sooner.

Her bladder empty, she stepped to the sink and washed her hands while looking at herself in the mirror. Next time you see yourself, you will no longer be a virgin. She slid her eyes shut, drawing on the very little inner strength she had remaining, before turning back towards the door. She paused one last time. They may take and control your body, but they can't control your mind. They can't take your intellect. Whatever happens, it's not your choice. It's not your fault. You are a victim, but that doesn't mean you have to act like one. Don't let them break you! Show them who Hermione Granger really is.
She stepped through the bathroom door to find Draco standing by the bed in nothing but blue silk boxer shorts. Lucius was unbuttoning his sleeves and she eyed him as he proceeded to slide off his dress robes. She stood, immobile, not sure where to go or what to do. Draco had a knowing leer on his ugly pointed mug as he scanned her up and down.

She looked away from him, which is when she noticed there was a large mirror next to the bed, so that when on the bed, you could see yourself. Lovely! she thought, even more determined to keep her eyes shut through the entire ordeal.

Her attention quickly shot to the elder Malfoy when his voice rang out. "Take your dress off, Hermione," he implored her gruffly as he unbuttoned his trousers. His soft grey eyes, as well as Draco’s darker grey ones, were glued to her. Draco had a malicious and leering sneer, but Lucius watched her without expression. Only his eyes displayed interest as they moved to her breasts, down her dress, and back up again.

She swallowed the lump in her throat. She had nothing left to lose. So, unable to stop herself, she pleaded with him. "Please, please don't do this to me," her voice was so soft it was almost a whisper.

She was looking at Lucius, knowing her eyes were brimming with tears again. For some reason, she felt he was her best option. She watched as he froze in the act of undressing and looked at her sharply, his face blanching. A flash of something quickly crossed his face. Regret? Sympathy? It was fleeting, however, and his expression went hard and stony once again.

"Take it off now," he commanded, cocking an eyebrow. "Don't make me say it again."

Hermione clenched her jaw to dam the tears that wanted to spill again, knowing the battle was lost. She slowly reached behind her to find the dress had mini hooks all the way down her spine. As her arms arched behind her, struggling with the first hook, her chest was thrust forward from the effort. Her fingers fumbled and her eyes were on the floor as she refused to look at the soon-to-be rapists. She could feel their eyes on her as she fought with the fastenings. Be strong, Hermione! It's just sex! It's nothing. There's so much hype around it, don't let yourself fall into that trap. Take it for what it is, a physical act. Nothing more.

She squeezed her eyes shut as she began to work on the second hook. "This is taking too long. Can't you even undress yourself?" Draco scolded, marching towards and around her. She dropped her hands to her sides, cursing the tears that wanted to fall from his stinging remark.

A flash of anger overcame her despair. "Well then perhaps this isn't a dress to have your slave put in if you want her to undress herself!" She shot a contemptuous look over her shoulder. "Take it up with your house elf. Evil little thing insisted it was 'just perfect for the masters!'" she snapped waspsily. Her eyes widened as she heard Lucius snort a laugh and she looked up to him in surprise. He quickly cleared his throat and looked away from her.

"Whatever," Draco muttered before shoving her forward, further away from the bathroom door. She stumbled and he did nothing to try and help her from falling. She caught herself awkwardly as he stepped closer behind her, jerking her upright with his hands on the dress as he forcefully pulled and ripped at the fastenings. She then felt his hands on her lower back as he once again tugged and tore, causing the dress to collapse at her feet, leaving her in nothing but the silver, lace bra and panty set Tinny had dressed her in.

Draco grabbed and squeezed her right butt cheek, his mouth close to her ear. "Nice and tight, prime for fucking." He slapped where he had just squeezed, causing a muffled gasp to leave her throat, and then added with a sneer. "If fucking filth is something you enjoy."

Don't let him goad you! Ignore him! He's trying to upset you! She kept her eyes down and could see
Draco’s bare feet as he moved around in front of her, standing next to Lucius. His toes were long and elegant, it bothered her that they pulled her attention. "Look up, Hermione. Look at us. We want to see the full picture of what the Dark Lord has...gifted us." Lucius demanded.

Hermione lifted her caramel eyes to find theirs were not on her face. She felt her skin flush from embarrassment as the two wizards scanned her form. Lucius cocked an eyebrow and began to walk around her. She picked a spot on the far wall to look at, distancing herself from her shame. "Not bad, I'm rather pleased. You looked rather scrawny in your dress, yet you have very lovely hips and your breasts are a nice size," she felt like cattle being appraised at an auction as they leered and commented about her body.

"I guess she's fuckable," Draco added. "She's average, at best."

Lucius shot Draco what seemed like a surprised glance from behind her, his eyes quickly going back to the smooth and flawless skin of her back. "Take this off." He tapped the back of her bra and then walked around to the front of her until he was standing next to Draco. When she didn't move, his voice became harsh as he demanded more dominantly. "Take it off. Now." His tone was clipped. She sighed, trying to give the impression they were boring her. She had to drop her gaze from the safe spot on the wall to focus on the task at hand. When she did, she couldn't help but notice the tenting of both Wizard's boxers. She tried not to look, and she started trembling again. She reached behind her back and unhooked the clasp, causing the strapless lace to simply fall to the floor with her dress.

"Nice breasts, indeed," Lucius added, he said with a slight upturn of the corners of his mouth. It wasn't quite a smile. He started stroking himself through his boxers as he leered.

Draco cocked his head to the side, his familiar, drawling voice making her skin crawl. "I don't know about that. They seem kind of saggy for an eighteen-year-old. Pansy has perfect tits, but then again, Pansy is a pureblood. Superior in every way."

Lucius ignored Draco. He was too busy starting at Hermione's chest. Hermione was frozen, not wanting this to go any further. It was bad enough she was about to be raped, did Draco have to humiliate her as well? Although, why she was surprised, she didn't know. He hadn't changed at all. He was the same Draco he had been since first year.

"The knickers, Hermione," Lucius demanded, his voice slightly hoarse with obvious arousal. She took a breath, steeling herself to be strong before hooking her thumbs under the straps of the knickers and sliding them down her thighs until they slipped from her fingers, sliding to the floor. She kicked them away, unable to stop herself from putting a little force behind it.

"Gods, I can't believe this is happening. What the bloody fuck? She tilted her head up defiantly, silently daring them to say something scathing. What she found almost made her laugh.

Neither wizard said anything and the room was deafeningly quiet. They had matching expressions, father and son. Their eyes were wide and jaws slack. They looked ridiculous. If it wasn't such an awful thing about to happen, she most definitely would have laughed at the absurdity of it. Her eyes focused on Draco and he caught her watching him. He suddenly stood up straight and his dazed expression turned into a leer. She looked at him, her eyes knowing. He could say anything he wanted, but the gig was up. She knew he found her body appealing. She took a bit of power back for herself.

Draco looked down his nose at her, his sneer a look she had seen on his face hundreds of times since she started at Hogwarts. It was almost disappointing to her he still made that same face. "You have three holes for fucking, that's all that really matters." He turned and walked away. She felt her face drop. _Fuck_. For just a moment she had held the power, and just like that it was gone again.
Lucius shrugged, rolling his eyes at his belligerent son. "Fine. I'm taking her first, then," he said simply and quietly. His eyes continued to move up and down her hourglass form. He walked towards her until he was towering over her. His large, six-foot-one-inch frame dwarfed her five-foot-four-inch one. She stared into his chest, unable to help but note his toned and prominent pectorals, his smooth skin, the ridges of a shockingly defined six-pack, and the trail of white, soft hair from his navel to under the band of his now hugely tented boxers. He was in astonishingly amazing shape for a man in his … What? … Very late thirties? Early forties?

She swallowed nervously, willing herself to stay calm. Pretend he's Ron! She shouted to herself internally as she felt his hands reach out and gently touch her shoulders before tracing down her chest and over the swell of her breasts to her nipples. Her eyes now closed, she felt him pinch her gently, causing an unwelcome shiver to run down her body. Her breasts responded as if they had a mind of their own, her dusky nipples tightening and extending under his ministrations as gooseflesh bubbled across her skin.

A soft chuckle came from him. "Hmm, I think our little witch is going to work out just fine, Draco. She's very sensitive – very responsive – and I've hardly touched her." His hands began to gently cup and massage her breasts. She found herself surprised with how gentle he was being. Determinedly keeping her eyes shut, she tried to convince herself it might not be that bad. If she pretended...pretended this was something she wanted. If she let herself imagine this wasn't all some horrible nightmare that she just wanted to wake up from. Who are you trying to kid, Hermione Jean Granger? You're about to be raped. Snap the fuck out of it!

One of his warm, strong hands remained on her breast as the other moved down her stomach to the small strip of trimmed curls at the apex of her thighs. She tried to be still as fingers spread her open and rubbed her. Touched her where no fingers had ever been – save her own – and she had never touched herself in this way. Never for arousal. She had tried to once, in sixth year, but it hadn't felt particularly good and she had stopped immediately. This felt...strange, though. As one hand smoothed across her breast, gently plucking and rolling a nipple, the other moved on her in such a way that she felt her breathing begin to speed up. Her head was starting to feel fuzzy. A soft gasp of pleasure slipped past her lips as an invisible cord pulled that connected her nipples to her womb. This must be from the wine! Ahh, yes. That was it. It was because of the wine that she felt this way. It was because of the wine that this felt almost...good.

She began to relax, convinced her body was responding like this because of the guzzled alcohol. She did not need to feel guilty for enjoying it, it wasn't her fault. She felt his fingers become more vigorous and urgent between her legs and at the same time she felt a warmth, a delicious clenching, coiling deep in her belly. Something was building. It was a strange feeling, and she became nervous. She bit her lip and felt herself start to tremble, the fear of her own arousal adding to her confusion.

Lucius pressed a cheek against the side of her head, the length of his body coming in more contact with hers. "Relax, Hermione. Let yourself feel this. Don't fight it." His words were whispered soothingly into her ear, so quietly that she knew Draco couldn't have heard. Suddenly, she was scooped into his strong arms again. A squawk being pulled out of her unwillingly as he carried her to the bed and lay her back on it. He nestled her head on a soft pillow before backing away to slip his boxers off. He climbed onto the bed, spreading her legs with his knees and resting his hips between them.

The hard, hot insistency of his cock on her inner thigh brought Hermione's panic and fear back to the forefront of her mind, but his hand once again began manipulating her body, turning her against herself. He rubbed the sweet spot between her legs. The coil inside her began to move faster as he focused on a very sensitive spot. "Oh, God," she whispered, turning her face away as the insistent manipulation sped up and his other hand once again found her breast, then the sensitive peak at the
tip of it. Her voice betrayed her, letting out a moan of pleasure.

"That's it, relax. Just feel," he whispered. Then suddenly she felt something start to move inside her. It slipped in and out slowly, gently, and through her heady haze, she realized it must be a finger. It felt good and she felt her hips move forward, gently thrusting towards his hand. She didn't do it consciously.

"That's it. Good girl," he whispered soothingly. Shockingly, his praise relaxed her. She didn't know what she was doing. The sensation changed after a few moments, all of a sudden she felt fuller. She assumed this change to be two fingers inside of her as what must be his thumb continued to rub the special spot that felt so good. It sounded wet and loud as his fingers started to become more aggressive, firmly pumping in and out.

Suddenly, his fingers pulled away and something large was pressing against her. It felt huge and she realized it was his erection. He was starting to press into her. This is it! She told herself, trying to shy away from the rising sense of panic. "Oh, Gods. Please, don't," she whispered, utterly desolate. She turned her head away, breaking the contact of his face on hers. She felt his movement pause momentarily before his fingers moved back to that special spot again, fondling her furiously. Causing more of that coiling, building sensation. The return of that delicious awareness made her forget about the battering ram trying to force its way inside her and she retuned her focus to what felt good.

"Relax. Let yourself enjoy it, Hermione." His kind words allowed her to relax and the use of her name was welcoming. She had been called nothing but Mudblood, whore, witch, and many times nothing at all. It made her feel like a person again, to hear her name. The clenching and coiling in her belly became more intense as he continued to massage her nub. She willed herself not to fight it as he whispered quietly in her ear again. "Let it go. Breathe. Just feel, Hermione."

A tear slid down her cheek. For what, she didn't know. She just felt overwhelmed. Overwhelmed with fear, arousal, terrible confusion, and this delicious feeling boiling up inside of her. It built and built and then she clenched as an explosion of pleasure overcame her. Her heart pounding, her breath hitching, she felt waves of pleasure pulse through her belly and her core. It was the most amazing thing, and for a split second she thought. So, this is what all the fuss is about. But then, there was pain. Intense pain. Lucius had thrust his hips forward, ripping her open, taking her maidenhead. She let out a cry that choked into a sob as she felt him tearing her in two. She tensed, every muscle in her body clenching, and he froze.

A strange feeling came over her as he whispered. "Relax." His voice raw, almost choked sounding. "You need to relax, Hermione. It will feel better if you aren't so tense." It was strange how her body obeyed his whisper. Every muscle simply let go. She felt the tension in her stomach, her thighs, her back, her shoulders, and even her neck...just calm. Like someone had flipped a switch. She felt heavier as she settled more into the soft pillow and mattress beneath her.

"Good girl," he whispered once again, and once again his praise made her feel warm. She lay still, overwhelmed with what was happening. She had just had her first orgasm and was having sex with Lucius Malfoy. And it felt good...at the same time it felt wrong. She should be fighting him, yet her body was relaxed and not fighting. Her brain, on the other hand, was screaming. She bit her lip to stifle the sob that wanted to break through.

He began to pull back and thrust into her as her body continued to melt. "Ah, yes...that's it. Now, move your hips up and back as I move in and out. Meet me." Once again, her body simply did as he instructed and, to her devastation, she found it felt good. The pain was almost gone, it was just a sore feeling. She felt full and filled and he was hitting a spot that was so deep inside her...it made her whimper a gasp. His pace began to increase with the positive sounds that were being forced from her
throat of their own accord. "Yes, so fucking tight. So good...such a good girl," he whispered, his voice still raw. Another, low moan of pleasure escaped her chest, tears once again leaving her eyes without her permission. One of his hands grabbed her wrists and held them above her head, as his head dipped and his mouth moved to her left breast, where he began to nibble as he continued to move within her, his pace and force increasing.

She tried to stifle a gasp as he bit down on the nipple softly and then ran his tongue over her breast as his pace began to quicken even more. She gasped as the spot deep within her was massaged more forcefully, small sex noises erupting from her throat against her will. Shut up, shut up, shut up! She chanted silently. You sound like a wanton whore!

"Merlin, you feel good," he whispered. "You will come to my room and climb onto my bed at six every morning so that I can fuck you."

"Ok – ah!" she whimpered. Not liking that she had agreed so easily, yet not able to stop herself from saying it. Oh my God! It's the potion! She suddenly realized what was happening. Her body's response to his command to relax, her immediate acquiescence to his instruction to come to his bed, her hips following his command...it was all because of the potion. The realization didn't change anything, though. She couldn't stop herself. She continued to lie there relaxed and thrusting her hips with his as he fucked her, she had no ability to fight it.

The coiling was back in her belly, steadily clenching tighter. She didn't want to come again, she didn't want him to be able to control her so entirely. But she was so close...she was going to...going to...suddenly he froze and let out a moan, bucking hard three more times as he shouted. "Fuuuckkk!" She felt his cock pulsing inside her and after a minute, when he slowly pulled out, liquid rushed out of her. The building orgasm ebbed out almost painfully and her hips rolled, trying to find somewhere for the tension to go. He rolled onto his back, next to her, not noticing her dilemma. His chest was heaving with heavy breaths.

She lay there, frozen. Unsure what she should do next. "Very nice. You'll do nicely." He said as he simply climbed over her and hopped off the bed, leaving her behind.

A tingle of ice rushed through her at his cold words. She didn't understand why she felt a sense of loss when he left the bed. She watched his retreating form from under the protection of her eyelashes as he walked into the bathroom, closing the door behind him. He didn't even look back at her. She swallowed a lump down as she rolled onto her side, pulling her legs up so that she was in a small ball. She just wanted to disappear and not think about what had just happened. She didn't want to think about what he had just made her feel.

"Finally!"

Hermione's head snapped up to the sight of a leering, naked Draco Malfoy. She had forgotten he was even there, much less that he was about to take her as well. Based on what Lucius had told her, Draco would be taking her in a very unnatural way.

She watched him with wide eyes as he hopped on the bed and straddled over her. Her stomach roiled like she was going to be sick at the feel of his length on her bare skin. He reached forward and roughly took her breasts into his hands. He slapped them around, not too hard, but enough to make them juggle and shake. He grinned. "Oh, Granger. This is going to be fun."
Chapter Three

Disclaimer: Anything you recognize, we do not own and I'm not making any money off it. I write for fun.

Non-Con/Heavy M rating – if we could rate this NC-17, I would: This is what we would consider literotica. It has extremely controversial issues such as non-consensual sex/rape, extreme violence/torture, war-time crimes, heavy lemons (smut), and the list goes on. Rape is a personal journey for each victim. No two rape victims are alike. You will see continuous rape over a long period of time in this story, a magical slave bonding, a touch of Stockholm Syndrome, and more. IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT... PLEASE, JUST MOVE ON. THANK YOU :)

Adult Tags: 3Plus, Abuse, Angst, Bi(?), Bondage, Controversial, Dom, DP (?), D/s, Fetish (?), Fingering, Hurt/Comfort, Hand Job (?), Humiliation, Mind Control, M/F, M/M(?), F/F (?), Oral sex, Spanking, Toys (?), Masturbation, sexual intercourse, rape, torture, beating, anal intercourse, rimming, BDSM, extreme emotional situations, and others we probably haven't thought of yet.

Read at your own risk. If you don't like it - we don't need to hear from you. Flames are not necessary or welcome - just walk away. We realize this story isn't for everyone.

In this chapter the abuse has been turned up a notch, which is why warnings have been reposted.

FYI - This story has a long journey ahead and the relationships will change and evolve over time.

Thanks to LissaDream for co-authoring this story with me. Love you, LD!!

As always, thank you for reading, kudos, bookmarks, subscriptions and comments!!

Chapter Three

His eyes raked down her body. He grabbed his wand from the bedside table and waved it over her, casting a cleansing charm. It caused an unnerving tingling in her groin. She squeezed her eyes shut, realizing this was going to be nothing like Lucius. Lucius had ended up being kind to her. He had been gentle right up until the moment he had rammed into her, but his words had been soothing and he had tried to make it somewhat easier on her. She supposed with a virgin, there was no way to get away from the pain. He had taken the time and effort to give her pleasure. She didn't think Draco was going to do the same.

He licked his lips and leaned forward, taking her right breast into his mouth almost savagely. She flinched as he flicked her nipple with his tongue before sitting back up. His eyes roved up and down her, appraising her, then they then shot back up to lock with hers. "This is where you belong, you know that, right?" She didn't answer or respond, but felt her face cloud over with embarrassment and shame as he continued. "On your back, a vessel for the pleasure of better wizards." He said the words simply, without a sneer. To him it was just a simple fact. It was as Voldemort had told the boys at Hogwarts: it was their right as purebloods to fuck and use Mudbloods as they wished. Clearly Draco had "drank the purple Kool-aid" as the American saying went.
His hands began to move over her, squeezing, plucking, and lightly slapping the planes and slopes of her body. She felt herself cringe and shy away from him. Her movements only seemed to please him. "Yes, a tight little bod." He looked over at Lucius who had reappeared from the loo and was donning a robe. "You don't care if I let Blaise and Theo have a go with her, do you, Father?" He looked back at her, raising an eyebrow at the shocked look on her face. "They'd love a go with the princess of Gryffindor."

She heard Lucius chuckle and felt more shame slice through her body. *Get ahold of your emotions, Hermione. Don't let them see how they're making you feel. It only gives them more control.*

Lucius' voice came from the other side of the room. "Hmm. Well, normally I would say the more the merrier, but considering there is a slight possibility she will be your wife – or perhaps even mine – it would be best if your friends hadn't sampled her charms. Once it's determined she will not be Malfoy, then I don't care who you lend her out to. As long as she comes back unmarked and unharmed. Only you and I shall have that right."

She closed her eyes, disgusted at being discussed in such a way, as though she were a common whore or a hound to be lent out for a hunt. Like she wasn't in the room, lying right there, hearing every word. She knew she shouldn't and knew it was irrational, but she was disappointed and hurt all the same that the man who had just taken her virginity and given her her first orgasm was talking about her in such a way. She had been raped, but it had seemed like...*Stop it, Hermione. You were simply raped. It was nothing more. He used you and didn't look back.*

Her attention was jolted back to the wizard straddling her legs. Draco had stopped talking and watched her for a minute. "I really want to fuck your mouth. It's been a fantasy of mine to shut you up that way for years." She let an incredulous growl slip through her lips and he contemplated her stormy gaze for a moment before sighing. "Nope, not until after you've been bound to me." He wiggled his eyebrows, and whispered conspiratorially. "I wouldn't want you to bite me, after all." He chuckled at his own sordid joke.

She felt a rage begin to build inside of her. Rage for this wizard, more rage than she had felt towards even Voldemort. Draco had tormented her for over six years. She was furious with God, with fate, with herself for ending up here...at his mercy. Of all the awful, nasty, hateful wizards she could have been bonded to...why had fate stuck her with him! Laying before him...naked and exposed. Being prodded, insulted, teased, degraded, and about to be raped...a second time. She could think of nothing but ripping his eyes out of their sockets. She never wanted them on her again. Or his hands. Or his mouth...and definitely not his disgusting prick.

As she seethed, his eyes moved from hers and he let out a breath as he looked her over. He was like a kid with a birthday cake who didn't know which part to cut into first. His hands began to glide up and down her, his eyes on her face. "Look at me, Granger," he demanded. She opened her eyes and was overcome with such a fierce loathing that she was unable to stop herself. She spat hard in his face, hitting him on the cheek.

He froze, a look of shock on his face. His hand reached up very slowly and he wiped his cheek. He looked at the spittle on his fingers with an almost incredulous expression for a moment and then quickly raised his hand higher and slapped her across the face – hard.

Her face whipped to the side, the force of his slap stunning her. She pulled her hand up to her cheek, tears spilling down her face from the awful sting.

He grabbed his wand. "Accio cravat." His neck tie from his formal robes flew to his hand. He waved his wand over it, transfiguring it into a long strip of fabric before gripping her face hard in on hand, forcefully shoving it into her mouth, and tying it behind her head. More tears fell and she tried not to
gag as the fabric dried out her mouth and tickled the back of her throat. "There, no more spitting."

He sneered at her once again. Then spoke slowly, as if she were too stupid to understand him. "I'm going to fuck you, daily. Multiple times...every day. When I want, where I want, and in whatever way I want. I'm going to fuck your mouth until you think you'll vomit, your sweet little rosebud until you won't be able to sit, your pussy until it's wrecked. I'm going to tie you up, string you from the ceiling, whip you until your arse is red and flaming." He seemed to relish the widening of her eyes, the horrified expression behind them. He let out a low laugh before dragging his tongue long her cheek just under where the gag was tied and she cringed away from him. "And you know what you're going to do about it?" He paused, enjoying the torment her eyes so deliciously conveyed.

"Absolutely nothing." His gaze slid down her body once again. She recoiled under his lascivious perusal. It made her feel filthy. Father and son were night and day. Lucius had at least tried to make it a pleasant experience. Because rape can be pleasant, Hermione. What the fuck is the matter with you?

He leaned over her before sliding down her stomach and to the apex of her thighs. He forced her legs apart and rubbed her roughly with his hand. "Hmmm, lets moisten you up a little, shall we?" Anger still raging through her, she tried to close her legs but he grabbed her knees in a bruising grip, forcing them apart. He moved his face between her thighs and she let out a muffled squeal of protest when his tongue began to lick up and down her folds. She reached down and grabbed his hair, pulling hard. He grabbed her wrist, squeezing it violently until she was forced to let go. He looked up at her.

"If you touch me again, I'll tie your hands, too." His eyes were glittering like sun spots off a frozen pond, daring her to continue trying to fight him.

She stilled, not wanting her hands tied. She closed her eyes. Stop it, Hermione. You can't prevent this. Not tonight. Be still. Your making this more exciting for him.

He watched her, making sure she wasn't going to grab him or hit him again, before dipping his head to her folds once more. He darted his tongue in and out of her pussy. She was battling with the realization that it felt crude and abusive the way he was treating her, yet his mouth on her was causing her body pleasure at the same time. He moved his tongue up to the pleasure point that Lucius had focused on and began to nibble and suck, causing her to squirm and grunt through the gag. He continued his ministrations and began to finger her. She groaned, frustrated with how rough he was being, yet turned on by the stimulation.

He pulled back, his eyes glued to the pink folds between her legs. "Mmm, he's right. You are very responsive." He rubbed her with his fingers. "Nice and wet." He licked her one more time. "Roll over, Rover and face the mirror," he demanded as he hopped off the bed. Hermione felt panic and dread build again as she knew what was coming. She froze, unable to move. She took deep breaths through her nose. She felt like she was suffocating. She heard him open a bedside drawer. "I told you to roll over." His hands grabbed her hips, flipping her easily. He used both palms to spread her cheeks and she cried out, the sound muffled by the gag. Instinct taking over, she reached behind, trying to slap his hand away.

He grabbed her hand, stilling it. "If you don't stop, I won't use the numbing potion on your arse."

Tears streamed down her face as she stilled. He watched for a minute before once again spreading her open and coating something cold over her rear entrance. "This will relax the muscle and numb the area. I'm doing you a favor," he said with a touch of impatience. "Maybe next time I'll just let you feel every painful inch. Then you'll know how merciful I really am being."

She resigned herself to ignore him, trying to distance herself from the experience. She was forced back to reality when she felt a tingling sensation as he whispered a spell. "Now you're nice and clean as well."
"Up on your hands and knees, pet. It's time for the Princess of Gryffindor to get it up the arse."

Fighting tears yet again at his cruelty and abusiveness, she pushed herself into position. "Look in the mirror," he commanded. Not giving her a chance to respond, he leaned forward and grabbed her braid forcing her face up. He was still standing beside the bed behind her. She watched as his head dipped down behind her body. He spread her once again before his tongue swirled her pucker. She yelped from the unwelcome pleasure versus revulsion at his assault. *What is wrong with me, why does that feel good?* He forced the tip of his tongue in and out and then pulled back, looking her in the mirror, his voice condescending. "See, Granger? Your body is my play toy, just as the Dark Lord said. I enjoy my toys. I use them…a lot."

She watched as he climbed onto the bed behind her, stroking his erection. His penis looked large and the tip was dark purple as he stroked it. He looked at her in the mirror, a smirk on his face. "I see you looking at my cock. Don't worry, you'll become intimately acquainted with it once you are bound to me."

Morbidly unable to look away, she watched as he positioned himself behind her. "Here we go," he whispered. She watched in horror as he grabbed his glans and moved closer to her. She felt what she assumed was a finger rub her entrance and wiggle its way in. She flinched at the awkward intrusion. It didn't hurt, she did feel numb, but she felt pressure. She felt like she needed to move her bowels, but knew he had just cleaned her out with a charm. His finger moved around and then she felt another finger move into her. She could feel him stretching her. His eyes on his fingers as he worked her, he said simply. "You have a perfect ass for fucking."

She watched as he straightened up. "Ok, eyes on the mirror, princess. Stay on your hands. I want to watch your face and your tits as I take you this way."

She looked up, exhausted. She just wanted this over. She closed them again as she felt intense pressure and hands on her hips, squeezing her hard, holding her in place. "Open your eyes." He demanded. She opened them to find his eyes on hers. His jaw fell open and she watched as his tongue ran over his teeth before he pushed himself in with a forceful thrust. He smiled and closed his eyes briefly. "Nice," he whispered.

Her body instantly tensed. *Oh God!* Her hands gave out as her chest fell to the bed. His hands held her hips in place, gripping her hips so hard it would likely leave bruises. She hated it. She hated everything about it. She wasn't in pain, but it was very uncomfortable. It was humiliating. It was Draco Malfoy sticking his cock in her ass. He ignored her. His eyes moved down, watching himself slide out and back in, deeper this time. He began thrusting.

His eyes were back on her reflection in the mirror. "Get back up on your hands."

She pushed herself back up as he continued his assault. He smiled as he watched her tormented face in the mirror. He began moving faster causing her tits to sway underneath her, his eyes glued to them. "It looks like the potion worked, but let's be sure." After a couple more thrusts he whispered with malicious glee. "Bark like a dog."

Shocked that her mouth even opened, she was even more stunned when she let out a bark. Draco began to laugh. She looked down at the bed, unwilling to watch him laugh at her. She was so mortified.

He quit laughing and began to let out little grunts as he pumped in and out of her, his pace increasing. Suddenly he reached around her waist and pulled her back so that she was in a tall kneel position, her back arched as he sat on his knees behind her, continuing to piston in. He gently leaned her back onto him. "Keep your eyes on the mirror," he whispered. Immediately her eyes shot up to the mirror. "Massage your tits," he ordered. Her hands quickly moved to her breasts where she began
to fondle them. "Alternate massaging them and pinching your nipples." She watched in the mirror as her hands obeyed his command.

His eyes on the mirror, he whispered. "Mmm, can't deny it, Granger. Your ass was made for fucking and you look so hot taking it." He continued thrusting, watching her.

She observed in revulsion as he pumped her from behind and her hands stayed on her breasts, unable to pull them away. He kissed her cheek, and she flinched away from him. His eyes were on hers in the mirror and he whispered. "Ok, now move your dominant hand to your clit and rub one out for me, okay? I want to feel your walls clamp down on me." He reached up behind her head and untied the gag, tossing it aside.

Her right hand moved to her clit and began to rub. It was awkward and felt nothing like when Lucius had done it. "That's it," he whispered. "Now smile at the mirror, my little pet. You're being watched. Let's give them a good show, shall we?"

Hermione felt numb all over, her brain fuzzy. She heard his voice but had no idea what he said. She felt her mouth move into a smile, but she didn't know or care why.

After a minute, Draco gave her another direction. "Touch yourself like you do when you're alone." When she just continued to fondle herself in an unsure way, he got a confused look on his face. "I know you're compelled to do what I say, so why aren't you getting yourself worked up, huh?" He continued pumping. "Answer me!" He snapped.

She was pulled out of her fog when he raised his voice. She sounded world weary as she answered with a raw voice. "I've never done this before."

He suddenly stopped moving, a bewildered look on his face. "Granger, are you saying you've never had an orgasm before tonight?"

She swallowed, abased at being forced to answer such a personal question. "No, I never have."

He let out an incredulous laugh. "The first time you ever climaxed, it was my father who got you off?"

"Yes," she barely whispered, her voice caught in her throat. Her humiliation complete.

He got a huge smile on his face and he yelled back into the room. "Hey Dad! Guess what? You were her first orgasm...ever! Priceless!" He began pumping her again, shaking his head at the hilarity of it all.

His laughter and taunting finally broke her. A tear slid down her cheek. She started to cry with her eyes frozen to the mirror. Her left hand was still on her breasts; her right still on her clit, flicking in unsure, jerky movements. Doing as he had ordered like a puppet. All with a smile on her face.

"Stop touching yourself and stop smiling for Merlin's sake." He muttered, exasperation replacing the amusement his voice. "Do I have to do everything?" He rolled his eyes. He wanted her to orgasm so that she would tighten on him for his own pleasure. He started to move again, slowly. A heavy sigh escaped his mouth and he said with clear annoyance. "Just close your eyes and lean back into me." His voice suddenly became softer. She did as she was instructed, the binding giving her no alternative. He kept one hand on her hip and another reached around, spreading her open. She felt pressure on her clit and after a moment it began to feel good. "Just relax," he murmured.

He began to move faster with both his hips and his hand. She was so tired, she just wanted him to stop. She wanted to fight him. Just relax. Her body wouldn't allow her mind to fight the command.
She no longer controlled her own actions. He kept fondling her. She shook her head, choking back an outraged sob, she didn't want this. She didn't want to orgasm...not like this. Not with him. But she had no control.

"That's it," he whispered. She felt her breathing pick up and the new, but now familiar, coiling and clenching in her womb as her arousal built. He began manipulating her more vigorously. The delicious but unwanted sensation just kept escalating.

She shook her head. "No, no. Please, stop."

He whispered hoarsely. "Yes, pet. Come on. Let go, relax." His words were said soothingly, like Lucius'. She let out a small moan as she felt her body about to betray her for the second time that night, and then cried out through gritted teeth as the tight coil of pressure erupted. Her core clenched and unclenched repeatedly as her climax tore through her. Her head fell back on his shoulder, her muscles too weak to hold it up.

"Grrrroooooohhhhh, Merlin." He poured himself into her, grunting behind her as he continued to pump through his orgasm before finally freezing with one last, brutal thrust. His chest was heaving against her back and his hand moved up from her clit to her breast, squeezing roughly as he continued to catch his breath. His head collapsed forward onto her shoulder.

After a minute, he let out a slow, shuddering breath. His hands slid to her hips. "Ok, get off me now," he commanded. He sounded as if he was disgusted. She leaned forward and felt him slip out of her, it was an unpleasant sensation that made her wince. Once again, liquid rushed out of her, leaving her feeling dirty and used. She let out a small moan as she felt him slip out of her.

She could hear the deep tenor of male voices, but couldn't tell what was being said. She found she didn't care. She slipped into welcome unconsciousness.

Hermione moaned as she rolled over, flipping her pillow to the cool side. She was thoroughly exhausted, but an unwavering and intense pressure from her bladder was screaming at her. She slowly opened her heavy eyelids and noticed soft moonlight filtering in through fine, linen curtains over the French doors she was facing. This confused her greatly.

"curtains? Moonlight? A soft bed?" Then, it felt like a bludger had struck her as the horrifying memories of where she was and what had happened crashed down on her. She felt as if her stomach had dived right out of her body onto the floor. She forced herself up with her arms and an anguished moan tore through her throat. Her muscles were aching all over as though she had run a marathon. She forced herself into a sitting position, tossing the soft sheets and downy comforter off her. She gingerly moved her legs off the side of the mattress and cautiously slipped out of the bed. Her feet met soft carpeting that felt like velvet. It was such a difference from the damp, cold concrete she had grown use to during her captivity, but her new accommodations had not made the terror and grief of her life dissipate.

She yawned as she padded to the bathroom, dim lights automatically came on as she entered the en suite. Her eyes scanned the space remembering the awful bath that horrid little elf had forced on her. Where Lucius' bathroom had been pale grey, hers was a very soft and pale peach. The marble tile was white and crisp on the floor. Her shower was simple, basic, but she had a lovely tub. It was large and deep with tiles on the bottom that all formed together to make a beautiful mermaid with a stunning green to teal tail, pale ivory skin for her torso and long blond hair that trailed over her
breasts and shoulders. She was turned so that she looked like she was swimming sideways and away, but her face was looking back into the room.

She made her way through the bathroom and noticed her reflection in the mirror over the sink and vanity. Her hair was still in a braid. A braid that was coming apart, her tresses in knots. It was going to be hell dragging a comb through it. She noticed in bewilderment she was wearing a white, low cut night sheath. It was thin and practically see through. Her pink nipples visible as well as the thin thatch of dark hair at the apex of her thighs. What really caught her attention, however, was the welt across her left cheek and a shadow of a bruise just to the right of her chin. She could only guess that the marks were from when Draco slapped her and then grabbed her face to shove the gag in her mouth.

Morbidly curious, she painstakingly pulled the sheath dress off her and took stock. Her arms and shoulders were tired with muscle aches that reminded her of the day after a light to moderate free weight work out. There was a shadow of a bite on her right breast. She looked down and studied it for a moment before turning to her side, she gasped as she saw why her hips were so tender before quickly turning to the other side. She had matching sets of what must be fingertip bruises along each hip. Again, they must be from when Draco had gripped her. Her eyes returned to her face before she quickly averted her own gaze. Shame and humiliation filled her. She should have fought harder, she should have fought so hard they would have had no choice but to kill her. There was this little voice in the back of her head, though. A voice that told her being alive and humiliated was better than being dead and gone. She reached out and snatched it up, hanging onto that notion, for better or for worse. She put the nightgown back on before dismissing herself from the tortures of the mirror.

Completely bewildered as to how she ended up in her bed and in a night sheath at all, she continued towards the toilet. She lifted the lid and turned to sit, finding her leg muscles very weak and tender. As she urinated she felt a burning sensation and the muscles to move her bladder made her rear entrance feel tender. She was only able to evacuate a small amount of urine, yet she had felt like she was about to burst. She sat there for a few minutes, willing the burning to stop. After a few more moments, a couple drips escaped her and the burning intensified once again.

"Brilliant! A bloody UTI!" She muttered to herself. She wanted to cry but was too knackered to put forth the effort.

She wiped, cringing at the discomfort it caused, and stood, gingerly walking to the sink. She remembered getting a UTI when she was much younger. Madam Pomfrey had given her a potion and it had cleared up right away. She didn't know what she would do this time, though. If she told the wizards she was bound to, they would probably be thrilled she was suffering. Well, perhaps not Lucius, she wasn't quite sure about him. He was a rapist, but a somewhat civilized one for the most part. What an oxymoron, Hermione. Are you listening to yourself? Draco was a different story. She reflected back to Lucius, still surprised he had been so gentle with her. There was something off with him...something she couldn't put her finger on. She'd have to think about it more when she wasn't so tired.

She looked in the cabinets, hoping to find a pain reliever or something, but there was nothing. She left the bathroom and headed back into the main chamber. To her right, the French doors with the pale moonlight coming through was very luring. She stepped to them, attempting to open the ornate entry way and get some fresh air but they wouldn't budge. Probably warded so that I can't jump and end this misery.

Still blurry from sleep deprivation, she decided she didn't care at the moment and moved back to the soft bed, climbing into it. The feeling of having to pee was still making her uncomfortable, but not so much that sleep didn't immediately drag her back under. She felt like she had just fallen back to sleep
when she was startled awake, feeling forcefully compelled to go to Lucius' room.

Her eyes only half open, she slid out of bed once again and headed back to the loo. She was still suffering from the awareness of an over-full bladder with that awful burning sensation. She had no more success on the toilet than before, and she knew she would have to say something. An untreated UTI could be painful and, if left too long, deadly. Not knowing why she cared, she went through the motions of washing her hands and face and cleaning her teeth, all the while avoiding her reflection. Her hair would take more time than she felt she had, so she settled for pulling out the rest of the braid and finger coming the mess into a knot high on her head so it was out of her face and off her neck.

Finished with her ablutions, she walked towards her bedroom door, glancing over her shoulder longingly at the marvelous bed. As she crossed the room, she realized she had no idea how to get to Lucius' room. It turned out to be a moot point because when she turned the knob the door wouldn't open.

She sighed and considered just going back to bed, but that idea quickly seemed terrible as wave of anxiety and a sense of panic crashed over her. She had wondered what would happen if she simply forced herself to ignore a command. It seemed she now had her answer. Sweat began to form on her brow as she began to frantically pull on the door. There was an overwhelming sense of urgency and she could feel her heart beginning to pound so hard she could hear it in her ears, her adrenaline spiking. She didn't know if she could tap into wandless magic again and was about to try when something caught her eye.

Beside the door, on a small table, was a piece of parchment that seemed to be glowing. On it was written in elegant, cursive script. "Lucius' bed at 6am so that he can fuck you." Oh, how disgustingly crude. Couldn't just say "Lucius' room at 6am?" She picked up the parchment and was filled with dread when she experienced the tug at her navel of a portkey. Everything went dark, and she felt like she was being sucked through a dark straw, until she landed harshly by the door inside Lucius's pitch-black suite, barely keeping her upright position.

It took her a minute to regain her equilibrium. As she began to feel grounded, she slowly turned to face the massive room. It was much darker than her room, as his windows and French doors had heavy fabric coverings blocking out the light. Even though her panic was ebbing, she still had the intense need to climb into his bed. She didn't want to, but she had to.

Still very sore and feeling weak, not to mention utterly bushed, she slowly made her way over to the massive bed. She could hear his soft snores and it occurred to her that if she were very quiet she might be able to creep into the bed and simply go to sleep.

Trying to be silent and to cause as little movement of the bed as possible, she attempted to push herself up and onto the massive thing. His bed was much taller than hers, reaching just above her navel. Her shoulders and arms ached and screamed in protest as she once again tried to use her upper body strength to make her way into the bed. Giving it up for a bad job, she stepped closer to the foot of the bed and was able to use the base of the footboard as a step, having to grab the bed post to hoist herself up. She crumpled onto the foot of the bed near the corner, and would have been fine to just lay there and go back to sleep, but the pull of his command was causing her body to move towards him.

She crawled slowly up the mattress until she was so close she was almost touching him. The pull finally stopped, her heart slowing as her body began to relax. Her mind, on the other hand, was screaming in protest, wanting to be anywhere else...well...with the exception of the younger Malfoy's bed.

Gingerly and wearily, she noiselessly lowered herself next to him. She tried to move just a touch
farther away so that she could rest her head on a different pillow from his, but the pull wouldn't let her. Her body wouldn't budge. *Really?!* She screamed in her head. This was going to get old very fast. She had to figure a way out of this mess. She pulled another pillow closer and rested her head on it, pride and dignity not allowing her to share his.

She slowly exhaled and closed her eyes, hoping for a deep slumber to take her into pleasant unconsciousness. Her hopes were dashed almost as soon as they entered her mind as a strong arm reached over her waist and pulled her so she was spooning into his chest, an already prominent erection digging into her bum. Her eyes flew open wide and she just stifled the gasp that threatened to be pulled from her chest. She was no longer tired. His hand slid up the flimsy sheath draped over her body and cupped her breast.

Lucius breathed a lazy sigh through his nose and then whispered words close to her ear, causing her to shiver with disgust. "Ahh, I see my wake-up fuck has arrived."
Chapter 4

Same Disclaimer as before. I own none of this!

Same Warnings as prior chapters. The abuse and rape continues through this chapter. However, this story will be much more than just rape and abuse. We are getting there, we promise. I say we because LissaDream and I are co-authoring this story as well as Master Mine which she has just posted. Please check out Master Mine if you haven't already done so!

We would love to hear your thoughts so please review! Kudos, bookmarks, subscriptions and comments are all appreciated. It's the only way we know whether or not you like the story. Thanks so much for reading!

Chapter Four

"Ahh, I see my wake-up fuck has arrived." Lucius pulled her closer, spooning her, his erection obvious against her backside. His left hand wiggled underneath her, bunching up her sheath at her waist as his other hand continued stroke her breasts. His words made her nauseous and his hands made her flinch as they roved and meandered over her tender skin. His hard-on continued to rub against her bum as she felt him gently move against her. She squeezed her eyes shut. Oh, God. Please don't bugger me! Please don't bugger me!

As much as she didn't want him to touch her or fuck her, she really didn't want him anywhere near her arse.

His right hand slid from her breasts to her mound and his fingers began to play with her, spreading her open, rubbing her clit and then up and down her folds. She flinched more violently as his hand became more aggressive on her tender and bruised flesh. Merlin, that smarts! Fuck! I'm young enough to be your daughter, you fucking perv, just get your hands off me!

"Ahh, you're sore, aren't you?" He whispered against her hair as he continued his assault, not slowing or softening his touch. No shit, Sherlock! And I want your filthy, fucking hands off me!

Deciding she needed to try something...anything to make him stop, she thought maybe she could scare him off. Disgust him. Her voice sounded pained as she whispered urgently. "Yes, and I think I have the beginnings of a urinary tract infection." Hermione hoped this would cause him to pull his hand away. The word infection would surely repulse him, wouldn't it? "You might not want to have sex with me, I could be contagious." Hermione continued in a rushed voice, hoping he would be clueless and accept her warning as truth.

A deep chuckle echoed from behind her as he inserted a finger and then a second and began sliding them in and out of her sore channel. She gasped, but it was an obvious reaction to pain, not pleasure. "UTI's are not contagious as I'm sure you are fully aware, Miss Granger." He slid back from her and rolled her onto her back, looking down at her. "Do not take me for a fool," he whispered with humor on his face.

Unwilling to give up, she tried a different approach, she stared up at him, her rich caramel eyes meeting his soft grey. Figuring she had nothing to lose, she pleaded. "Please stop, I'm so tender and what you're doing hurts. I'm in pain with this infection, more sex can only make it worse." She watched as she saw a flash of something in his eyes. He didn't answer right away, just watched her for a second. It was the same look he hadn't been able to hide the night before. She had forgotten about that. It gave her a glimmer of hope.
His eyes moved from hers to her lips and slid down her body before returning to her face. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly through his nose. He spoke with a soothing tone, his voice quiet and non-threatening. "You will heal. You will get used to our...attentions. I recommend you urinate after our attentions from now on. The moment you are able to." He rolled on top of her, spreading her legs with his knees as he wedged himself between them. His right hand once again slid down to her folds.

"This won't take too much of your time, and then you can go back to your room and soak in the bath. I'll be gentle and you'll enjoy this, I promise." He nuzzled her neck and gave her a soft kiss on the underside of her jaw as he began fingering her and rubbing her clit interchangeably. He wasn't as rough as he had been only moments before. His other hand wedged itself between their chests where he twisted and pulled her right nipple, causing a soft grunt to leave her, before his hand began massaging her entire breast.

She closed her eyes, her forehead crinkling as she turned her face to the side, not wanting to look at him towering over her. His face was so close, his morning breath foul. His mouth ventured down her body to her breasts. His right hand continued rubbing her clit and, despite her revulsion, she could feel that familiar clenching and tension building within her. How is this happening? She remembered reading that a climax was a physical response from physical stimulation, but how could her body still become so aroused when her mind hated it so much?

He spoke softly once again, as his mouth moved back up to her neck. "I want you to put your arms around me as if you are enjoying yourself, as if you want me. Respond to me the way a woman responds to a man she desires." Are you kidding me? This man is on drugs! She had to fight herself from laughing at the absurdity of it. She rolled her eyes with irritation as her body followed his command. As soon as her hands were on his shoulders, he continued. "I wish for you to not hold back your lovely noises, pet. I want to hear you."

Hermione felt her hands and (surprisingly, as he had not commanded it) her hips obey without her having to give conscious thought to the action. Respond to me the way a woman responds to a man. Bloody hell. He continued to rub and she heard herself let out a soft moan, her hips thrusting into the fingers now moving in and out of her. The tenderness had lessened, she wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not. Her moan seemed to ignite him, evidenced by his movements becoming more aggressive. Her climax continued to build and her hips continued to writhe beneath him. "That's it," he whispered.

She felt him pull his hand away and then he shifted his hard erection to her core and begin to press into her. As he started to sheath himself in her moist heat, he let out a soft moan as his right hand moved back to her clit where continued to stimulate her furiously. Hermione couldn't stop the moans that escaped her mouth as his fingers continued to wind the coil in her belly tighter and tighter.

"That's it my little cub. Doesn't this feel good?" She refused to answer him. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction of admitting he was right. "I'll make you feel good, lioness." That infuriated her, and now she was no longer able to bite her tongue.

"Rape does not feel good, Mr. Malfoy! No matter how you go about it. Forcing an orgasm from another is still rape if she doesn't give consent." She felt him flinch and pause his movements. He didn't say anything for a minute and then replied as he gently began his ministrations once again. He thrust his cock more deeply into her as he whispered. "We'll debate this topic later. For now, just feel. Relax, Hermione." His command to relax caused her muscles to loosen and she melted into the mattress beneath him. "That's it."

As his hands continued to probe and stimulate, her arousal continued to build. She rolled her hips with his, her hands now moving up and down his back, soothingly, like a lover's hands would.
Moans began spilling from her like she was a common, alley whore. Despite being disgusted with herself, she couldn't stop.

She could feel his mouth curve up into a smile against her neck as he whispered, "Yes, see how responsive your body is? So wet, so pliant, so...accommodating?"

He began to move faster and press deeper. His words continuing to taunt her. "Mmm. You are enjoying this my little nymph. Deny it all you want, but the sex kitten in you is dying to come out." She hated to admit it and would not do so out loud, but the bastard was right. Merlin, this felt good. Fight it, Hermione. What's wrong with you? For what seemed like the millionth time in less than fourteen hours, she wanted to cry. His commands on her body wouldn't seem to allow her to do anything but feel his length filling her, his fingers on her clit was making it sing. They forced her body to think it was pleased with his attentions. All the while her mind either begged her to fight, to throw him off, to run, to scream her protests, or to shut down and hide. She wished she could move away from the sensations, protect herself and her sanity.

Her brain continued to scream its denial all the while her body was moving with his languidly. Moans of pleasure continued to fall from her lips, louder and louder as she felt her climax building. "That's it, kitty cat. Cum for me." Without a moment to fight it, her body convulsed and tensed with her release as she gave out a yell of pleasure. Lucius thrust hard and fast before tensing with his own release. He collapsed over her, out of breath. His hand between her legs slid up her torso to her breasts where he cupped and stroked as his breathing slowed. After a minute, he rolled off her and let out a slow breath.

He slid to the edge of the bed and swung his feet over, his back to her. He didn't look at her as he patted her hip. "Go take a hot bath and be downstairs for breakfast at eight."

Still catching her own breath and trying to come to terms with the fact she had just had another orgasm against her will, she gingerly rolled out of bed. Now that the forced pleasure had dissipated, she was so sore it was painful to sit and slide off the side of the bed. She walked towards his door wondering if it would open for her but found a glowing parchment on a table beside his door. "Your suite for a hot bath."

Hermione winced as she was Portkeyed back to her room. Still exhausted, she just wanted to sleep for another hour. Looking at her bedside clock across the suite, she could see it was only six-twenty am. She could sleep for an hour and then take a bath in time for breakfast. As she started to move towards her inviting bed, the uncomfortable anxiety once again came over her. Her heart started to beat faster as she continued to resist the command. Sweat began to form on her brow and her breathing became labored as she tried to fight the pull. Gods, she was so tired. When she was halfway across her suite she couldn't fight it any longer. The moment she resignedly turned towards the bathroom, her anxiety began to diminish. By the time she stepped into the loo, her heart rate was almost back to normal.

She sighed heavily as she stepped up to the tub. There were multiple knobs and spigots, leaving her confused. Not sure which one to turn, she selected the knob on the right. She was pleased when the tub began to fill with water magically and rapidly. Even more elated to find that the water was the perfect temperature. Curious, she turned the next knob over and was amazed when a pleasant scent of lavender began to permeate the air. It wasn't quite as extravagant as the prefect's bath at Hogwarts, but it was damn close.

She stepped back from the tub and pulled the flimsy sheath over her head. She carefully stepped into the bath and slid into the soothing water. Merlin this feels amazing. She relaxed back, resting her
head on the lip of the tub. The luxury continued to surprise her when the lip of the tub under her neck morphed into a soft cushion. She let out a slow breath and closed her eyes allowing the warm water to soothe her tender muscles and abused vaginal and anal tissues.

She was just drifting off to sleep when Tinny appeared and grabbed Hermione's shoulder. "Master Draco sent Tinny to bring you to him right away." Before she could respond, she was side along apparated with Tinny. She landed on the floor, on her back, dripping wet and freezing. Tinny disappeared with a pop.

Furious, she rolled and slowly moved to stand as she took in the room around her with wary caution. Before she could get a real look, Draco slid out of the bed and stood before her. "No need to stand. On your knees and face me."

Unable to take it anymore, her frustration and desperation for sleep and to just be left the hell alone caused her to lash out. She was freezing, she was dripping wet, her body ached and she desperately felt like she had to pee. As her body slid back to her knees, she snapped, "Can't you just leave me the hell alone, you disgusting ferret? You're a vile sub-human piece of dung!" The minute the words left her mouth she regretted it. She looked up and saw a blaze of fury cross his face before it settled into sheer malicious joy as once again his hand reared up and slapped her across the face. The blow was so hard and she was feeling so weak, she toppled to the ground as her hand immediately raised to cradle the sting. Tears spilled form her eyes as her body immediately righted itself, still following his command to kneel.

She trembled with rage and cold as her tears betrayed her anger and spilled down her cheeks. Water from her bath continued to drip off her and goosebumps covered her flesh. Draco stepped closer and was stroking his large erection in her face. His eyes went to her nipples, rock hard from the cold. His eyes then went to her mouth. "You look so fuckable right now." She could only imagine what she looked like. Bruised and red face, swollen tear ridden eyes, blotchy skin and dripping wet. Draco would find this attractive, the sick fuck! "Open up, Granger. Time for you to suck my cock."

Hermione's eyes shot up to his, her mouth about to spew out exactly where he could go shove his cock. But, the words never came and her mouth simply opened wide. "That's it, little Mudblood whore. No teeth. Use your tongue and mouth. Move back and forth over my length and make me cum."

Hermione did as commanded, taking his length into her mouth. He grabbed the back of her head and began to move his hips. Fuck. Gross! I have Draco fucking Malfoy's cock in my mouth. She wanted to pull away and run to the bathroom to pour bleach on her tongue. Merlin only knows where his disgusting cock has been.

"Sssss, mmmm. That's it, my little whore. A little faster now..." His breathing became more labored. "Take it deeper into your throat...moan like the slut you are." Hermione used her tongue and moved back and forth over him. She was surprised the skin was so silky and smooth over what felt like steel.

Despite her revulsion, a throaty moan began to escape her vocal chords. This seemed to only egg him on, and he began moving his hips more aggressively, plunging his hard member to the back of her throat. Her eyes watered and she gagged as drool ran down her chin, her mouth forced into its open position. She wanted desperately to pull away, but his command wouldn't allow it. Her nose was congested and his cock kept ramming the back of her throat. I can't breathe! Her gagging became more pronounced, her desperation for air causing her to panic.

Despite her obvious difficulties and discomfort, he continued pummeling her mouth. In his usual, condescending sneer he growled. "Stop being a wimp and take it, whore. This is what your mouth
was made for. This should come naturally for you." Inside her brain was screaming in protest. She wanted to bite down on him so badly, but his command had taken her free will and she continued to gag and sputter. His voice raspy, he instructed. "Stop. Open your mouth wide and stop moving."

Hermione opened her mouth wide and watched as Draco positioned his cock a couple inches in front of her face. She gasped for lungful's of air as she watched him stroke his cock before he let out a loud grunt. Hot sperm was shot into her mouth, on her cheeks, and on her breasts. When he finished ejaculating, he wiped his cock on her cheek and then slapped it on her face. "That's it, my little cum queen. Swallow what's in your mouth." WHAT?! Oh, dear Merlin, NO! Despite her inner protestations, her body complied. The minute she swallowed, she gagged, feeling the urge to vomit. He stepped back from her, laughing at her reaction. "Granger, I really had no idea how entertaining you could be."

Furious, she spat on his foot. She saw stars when he grabbed the back of her head and slammed it into the bedside table she was kneeling next to. Hermione, you idiot! Stop giving him cause to beat you and make this worse! She clutched her head, not giving him the satisfaction of her tears. When she pulled her hand away, it was covered with blood.

"You'd better not get your dirty blood on my rug, you bitch." He snarled. There was a short pause before an evil smile crossed his face.

"Look at me, Granger." Her eyes flew to his, her hand still pressed to the gash above her eyebrow. "Every morning you are to come here after you leave my father's suite and kneel beside my bed. When I wake – you will be waiting. You are not to wake me. I will fuck one of your orifices and then you will bathe me." He started to walk towards his bathroom. She started to stand as she wiped the dripping sperm off her face. He looked back at her. "I didn't tell you to stand. You will crawl behind me."

The anxiety of a directive not being met brought her up short. "I will get blood on the rug if I crawl." It was said urgently, fearfully, and his head whipped to her – he couldn't hide his surprise at the anxiety in her tone. When he realized what was happening, he sneered at her.

"Better figure it out, then, Mudblood. Quickly, now." He watched her, eyes glittering with amusement as she kept one hand covering her wound and moved one hand forward, then each knee followed awkwardly, then her arm again. She almost fell and he snorted with laughter. She felt like a three-legged dog.

Her knees hurt, her shoulders hurt, her pussy throbbed, and she felt like she had to pee. Utterly humiliated, she put on a stone face and made it to the bathroom. He walked past her to the toilet and stood over it. She stayed on her knees behind him as he began to urinate. He yawned as the liquid flowed. Hermione turned her head away, not wanting to smell or see his urine.

"Turn on the shower," he instructed. Hermione turned towards the shower and reached up for the knob. Unable to reach it from her kneeling position, she slowly stood and turned the knob on the right. She wasn't sure which knob to turn, as there were so many, but the right knob had worked on her tub. Warm water poured from the ceiling and the sides of the shower. It was clearly charmed to have multiple heads. "Climb in the shower and kneel."

Hermione stepped into the shower and then kneeled once again, water pouring on her from multiple angles. The blood from her head and hand ran pink. Draco stepped in. "Wash me." He commanded. Hermione couldn't see anything as water was shooting her in the face and running into her eyes from her wet hair. Her head was now pounding and the water stung her cut.
She reached up, feeling around for soap and a flannel with her eyes closed. After a minute of fumbling around and not finding what he asked, he shoved soap and cloth into her hand. She could hear him say something derogatory by the tone of his voice, but the water was pounding her face and ears so hard, she was unable to hear his specific words.

He was standing close, his leg almost touching her. She lathered the flannel as best she could and began washing his legs. As she moved up his body she avoided between his legs, hoping he would opt to wash that himself. She washed as far up his body as she could without standing, all the while cursing him under her breath. She couldn't believe this was what her life had come to.

"I'll need to stand to wash the rest of you." She said loudly.

"You don't need to stand to wash my cock." He replied.

*Of course, he wants me to wash his ugly prick. Asshole!* She lathered up the washcloth and quickly wiped over his dick.

"There, finished," she declared.

"Now, now, you didn't do a very good job. My cock is still dirty. It fucked a mudblood in the arse last night and then in the mouth this morning." He looked down at her hoping for a reaction, but her eyes were closed and he wasn't even sure she could hear him. "Wash my balls and my arse," he said loudly. "Gently!"

He watched as she begrudgingly soaped up the flannel once again. He smiled down at her as she washed his sac. He turned around so she could have better access to his arse. He felt her spread his cheeks and wipe him down there as well. *I hate you, Draco Malfoy. I'm going to get you back one day. You mark my words.* She wanted to say the words out loud. She wanted him to hear her promise, but this time she held her tongue.

"Stand up, my little cum bucket. Time for my next deposit." He turned back towards her and grabbed her arm, pulling her up forcefully. "Spread your legs and bend over. Grab your ankles, and stay still."

Despite being exhausted and sore, the warm shower water was very soothing to her aching muscles. She felt like a drowned rat, but her thighs were no longer burning as she kneeled. She grimaced with frustration and had to fight back tears when he told her to stand and bend over. As soon as she was upright, his hands forced her shoulders forward and she flinched when he grabbed her arse, one hand on each cheek. She continued bending over until her ankles were firmly gripped in her hands.

His thumbs spread her opening and she felt him start to press into her. While she hated this, and wanted to scream and yell, she was thankful he wasn't sliding into her arse. He began to rub her clit and up and down her folds. "Hmm, the water is washing away your juices." At least that's what it sounded like he said.

All of a sudden, the water stopped. He continued rubbing and stimulating her. She cursed internally as she felt her arousal building once again. She couldn't believe her body would continue to betray her like this. *This can NOT be turning me on for Christ's sake!* Humiliated, and unable to take it anymore, Hermione allowed herself to cry. Thank Merlin he couldn't see her face.

"There we go, that's better." Suddenly, he rammed into her. She let out a shriek at the brutal intrusion. A sob escaped her lips, it felt like he had shoved a white-hot branding iron up her pussy, and she no longer cared if he could hear her. She heard him start to grunt with each thrust as he ignored her distress and began to pound in and out of her mercilessly. "Your pussy is so tight." He
continued moving in and out, his hands gripping her hips forcefully, holding her in place. The bruised spots already on her hips were screaming in agony and she knew new she'd have new marks when he was through. She pondered how bad her face would look now that he had slapped her once again as he continued to fuck her, plus a gash above her eye. She wished she could disappear, think about something else, but his punishing thrusts kept her in the here and now. His hands on her bruised hips were too painful. Maybe Tinny would locate some bruise paste for her. She didn't care how she looked, but the pain was jarring.

She felt a sense of relief when Draco suddenly stilled and let out a loud moan as he spilled his seed inside her. After a minute of him heavy breathing and panting over top of her, he slapped her arse, making her jump with a startled cry, and then pulled out. More pain, but she stifled it. "Nice, three holes. Each of them delightful in their own right. How's a wizard to choose?" He chuckled as he started the water once again. "Go away, Granger. I'm done with you for now."

Hermione righted herself and stepped out of the bathroom. She grabbed one of the oversized towels he had on his towel rack and wrapped up in it. It was heated and felt divine against her raw body. She stepped out his bathroom quickly, not being able to get away from him fast enough. When she walked to the door, there was a parchment waiting for her, glowing.

She picked it up and once again found herself in her own suite. She looked at her clock across the room. Seven twenty-two. Breakfast was still over thirty minutes away. She went into her bathroom and sat on her toilet. Once again, the burn of urination was intense and despite feeling like her bladder was full, she only voided a small amount. Even with the shower, she felt disgusting. She walked back over to her tub, it was still full of water - which was now ice cold. Really? It was the last straw.

Unable to take even one more thing, she slipped to the floor beside the tub and sobbed, clutching the towel wrapped around her. She curled into the fetal position as she cried for her situation. She cried for her lost virginity that she had wanted to give to someone special. She cried for the pain, the UTI, the bruises, the abuse. She cried because she felt as though God had abandoned her. She cried because she was terrified she was destined to a miserable, short life. She cried because her friends were all dead. She cried because she knew she should just kill herself and then cried harder because she knew she never would.
Chapter Five

Same disclaimer as always, we own none of this and make no money from this FF.

AN: Same warnings as prior chapters. Abuse is a huge part of this story, however, it's not the only dynamic that will occur. The plot of this story is much more than what these first few chapters have shown. It's been less than 24 hours that Hermione has been with the Malfoys. We are still setting the scene and laying the ground work. :)

A huge thanks to my awesome and amazingly talented co-author, LissaDream! Please check out our other co-authored tale, Master Mine. We are having soo much fun writing these stories together. She's become such an important person in my life. Love you, LD!

Thanks for kudos, subscribing, bookmarking and commenting! It's the only way we know you like the story and want us to keep going!

"Miss! Miss! Wake up, Miss." Hermione woke with a brutal start. It took her a minute to remember where she was. She slowly pulled herself up to a sitting position from the cool tile floor. The room spun as her head pounded. She was literally shaking with her fatigue…and cold. She was so cold. Bloody fuck, I just want to sleep! Her hand immediately went to the gash on her forehead where she could feel dried blood and a huge knot. "Ouch," she cried out quietly. She was shivering and her teeth chattered, causing her head to hurt even more. Pulling the towel tightly around herself, she slowly got to her feet. The incredible urge to pee drew her to the toilet where she once again experienced intense burning as she emptied the small amount of urine from her bladder.

She could hear Tinny rummaging around her room but was too tired to be bothered with caring or curiosity. Despite having been drenched in Draco's shower, she felt dirty. Filthy, actually. Replaying what Draco had put her through, she shuddered with disgust. She could still feel his abusive hands on her skin, his prick touching her face. Even if she had a brillo pad, she wouldn't be able to scrub it all away.

She turned on the shower and stepped into the wonderful, hot water. Leaning against the tiled wall she relaxed as the warmth of the water seeped into her bones. She lathered up a flannel with the new bar of rose scented soap from the soap holder, quickly washing her face, neck, chest, and stomach. She winced as she gently wiped between her legs, her abused flesh was too tender to tolerate the harsh scrubbing she desired. She scrubbed down the rest of her body to her toes before lathering her hair with the provided shampoo and conditioner. "Rise and Shine Shampoo. Provides volume for limpness and shine for dullness," she muttered, reading the bottle. She shook her head in dismay. She could only imagine what her hair would like when it was dry. The last thing her curls needed were more volume. The thought quickly left her mind however, she really didn't care how she looked.

Despite the warm water, she couldn't quite shake the chill she felt. She had barely dried off before Tinny was in her closet picking out a dress for her to wear. "Master's will want the young miss looking pretty. Young miss will wear this." Maybe if she hadn't been so tired, or if she was feeling better, she would have gasped like a normal teenage girl when the beautiful set of robes was enchanted to float in front of her. As it were, however, she wanted nothing more than to stay naked and slip between the sheets of the large four poster bed that was screaming her name.

Before she could even think about getting dressed, she needed to dry her hair and comb out the
knots. As much as she hated the imposing little beast of a house elf, she could almost have kissed her when Tinny stepped into the bathroom and snapped her fingers, instantly drying Hermione's hair. Another snap, and once again the elf had done up her hair in a long, soft braid. It was such a simple thing for her to do, yet Hermione felt it was the only kind thing that had been done for her in weeks. Even if it hadn't been done for her benefit – she was certain Tinny was merely making her presentable to please her masters. She wondered if the elf might be able or willing to help her in other ways as well.

"Tinny, you wouldn't happen to have any bruise paste or pain potions, would you?"

The house elf surprised Hermione when she looked at her with sympathy. "Master Draco tells Tinny no potions for Miss. Miss is to be left as is. Only the Masters can approve potions and treatments for young Miss."

Hermione huffed in frustration even as tears pricked her eyes. She hated him. Oh, Gods, she hated him. "That's okay, Tinny. Thank you."

Hermione slipped the dress on and looked at herself in the mirror. It really was stunning. It was made of a rough woven linen, dyed a deep, dark blue. Not as bright as a royal blue, but not as dark as a navy. The tops of the long, flowing sleeves capped her shoulders and dipped into a layered scoop neck. The sleeves themselves were split and flowed almost to the length of the dress hem. They were connected just above her elbow with a gold brocade. The dress itself was A-line, flowing to the floor to pool at her feet with a short train in the back. Just under her bust was a woven belt that knotted at her sternum, the tails cascading down her torso to end at the juncture of her thighs. It was similar to the colors of the brocades on the sleeves. She turned so her back was in the mirror, noticing the same scoop in the front trailed over her shoulder blades.

It was grotesque to her, wearing such a beautiful garment over a body marred with so many contusions and abrasions. The left side of her face was dark purple. She had a gash on her forehead and huge, dark circles under her eyes. She thought back and realized she had probably only slept a couple hours during the night. She remembered it being after eleven when they finished dinner. A jolt of nausea hit her as memories of all that transpired after dinner flashed through her mind. It had truly been disgusting and beyond horrendous. She felt as if it couldn't be real. It couldn't possibly have happened. This had to be just a nightmare and she'd wake up any minute. Her eyes looked at her reflection. She swallowed the hard lump of tears in her throat. This isn't a dream Hermione. The bruises in the mirror, the pain between her legs, and the tenderness of her entire body...it screamed the truth. She was living a true nightmare.

"Comes, Miss. Yous be late if we don't hurry." Hermione knew the elf spoke the truth because she could feel her anxiety and heart rate climbing as her body reacted to the pull of her eight-a.m. summons.

Tinny grabbed her hand and Hermione was apparated to a beautiful, large dining room. As her vision adjusted to the change in environment, Hermione was shocked at the extravagance. The ebony table could easily sit thirty people and took up the expanse of the room, but so many other things pulled her attention. The ceiling was covered in gilded molding done in gold. A large oval mirrored the placement of the table below and three chandeliers in gold and strings of crystal threw beautiful rainbow patters of light through the room. Around the oval was an arched rectangle that met the corner molding. The walls were painted a deep navy, with the same gilded gold trim making up pillars that ran in intervals down them until it reached a rich, chiseled marble wainscoting that started at her hip level and flowed to the floor. The flooring itself was a deep, dark parqueted wood. There was an archway that led to a sideboard done in the same ebony as the table, laden with crystal goblets and a silver serving set. A huge Persian rug in greens, and golds, and blues ran underneath
the length of the entire table while crystal sconces dotted the pillars at repeating intervals. At one end of the room stood an enormous stone fireplace. The most amazing part, however, were the large windows, encased in the same gilded golden trim. They let in so much beautiful, natural light that it caused the room to glow and feel warm. She imagined at night, the room would have a very different, formal feel.

Lucius and Draco were already seated, reading the Daily Prophet. Upon her entry, they both stood. Once again behaving as though they were gentlemen. Lucius was at the head of the large table on the right. Draco was positioned to his right and there was a third setting for Hermione to Lucius' left. Unfortunately, it left Hermione facing Draco. *Just don't look at him!* It was as they had been seated the night before. When Lucius started to walk towards her chair to pull it out for her, she grabbed it and sat down quickly, scooting it back to the table before he even had a chance to assist her. She turned to him, noticing the slightly frustrated look on his face. Her tone was scathing. "Please don't bother with the charade, Mr. Malfoy, there are no gentlemen in this room."

She could hear Draco let out a snort as his father returned to his seat. "In this house, Miss Granger, good manners will not be forgotten or ignored. You will allow us to carry out the expected behaviors a gentleman bestows upon a lady in a dining room," Lucius replied with a note of condescension in his voice. He was seated and sliding his chair back towards the table as a different house elf appeared, placing a covered plate in front of her.

She couldn't help the retort which slipped from her lips. She stared at him, her expression flat. "Oh, I must have missed the chapter in *Magical Manners and Etiquette* when it says that raping and sodomizing your guests after dinner is polite and well-mannered behavior. If only I still had my copy, I could refresh my memory," she deadpanned.

She noticed the slight uptick to the corners of Lucius' mouth. Draco was chuckling from behind the Daily Prophet which he was holding up to read. "Oh, Father, she's a riot. I may have to send the Dark Lord an extra pensieve memory to thank him." Draco dropped the paper and looked at her maliciously. "He's probably looking at the memory of my morning shower right now. The least I can do is keep them coming."

Hermione's expression was full of loathing. She felt nauseated as she imagined Voldemort – or anyone, for that matter – watching her being raped. Just as that unwelcome sensation came over her, the house elf snapped his fingers, causing the three covered dishes in front of them to display what would normally be a lovely breakfast. French toast with powdered sugar and glazed strawberries, scrambled eggs, sausage, and assorted cut fruit were all displayed beautifully before her.

Draco ignored his plate, still watching her reaction. Clearly enjoying her misery, he expanded on a bit of information she had not picked up on the night before. He spoke in his signature, drawling tone. "The Dark Lord sends his regards, by the way. He and his…guests enjoyed the show you put on last night. You remember the mirror?" He paused, waiting for her reaction. A slight frown pulled down the corners of his mouth when she refused to even look at him. "Anyway, it was charmed. Because of it, many were able to take in your….*charms.*"

*What?* Hermione could practically feel the color drain from her face. Her cheeks heated with mortification as she remembered what Draco had done to her in front of that mirror. She closed her eyes, fighting the anger and the rage boiling. Trembling as she remembered more. *Not just what he did to you, but what he made you do to yourself!* Completely horrified, it took all her strength and determination to maintain her restraint. She wanted to jump across the table and strangle him. She wanted to kill him. She never thought herself capable of killing, but now? Now she was positive that she could.
She knew better, though. She was no match for these two wizards. Not only were they physically stronger than her, they had wands. She was sick, exhausted, and had no wand. Draco would beat her or hex her to a pulp. She took a deep breath and looked up, meeting his eyes straight on. Her expression was flat, betraying no emotion. Fuck you, you piece of shit! You will not get a rise out of me! Under the table, she dug the nails of her right hand into the palm of her left as she imagined his eyes being gauged out of his evil head.

A malevolent smile on his face, his eyes stayed on hers. It was a play for Dominance between them. After a minute, he rolled his eyes and laughed knowingly. Picking up his fork, he began to eat.

She continued to stare at him. He ate as though he didn't have a care in the world. She looked away with disgust. She had no appetite and would not even look her plate, staring into her lap instead. She could hear cutlery on plates as the wizards at the table enjoyed their beautiful breakfast with vigor.

"Aren't you hungry, Miss Granger?" Lucius asked softly as he wiped his mouth with a beautifully embroidered linen napkin.

Hermione didn't look at him and replied with a note of hostility. "Strangely, my appetite has vanished." She could feel Lucius' eyes on her.

"Miss, Granger, look at me." His voice had a note of concern as he made his demand, not unkindly.

Having no choice, Hermione moved her eyes to his. She watched as he took in the sight of her face, eyes lingering on the gash over her eyebrow and the large bruise on her left cheek. Being that she was sitting on his left, he was probably just now really seeing it for the first time. It had been rather dark in his room earlier. Besides, Draco had slapped her again since then. The bruise was much more obvious now.

She was surprised to see what looked like worry and a touch of disbelief on his face. The expression morphed quickly into one of indifference as he cleared his throat and shot a contemplative look at Draco before picking up his fork and shoving a bite of egg into his mouth. He seemed to be deep in thought as he continued his meal.

Hermione kept her eyes on him as he had yet to tell her otherwise. She felt tears spring to her eyes in frustration. Being controlled like this was awful. Not having free reign of what her body did was unbearable. Unable to take it anymore, she asked through clenched teeth, "Mr. Malfoy, may I please have permission to look elsewhere?"

He stopped chewing and looked at her in surprise. It took a second for comprehension to hit. "Yes, yes. Of course." He waved his fork lightly as he continued. "Please, feel free to look around, wherever suits you." She immediately moved her eyes to her lap again as a tear escaped and slid down her cheek. She wiped it discreetly, but couldn't help it as another escaped, and another. Merlin, but she was exhausted. She was not a crier, not normally, anyhow.

"Jeez, Granger. What the fuck are you crying about now? No one's even touching you!" Hermione looked up into the sneering face of the man she hated more than anyone in the whole world. Draco was looking at her with impatience and rolled his eyes as he went back to his paper and his breakfast. She chanced a glance at Lucius, catching yet another concerned look on his face before he quickly returned to his paper, as well.

Hermione didn't answer Draco. Instead, she moved her focus back to her lap and tried to calm her emotions. In a way, the ferret was right. Stop crying, Hermione! Enough of the self-pity! She let out a sigh and picked up her fork, realizing that starving herself would only make her feel worse. She took a bite of the French toast, it practically melted in her mouth. She forced herself to eat slowly, as she
suddenly felt starved once the first bite had dissolved. After she finished a piece of toast and couple bites of egg, she found she couldn't eat anymore. Not only that, her fatigue was dragging her down. She just wanted to go to her room and sleep. *I know I would feel stronger if I could just rest.*

It was a short-lived possibility. She heard the sound of rustling papers and looked up to see both wizards put down their newspapers. She hoped they had activities to occupy themselves that did not involve her.

"So, I have my morning board meeting at Malfoy Enterprises and then a lunch meeting at the ministry." Lucius' eyes were only on Draco. The older Malfoy didn't even spare Hermione a glance. "What are your plans for the day?"

Draco shrugged indifferently. "Not much to do today, really. Pans said she might come over, but I don't really have the energy. She's an *animal.*" Draco said the last part with a smirk directed at Hermione.

Lucius sighed heavily. "Really Draco. One would think you were raised in the gutter. Must you talk in such a way?"

Draco grinned. "Well, I just want Granger over there to feel at home."

Lucius tossed his white linen napkin on the table as he stood. "See if Severus can make us some more bruise paste. I believe we are out." He paused looking at Hermione. "Clearly, we will be needing more."

Draco stood. "I'll see if he and his *pet* can stop by for a visit. I'm sure Granger would love to see her old Professor." He looked at Hermione. "Wouldn't you, Mudblood?"

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Draco started to walk away from the table and Hermione stayed still and quiet. She simply wanted to be forgotten. She would go to her room, hell she would sleep right here in this chair.

"Come along, little Mudblood. We wouldn't want you to get bored."

Hermione internally whimpered and then warily stood. Her lower back was really starting to hurt and her legs were aching – not to mention the UTI. Draco was walking fast, her legs struggled to keep up with the pace he set.

He looked back at her with impatience. "Merlin, you're slow. Keep up!"

She rubbed her cool arms as her legs began to move faster on their own accord. She followed for what seemed like forever. They walked down a long hall and passed what looked like a library and then a large, cavernous room. A ballroom perhaps? She spotted a narrow set of stairs on her left that led upstairs. Draco kept straight as they passed more closed doors before making a left and leading her down another long hallway. *Merlin, this place is monstrous.* She would need a map if she were ever allowed to wander. *Allowed to wander?* She internally shuddered at the frustration of that thought.

After passing more rooms and closed doors, and taking one flight of steps up at some point, they finally came to a room Hermione recognized. *The Drawing Room.* She instinctively reached for her forearm where the scar spelled out 'Mudblood' in small writing. She had nightmares about this room and what had happened in it. It was ironic that the room no longer held her worst memories. She had been tortured in this room, yes, but she had escaped. She had been rescued. She had been with her friends and Dobby had…
Her eyes began to well at the memory of the loss of Dobby. Merely weeks later, she had lost Harry and Ron as well. A tear escaped and she wiped it quickly.

"Ah, yes. I see you remember." She looked up to find him watching her curiously, a slight leer on his face. Hatred once again overtook anguish, and she stared back at him defiantly.

His leer turned into a malicious smile as he met her mutinous eyes. He then laughed, like he was amused. "Oh, Granger. You are just too easy to goad." Looking away, he let out a sigh as he walked to an area in front of the fireplace. He gestured around the room. "The entire marble floor needs a good polishing. This spot right here, though? It just won't come clean."

He looked up at her, mock frustration and concern on his face. "The floors in this room are beautiful, don't you think?" His eyes shot to the expanse of marble at his feet. "So, it's unfortunate this spot is marred with a blood stain. Mudblood blood to boot." A false comprehension came over him as he mocked her. "Oh, that's right! It's your filthy blood that has permeated this floor and will not come up."

He shook his head, looking at the floor again, and spoke as though he were at a loss. "Mudblood blood is just like the Mudblood it comes from. Impossible to completely eradicate...sort of like...," He looked back up, his grey cool eyes meeting her fawn brown. "...cockroaches, wouldn't you say?"

Hermione closed her eyes, once again forcing herself to maintain control. Her body trembled with suppressed rage. If she lashed out, he would beat her or kill her. She needed to keep a cool head. Ignore him, Hermione!

"Tinny!"

Hermione's eyes flew open as the small elf popped into the room. She bowed low. "Master, Draco... sir."

"Tinny, the Mudblood needs to clean her mess. Provide her with cleaning cloths, soap, and water." He looked back at Hermione. "You will clean the floor focusing on the stain, and then you will clean the rest of the floor, every nook and cranny. Twice. After that, you will polish it. If you finish before someone comes to fetch you, you will polish again. And again. I want this floor to shine." He started to step away. "I will come for you later or I will send Tinny. You are to continue cleaning and polishing until you are retrieved. I will inspect your work."

He watched her for a reaction, cocking his head to the side slightly. When none came, he continued. "Let's hope you are still the hard worker and over achiever you used to be, or you will serve...a detention?" He smiled at is joke. "I like that. Detention for Miss Granger. It has a nice ring to it."

He started to leave the room but stopped and looked back at her, as though he had suddenly remembered something. "Oh, and I'd hate for you to ruin that dress. So, I think you should take it off." He watched with glee as she sighed, unzipping the dress behind her and letting it fall to the floor before stepping out of it. He just couldn't humiliate her enough.

Unbeknownst to him however, it didn't faze her at all. What was the point of upsetting herself because she was unclothed? It wouldn't bother her anymore, not after the past sixteen hours of her life. God, is that all it had been? She was left standing in a nude colored lace bra and panty set. His eyes blatantly ogled her chest and then moved between her legs. He rearranged his crotch slightly and sighed. "Sorry, darling. I really need to save my energy for Pans." His eyes shot up to hers. "But I'll let you fuck me tonight if you ask nicely."
And then he was gone. He turned and apparated, leaving her alone with the house elf. The elf picked up her dress and said, "Tinny will be right back." With a pop, Hermione was alone. She looked around, taking in the vast, cold room. The last time she had been here, she hadn't really had the chance to look around. She snorted at the thought. Wringing on the floor in utter, awful, unending agony makes you fairly unobservant.

The room was large and had been cleared of all furniture and rugs. Most likely this was so she could do her "job" properly. The marble floor was black, veined with greens and blues and creams. It was cold, dark, and unfeeling. She figured they must be at one corner of the Manor because there were windows facing the South and East. Huge, latticed windows, framed in white, that went from floor to ceiling and streamed in the morning light. She counted ten. Feeling grateful she didn't have to clean them, she continued to look around. The walls were wallpapered with silk that picked up the greens and blues in the floor. They were trimmed at the ceiling and floor with white woodwork. Interspersed throughout the room were massive, white, ornate, stone pillars. The marble of these pillars was white, veined with cream and silver. They had square bases.

Opposite of the East windows was a balcony done in the same white marble of the pillars. On the opposite side of the opening was another balcony. It was one story up and carved from what looked like a darkly stained mahogany. She moved over to the lower balcony and realized it looked over the ballroom. Turning back to the drawing room, she looked up. The ceilings had to be at least twenty feet high. They were plastered with an ornate geometric design, and stamped. She craned her head back further and smiled. Her first genuine smile in days. She would never forget that ginormous chandelier for the rest of her life. A circular, black wrought iron piece with huge, glass sconces. It was a shame they had been able to repair it. She would have liked to see something of the room permanently destroyed because of them.

She looked to her right. Yes, I remember you. The ornate, white marble fireplace was massive and beautifully carved. It needed to be in order to fit the room. It was bookended with double pillars which were smaller than the massive ones scattered through the room. They supported a thick, deep mantle. Then, the pillars continued from the top of the mantle all the way to the ceiling. She remembered staring into it as Bellatrix had tortured her. The walls held portraits, some of them clearly very old. She felt exposed as the figures within them began moving amongst the frames. She could hear their whispering. As her eyes scanned the paintings, she froze when she saw a face she recognized. The thin, pale face, blue eyes, and blonde hair of Narcissa Malfoy watched her for a moment before turning away. She exited the portrait completely.

Hermione paused, wondering about the matriarch witch. She didn't know how Narcissa had died. She hadn't even known the witch was dead until the day before. There was the unmistakable pop of Tinny's arrival, then, and her thoughts were pulled from the portraits.

"Tinny has brought Miss cleaning cloths, bucket with warm water, soaps, towels, and polishing cloths." The elf set the items on the floor in front of Hermione and then watched her, curiously. Hermione let out a huff and then dropped to her knees. The dark marble floor was cold and hard and she knew it would wreck her knees. She tucked a cloth under each knee and then picked up a third, dipping it in the bucket.

Tinny gave her a contemplative look and then snapped her fingers, turning the cloths under Hermione's knees into small pillows. Hermione let out a gasp and looked at the small elf. Tinny was watching her without expression, but her ears were twitching. Hermione smiled at her. "Tinny, thank you."

With a pop, she was gone. Hermione looked at the floor in front of her, focusing on the spot Draco had eluded to. She couldn't see how the floor in that spot looked any different from the rest. She
soaped up the rag and began to wipe the floor. When she pulled the cloth back, it was still perfectly white. The floor didn't even have dirt on it. She huffed in irritation as she got to work.

It seemed like hours later when Hermione heard voices. Her face was wet with perspiration, her body moist with its exertion, and she could smell her own sweat from the hard labor. Draco's command had given her body no choice but to scrub hard. Her shoulders, arms, and back ached and screamed in protest. The hair from her braid that was touching her skin was saturated. Despite this, she was so cold. Absolutely freezing. Chills had wracked her body consistently for the last hour. Gods, she needed to sleep. Just to rest for a little bit.

"Granger's here? Why?" The unmistakable, nasal voice of Pansy Parkinson echoed from the hallway, her tone incredulous.

"The Dark Lord gave her to father and me to use as we please." Draco's voice was haughty and bragging.

Hermione heard their footsteps and voices coming closer.

"Well, what do you do with her? What use could she possibly be?"

"Oh, this and that." He responded with a bored tone. "You know, we've only had her since last night."

When she heard the sound of their shoes on the marble floor right behind her, she turned to see the shocked face of Pansy. "Draco, where are her clothes?" Pansy didn't acknowledge Hermione and didn't look her in the eye. She was too busy taking in Hermione's appearance. Hermione stood on her knees and looked down at herself. The skin-tone lingerie was practically see through now that it was wet. Her nipples were plain as day.

"No point in her ruining a perfectly good dress, Pans."

Pansy kept staring, her mouth hanging open. Then, comprehension dawned on her unremarkable features. Pansy's eyes shot to Draco. "Are you fucking her?" she screeched. Hermione winced at the awful sound, but smirked when she noticed Draco's shoulders had tightened imperceptibly.

Draco shot Pansy a bored look as he waved his wand at Hermione. Hermione had been about to answer Pansy's question in the affirmative when she found she couldn't speak. Damn it! Draco had cast a silencing spell on her!

His voice sounded offended. "Fuck that? Are you kidding?" His voice purred as he looked at Pansy adoringly. "Now Pans. Why would I touch that, when I have you?"

Pansy, her brain clearly as vacuous as Hermione had always assumed, smiled shyly at Draco, blushing. "Well, you can't blame a girl for asking."

"Oh, Pans. You're the only witch for me." He smiled, kissing her on the cheek. "Didn't what we just share in my room prove that?"

Pansy's blush deepened and she smiled. "Yes, that was lovely."

She sighed and looked back at Hermione. "Still, can't you at least give her a pillowcase or something?" Draco laughed loudly, clearly finding tremendous humor in that question.

"What a great idea, Pans." He turned back towards Hermione, eyes sparkling evilly. "Tinny!"
called out.

Tinny appeared with a pop. "Tinny, bring the Mudblood a pillowcase to wear."

Tinny's face flashed with a look of incredulity and then quickly changed to indifference. "Yes, Master Draco." She left with a pop.

While the elf was gone, Pansy hesitantly walked towards Hermione, looking her up and down. "Well, she's really a skinny little thing, isn't she?" She let out a huff and stood taller, looking down her nose at the Muggle-born witch. "Stand up, Mudblood."

Hermione looked at Draco to see him nod and then stood. She was so sore and stiff from being on her knees for so long that she hobbled and almost tripped. Pansy's hand shot out to steady her, but dropped Hermione's arm instantly at the contact. Her eyes widened and flew back to Draco's face. "She's positively burning up, Draco!" Wiping her hand on her skirt as if it were now covered with an infection, she stepped back. "She has a fever!" She turned away, walking to the other side of the room quickly. "Oh Merlin, what if she's contagious?"

Draco rolled his eyes and turned back to face the blonde pureblood. "Pans, why don't we leave the Mudblood to her chores. We'll go outside in the garden; would you like that?" Pansy agreed demurely and they started to leave, saying nothing else to her. Neither even turned to look at her as they left.

As soon as they departed, Tinny reappeared with another pop, handing Hermione a pillow case that had been quickly altered to have a hole for her head and arms. She shrugged and slipped it on. At least she was more covered, maybe it would help warm her. After Tinny disapparated again, she got back to polishing the floor.

Hermione wanted to collapse. Without a clock, she couldn't be sure, but it had to have been upwards of seven or eight hours since Draco had brought her here. She hardly had the strength to wipe her brow with her arm, but just managed. Beyond exhausted, she had a hard time focusing her vision and her body was so sore she almost couldn't move. To stave off the force of the slave binding, she persisted in small circles, scooting forward slowly to each new section. She had completed the scrubbing twice, as directed. The polishing work was done, but because of the binding, she was on round three of it. Draco had said she must work until he or Tinny retrieved her.

"Tinny!" she called out for the millionth time. Frustration coursed through her when no sound emerged. Fucking little ferret forgot to lift the silencing charm! She wanted to scream and yell but she couldn't. She wanted to break something but she could hardly move. Too exhausted to cry, and frankly cried out anyway, she simply went back to cleaning, the bond giving her no choice.

Hearing footsteps approach, she looked up hopefully, only to see Lucius looking down at her with a confused expression. It wasn't Draco coming to retrieve her, so her body was forced back to work. Her shoulders and arms were so weak, she could barely move the cloth on the floor. Her head drooped, as her neck and shoulders didn't have the strength to hold it up. Her gaze stayed on the floor beneath her.

"Miss Granger, stop."

Without the compulsion of the slave bond, Hermione felt her utter fatigue even more cruelly. She collapsed in a heap at the blessed command to stop and whimpered silently at the new torment coursing through her.
"What is going on here? Why was she left like this? Where is Draco?" Lucius' eyes quickly darted from Hermione to the house elf.

Tinny's voice shook and she cowered at the anger displayed and the sharp voice of her master. "Tinny was told to leave young Miss be until Tinny was told to comes get her, Master Lucius."

Lucius looked back at Hermione, his eyes taking in the pillowcase she was wearing and shaking his head. "Hermione, why didn't you call for Tinny? Clearly you needed to stop. She could have sent word to Draco."

Hermione looked up at him, embarrassed and agonized. "I couldn't!" she exclaimed, only no sound came out.

Tinny let out a small gasp.

Lucius looked horrified for a split second before concealing it behind a mask of stone. "Oh, for Merlin's sake!" he cursed. He waved his wand at Hermione. She touched her throat. "I tried to call, but..." Her voice sounded very weak and raspy. She closed her eyes. There was no way she was going to be able to get up from the floor.

Lucius looked back at Tinny, not waiting for Hermione to finish her sentence. "Get her cleaned up and dressed. Severus will be arriving soon for dinner." He sighed looking back at Hermione, shaking his head. "Give her pepper up of you have to. I need to find Draco."

Tinny had Hermione cleaned, shaved, buffed and primped in no time. Hermione didn't bother fighting it, she didn't even speak. She was simply a doll, a rag doll, being moved from here to there, being prevailed upon. Tinny had, indeed, made Hermione drink the pepper up potion. It made her more alert but did nothing for her tormented body.

The elf put the same dress on Hermione that she had worn for breakfast, only she added a silk overlay that matched the vibrant blue perfectly. It draped over the dress beautifully, like a robe. It had clearly been made for this very purpose. The dress looked much more formal, now, and when the elf placed a beautiful choker on her neck with a large sapphire as a charm, the look was complete. Hermione couldn't help but do a double take in the mirror. She still looked tired, and her face still had the nasty bruises and cut above her eye, but she looked fairly presentable, considering.

The elf grabbed her hand. Once again, the pull of Apparition caused Hermione to flinch. It was so much more comfortable and natural when one Apparated oneself as opposed to being side-alonged.

Hermione opened her eyes and found herself in a sitting room. It had a masculine feel with its dark leather furniture, bookshelves, and earth colored wall coverings and draperies. Lucius stood beside the large fireplace, a fire raging within. The sound of wood popping pulled Hermione's mind away, taking her to happier memories of sitting by the fire in Gryffindor. Her attention was quickly pulled back to the present when Draco and Severus both stood upon her arrival. Draco had been sitting in a wingback chair to the right of the fireplace and Severus on the large sofa facing the mantle.

"Ah, Miss Granger. Come have a seat." Lucius spoke gesturing to the other end of the sofa from where Severus had been sitting. Hermione slowly walked towards the three wizards, her focus on the floor in front of her. She was willing herself not to collapse. Her legs were trembling. They were so sore and the heels Tinny had put on her were impossibly high. Wobbling a little, she made her way around the sofa and sat gingerly.

She didn't make eye contact with any of them, keeping her eyes on the floor. She had no wish to
speak or interact. That included doing so with her old professor. She could feel his eyes on her, but she would not give him the satisfaction of meeting his gaze. It was his fault she was in this horrible position, she was the one who had created the awful binding potion.

It was a movement and a small gasp that grabbed her attention. It came from the floor to the left of Snape's feet. Hermione chanced a glance from her peripheral vision. A flash of red hair surprised her and forced her to turn her head all the way. Her jaw fell open, her hand flying to her mouth in shock. There on the floor, kneeling at the Professor's feet, was none other than Ginny Weasley.
Chapter 6

Once again, we own none of this.

This chapter starts to bring more of the plot into play. This story is about more than just abuse and this chapter begins to reflect that. We hope you like it.

LissaDream and I are co-writing this as well as Master Mine. Please check it out if you haven't already done so!

Please comment! Your thoughts help guide our approach. :)

Hermione tuned out the wizards conversing and stared at her red-haired friend in complete shock. Severus' pet is Ginny?! She had been so sure no one else survived. Judging by Ginny's tear-filled eyes, she must have thought the same. Their brown eyes stayed glued to each other and spoke volumes while their mouths stayed silent. Hermione's eyes welled. This time, they were welcome tears. Tears of joy. Thank God, you're alive! She wiped her eyes nonchalantly and quickly, hoping Draco hadn't noticed for fear of another scathing remark. Please don't let him humiliate me in front of Ginny!

Hermione noticed a tear slide down Ginny's cheek. Only, her expression looked concerned, her forehead crinkling as her gaze was on Hermione's bruised cheek and then the gash over her eye. Of course, she's concerned. Merlin, I'm a sight. Hermione scanned Ginny up and down, looking for bruises and injuries. She was pleasantly shocked to find Ginny looked...radiant. Her pale skin didn't have a mark or a bruise. Her eyes were bright and she looked healthy. Clearly Snape was taking good care of her, or was healing her. The latter was probably more likely. Why was she kneeling on the floor, though? She was to the left of Snape's feet, but facing the settee area and therefore facing the others in the room.

Hermione's gaze shot from Ginny up into the dark eyes of Snape, shocked to find him staring right at her. His expression was flat, his posture straight and rigid, his attire was his usual black robes. As usual, the man was a closed book. Hermione looked away quickly, not wanting him probing her mind, seeing the humiliation and the abuse she had suffered. He would probably enjoy it and she refused to give him the satisfaction.

She was pulled from her thoughts when Tinny appeared with a tray of drinks. The house elf served Hermione a glass of something red before serving Ginny the same and then whiskey for the wizards. Hermione sniffed the glass, stunned to find it was cranberry juice. Her eyes went to Tinny, who met hers with a knowing look before disappearing with a pop. Hermione sipped the juice and felt a surge of warmth for the little elf. That was three times today Tinny had done something nice for her. Hermione remembered Madam Pomfrey had make her drink cranberry juice when she had her UTI all those years ago. Cranberries are very good for the kidneys, or so Madam Pomfrey had insisted.

Hermione wanted to speak to Ginny, but there was nothing she wanted to say in front of the wizards in the room. It seemed Ginny either felt the same way or had been instructed not to speak. The young women chanced frequent glances at each other as the conversation about Voldemort's reign occupied the wizard's conversation. Hermione found herself curious and listened. She had been so out of touch since the battle. She really knew nothing more than the Order had lost and everyone she cared about was dead. Her eyes looked at Ginny once again. Not everyone is dead. Ginny's alive. She closed her eyes and gave a silent prayer of thanks to whatever God there was. She may be bonded to monsters,
but her friend was alive. Tinny seemed to not be so horrible, either. Things were bad. Actually, things were horrendous. Suddenly, though, there was hope.

Draco’s slow, drawling, arrogant tone made Hermione’s skin crawl. "Father, I forgot to tell you. Aunt Bella owled. It seems she was given her very own pet as well.” Hermione felt his eyes slowly move to her as he spoke. She refused to look at him in return. "This morning. Neville Longbottom." Draco chuckled with amusement. Hermione resisted the gasp that threatened to escape and looked at Ginny. Ginny met Hermione’s gaze, both their eyes conveying their surprise. *Ginny, Neville...who else is alive?* After a moment’s thought Hermione shuddered. Poor Neville. Bellatrix was likely torturing him, maybe even literally to death.

Draco continued. "Severus, you were lucky to be gifted a *pure blood* witch, even if she *is* a blood traitor." He stared at Ginny as he took a slow breath. "Then again, the Dark Lord gave you the pick of the litter the evening after the battle, so of course you chose her over the other...options."

Severus nodded. "Yes, the Dark Lord wanted the bonding potion tested promptly. I chose Miss Weasley for the simple reason she was the *least* irritating of my options." He spoke with that same voice and tone Hermione had endured for six years. It had once been a lovely voice, at least when it wasn’t spewing insults and incendiary comments. It was a voice she had trusted, despite Harry and Ron’s warnings. *You were a fool, Hermione.*

She reflected more on what she had just heard. Ginny had been with Snape since that first night? Hermione looked at Ginny once again. *If only I could talk to her!*

Draco’s eyes moved to Ginny. He licked his lips. "So, Severus. How about a little witch on witch fun? Or perhaps you'd let me have a go with Red? I'd offer you Granger in return, but father thinks the Dark Lord might be serious about making her a Malfoy. He doesn’t want to share her until we’re certain." Draco's tone clearly conveyed that he disagreed with his father.

Severus slowly moved his gaze from Lucius to Draco. "While a little witch on witch *fun* – as you call it – might be something your adolescent cravings desire, I have no need or inclinations towards such activities." He took a sip of his whiskey, face remaining impassive. "I...do...not...share."

Draco shrugged and laughed. "Ok, Sev. Clearly you old men have forgotten how to have a good time." His eyes moved from Hermione to Ginny. "I, on the other hand, have quite an imagination and can picture these two perfectly." Hermione could sense a very slight tension in Severus as Draco’s eyes continued to lasciviously scan up and down Ginny as he slowly sipped his drink. Snape’s reaction was subtle. If Hermione hadn't been sitting on the same sofa as Severus, she probably wouldn't have noticed.

Ginny and Hermione once again looked at each other, relieved, as the conversation continued.

Lucius changed the subject. "Severus, tell me, has the Dark Lord discussed the move into Ireland with you?"

Draco scoffed. "He's got much bigger aspirations than just Ireland. He was discussing Germany with Bella."
Lucius and Severus exchanged glances. Hermione wondered if perhaps Draco knew more than the two older wizards. As the men continued discussing Voldemort's plan of European domination, Hermione began to feel tired. The pepper up potion was clearly starting to fade.

The male house elf from breakfast appeared with a pop. "Dinner is served, Master Lucius." The elf was bowing, his nose almost touching the floor.

Hermione was grateful when Lucius stepped forward quickly to assist her to her feet. He then offered his arm to lead her into the dining room. His earlier order from breakfast took matters out of her hands, forcing her to - what was it he had said? "You will allow us to carry out the expected behaviors a gentleman bestows upon a lady in a dining room."

Hermione was simply glad it was Lucius leading her, and not Draco. They walked through a door she had not noticed, which led straight into the dining room from breakfast. Looking around the room, Hermione found the dining room did, in fact, look very different at night. It was formal, elaborate, and imposing. Without the light coming through the windows, and only darkness displayed in those giant spaces, the room had lost the warmth from earlier. It was grandiose, but it wasn't what she would call comfortable or inviting.

Lucius pulled her same chair out and she sat, allowing him to scoot her chair in as the compulsion once again gave her no choice. This time Draco sat to her left and Ginny was seated directly across from her, where Draco had sat for breakfast. Snape was to Ginny's right, directly across from Draco. Lucius, once again, sat at the head of the table to Hermione's right.

As at breakfast, covered plates were levitated in front of them. This time it was Tinny and the male elf working together. Hermione's head was beginning to become fuzzy with exhaustion. She knew she should be starving, but all she wanted was to sleep and for the discomfort from the UTI to go away. Her lower back was really starting to throb and her arms and shoulders were tender. Not to mention she had a raging headache.

The covers were lifted off the plates revealing Beef Wellington, scalloped potatoes, and assorted roasted vegetables. It smelled delicious. Hermione slowly began to eat as the wizards at the table continued talking about Voldemort.

Severus swallowed and wiped his mouth with the gray, linen napkin. A napkin which matched the stunning china. The coloring of the china was whites, stormy greys, and blues. The scene depicted all white magical creatures: unicorns, white peacocks and few Hermione wasn't familiar with. The animals moved on the plate. It wasn't something Hermione had ever seen before.

Hermione's thoughts were pulled from the dishes as she heard Severus discussing Voldemort's latest consideration about venturing into the private sector. Apparently, the megalomaniac was contemplating opening whore houses as well as some other businesses. The wizards all seemed to find this to be an exceptional idea and spoke of the despot as though he were a genius.

A vision came into Hermione's mind and before she could stop herself she let out a bark of laughter, which led into a genuine belly laugh. Tears pooled in her eyes and her belly ached from laughing so hard. She had no control over herself and could not stop laughing. The wizards at the table all looked at her in stunned silence. Ginny's eyes were large, a touch of fear in them. Clearly, Ginny thought Hermione had gone mad. Perhaps she had, but it was just so darn funny.

Lucius spoke first. "What in Circe's name has you laughing so hard, Miss Granger?!"

Hermione had to pant to control her breathing and give herself a chance to get the words out. She recited what was rolling around in her head like a game show host. "Voldemart! For all your less
than ethical needs. Veritaserum? We got it. Lust potion? It's on special! Need a quick shag? We rent
witches by the minute for your convenience. Shop Voldemart today!" She took a breath and then
laughed again as she continued. "World domination, one convenience store at a time!" She barely
got the last word out as she began to guffaw with laughter once again. She could see Ginny's jaw
hanging open and Lucius and Draco looking at her...Draco with irritation, Lucius with concern.
Hermione realized that she was absolutely punch drunk with her fatigue. With three of the four other
magical folk at the table being pure blooded, it was very likely they all thought her mad.

Snape however...Snape was watching her with a twinkle in his eyes. She could see the corners of
his lips twitching. He was clearly trying to maintain control. Being the only one at the table besides
Hermione who had any idea what a convenience store was, he was most likely the only one who
realized how clever the joke had been. Is he really trying not to laugh? That would be so out of
character for him.

"Stop laughing!" Draco snapped.

Hermione let out a hiccup as her mouth clamped shut and her laughter stopped abruptly. She
dabbed her eyes with her napkin as she felt herself slowly regain control.

Draco continued. "You're ridiculous, Mudblood. A pathetic excuse for a witch. You sit here all
evening and say nothing at all. When you do decide to deign us with your input, you start laughing
like a mad woman and talk absolute gibberish." Everyone was quiet as he added another jab.
"Intelligent? There's nothing intelligent about you. You only received good grades because you
could spew back out what you read. It was never because you had an original thought." He sneered
at her as he continued. "But you never fooled me and you never fooled Severus." He looked across
the table. "Did she, Godfather?"

Snape's gaze moved from Draco to Hermione, his eyes somehow slightly softer, but his words were
as expected. "Yes, Draco. Miss Granger has a skill of being able to recite verbatim what she reads."

He looked back at Draco. "While irritating, it's not the worst of abilities. She still far exceeds the
abilities of those buffoons, Crabbe and Goyle."

Hermione couldn't help the slight disappointment she felt when Snape called her irritating. Saying
she had more ability that Crabbe and Goyle was hardly a compliment. She moved the food around
her plate. For some reason, despite it all, his opinion mattered to her. She was a fool to care. Any
appetite which had returned moments before was now gone. She couldn't help it as a yawn escaped.
She covered her mouth, but Draco noticed and was quick to comment.

"Really, you have no manners. You're pathetic." Draco had opened his mouth to continue insulting
her but the voice of Lucius interrupted the string of insults.

"I believe that's enough for now, Draco. Let Hermione eat her dinner in peace."


The table remained quiet as Draco began eating again. Hermione looked at Lucius. He was watching
her. While his expression was not friendly, it wasn't threatening, either. She realized then and there
that, between the two, Lucius was the least dangerous. Perhaps there was something in him that was
human. Perhaps... Who are you kidding, Hermione! He's Lucius Malfoy. The same Lucius who stole
your virginity less than twenty-four hours ago. Stop trying to find a silver lining. There isn't one.

Hermione glanced across the table at Ginny. Concern and worry was evident on her friend's face.
She offered Ginny a small, reassuring smile. The redhead's eyes welled with tears at her friend's
bravery and Hermione looked away. She was done crying. It accomplished nothing.

"Eat your dinner, Hermione." Lucius ordered. Hermione picked up her fork and began taking the unwelcome bites into her mouth.

"Yes, Ginny, you as well. You've barely touched your food." Hermione could see Ginny pick up her fork as well and follow Snape's instruction.

Fifteen minutes later everyone was finished eating as Hermione struggled to put the last bite in her mouth. She was so full, but Lucius' order gave her no choice but to eat everything on her plate. Snape had allowed Ginny to stop when he felt she had eaten enough. Unfortunately, Lucius and Draco didn't have the same consideration for her as Snape obviously did for Ginny. Hermione determined she would speak to Tinny and request smaller servings if possible.

After she swallowed her last bite, Draco spoke. "Finally!" he exclaimed. "I don't think you could have eaten much slower."

Lucius started to stand. "Let's retreat back to my study. I have instructed Bilby to lay out coffee, brandy, and petit fours."

Hermione made note of the elf's name. Bilby. She attempted to stand, but her legs and back ached so much, she couldn't get out of the chair. Another attempt had her slowly move to her feet, wobbling and grimacing in pain. She felt Draco's eyes on her and internally flinched for the insult she knew was coming. Only, he didn't speak. Instead he grabbed her arm roughly and jerked her to follow behind him. She stumbled and almost fell, but Lucius was right behind her. His strong hands gripped her waist, righting her as Draco looked back with a scowl. She took a tentative step forward, still shaking when her knee suddenly made a creaking sound and a sharp pain overtook her. She let out a gasp.

Draco sighed and stopped walking. He rolled his eyes, looking at his father, his right hand still gripping her left arm. "I think we've broken our new toy already, Father. She was supposed to be so strong, but look at her." He directed his next comment at Hermione. "You are pathetically weak. Such a fucking let down."

Lucius placed his hand over Draco's tight grip on her arm. "She's not broken, Draco. Nor is she weak. She's merely exhausted after having cleaned the floors in the drawing room a half dozen times today." There was a note of scolding in the older man's voice that caused Hermione to look at him in interest. Was he defending her?

Draco released Hermione's arm. "Whatever. I wonder if we can trade her in."

Lucius stood beside Hermione as Draco walked ahead. Hermione noticed that Ginny was walking behind Severus and a few paces to his left. It seemed to be by design, because she maintained that exact distance and position behind him when his pace changed and when he moved through the door.

Her thoughts were pulled from Ginny when Lucius spoke quietly, his tone formal. "If you would like, Miss Granger, you are welcome to retire for the evening." He wasn't looking at her with kindness; he was merely presenting her with an option.

Hermione looked up into his pale grey eyes, emotion clogging her throat. Sleep was needed desperately. "Yes, thank you. I'm just so tired."

Lucius nodded, a flash of what looked like understanding come over his face. He handed her a small
jar which he pulled out of his pocket. "Take this, it's bruise paste." His eyes went to her cheek and his hand started to reach up. Hermione flinched. He dropped his fingers and stood taller. His expressionless mask once again present.

Realizing he was actually being kind, Hermione spoke again. "Thank you, Mr. Malfoy." She offered him a small smile, but her tone and words were as formal as his had been. She thought she noticed him flinch when she called him Mr. Malfoy.

"I will instruct Draco to let you rest tonight," Lucius told her soundly. Then he spoke out more loudly. "Tinny!"

The house elf appeared instantly. "Take Miss Granger to her room. She is to retire for the evening."

Tinny apparated the exhausted witch to her suite and helped to undress her. Hermione yawned and looked down at the elf who was working quickly to unfasten the bindings of the dress. Hermione spoke sweetly. "Thank you, Tinny. Thank you for helping me. for the pillows under my knees and for the cranberry juice."

The elf kept working but glanced up at Hermione in wide eyed surprise. Hermione wondered if the elf had ever been properly thanked.

Tinny slid the dress down Hermione's form as she spoke. "Tinny tended to the Lady Malfoy's of the past one hundred years. Tinny will tend to young miss as well, until Tinny is tolds not to."

Hermione sighed, her eyes fluttering, struggling to stay open as she talked with the elf. "Well, whatever your reason, I'm grateful. I'm relieved to have at least someone in this place who seems to care about my well-being."

Hermione made her way to the loo. Emptying her bladder, she was once again disheartened that the uncomfortable burning sensation was still present. She managed to stand and make it to the sink by leaning against the wall and gripping the edge of the large vanity as she walked. As she washed her hands, she looked at her grotesque reflection. Her bruise was a deep purple and her left eye looked swollen. The gash above her brow looked deep and the edges seemed to be bright pink. She wondered if it would become infected. She was too tired to use the bruise paste and placed the small jar on the vanity beside the sink. She would tend to her bruises in the morning.

Hermione thought of Ginny as she made her way back into her room. Her friend had looked radiant, and that was good news. She hoped Neville was okay. She gingerly slipped into her inviting bed. Taking a moment to look at her bedside clock, she found it was eight-thirty. It felt like midnight. She thought she noticed a flicker of movement in the portrait that was hanging over her fireplace, but when she looked again, she saw nothing except a vast blue sky and a field of poppies. Her thoughts moved to Neville as sleep overtook her instantly.

"Granger!" a voice yelled in the distance. "Mudblood, wake up!"

Hermione's eyes opened slightly. "No, I'm so tired," she whispered in her half-conscious state.

"Wake up! Jeez, you're a hard sleeper." Hermione wanted to close her eyes, but the command kept her eyes open as her brain slowly came to consciousness. A strong hand was tapping her face and grabbing her arm, shaking her roughly. "Wake up, I'm not done with you. Father shouldn't have let you go yet."

Hermione glanced at the clock. It was only eight fifty-five. She'd only been in bed for twenty-five minutes.
She couldn't help the plea that fell from her lips. "Please, Draco. I can't. Please let me sleep."

"No. Pull your night dress off and scoot over," he demanded impatiently.

Hermione wanted to scream in frustration as she tried to move over in the bed. The muscles in her shoulders, back, and legs screamed in protest as she slowly moved towards the other side of the bed. Her arms ached as she grabbed the hem of her gown and pulled it over her head. Draco was naked and climbed in the bed beside her, laying on his back in the spot she had just occupied. He began stroking himself, his cock swelled quickly. "Climb on top and ride me."

Hermione's brain cried its disgust as her body obeyed his command. She felt like crying, but resisted. Her muscles throbbed and her legs trembled with the exertion. She managed to get onto her knees and move next to him.

"That's it. Now swing your leg over me and slide that cunt of yours down on my cock." A thought clearly came to him. "Wait, suck me first. Get my cock good and wet."

Hermione leaned down, her stomach muscles now adding their protest to her movements, as she lowered her mouth over him. He grabbed the back of her head and thrust his hips forward, once again ramming into the back of her throat, causing her to gag.

"If you puke on me, you'll regret it," he cautioned with venom in his voice.

Hermione concentrated hard on not gagging as she licked and sucked up and down his length. He grabbed her hair roughly, pulling her head back. "That's good enough. Now, fuck me."

He let go of her head as she forced herself up on her knees. "Put your hands on your tits and play with your nipples." Her hands did as instructed as she lowered her tender core over his length. He grabbed her right hip roughly with his left hand as his right hand guided his cock so that it nestled at her entrance. He put his right hand on her left hip and forced her down on him. She nearly screamed in pain. She was dry and his cock felt like a ramming rod being shoved into her. He let out a grunt as his eyes closed. "Now, move up and down and fuck me like the whore you are."

Hermione's legs were so weak she could barely lift herself. "Faster and harder...now!" He commanded. The pain in her legs was almost unbearable, but nothing compared to the tender flesh of her damaged core being assaulted with his prick. He pulled his right hand from her hip and began to rub the spot that she was beginning to resent. This part of her body betrayed her. It caused her to feel pleasure when pleasure was the opposite of what she should be feeling. The more he rubbed the better it felt and the easier it became to slide up and down. The pain of him inside her lessened some.

"That's it. Now moan loudly."

Hermione began to moan. Sex noises, grunts, and whimpers fell from her lips as he rammed his hips up and into her. Her head pounded with each thrust. While the movements became more smooth (because of her natural lubrication), each jolt of his rolling hips aggravated her tenderness.

"Now, say: I'm a Mudblood who loves getting fucked."

Hermione repeated his words without a conscious thought. Words were just words, after all. She was adapting to the humiliation quickly. Soon enough, she would be able to ignore his taunts.

"Take your hands off your tits and put them on my chest. Move faster and harder. I want to see those tits bounce," he instructed, panting in time with his thrusts.
Hermione did as instructed, his eyes glued to her chest as she pumped up and down quickly. "That's it. You're so good at this. You were made for fucking. That's what you'll be spending the rest of your pathetic life doing." He continued mocking her as he drove up into her. Her eyes were closed, trying to shut him out as her mandated pleasure sounds continued without her consent. He smiled maliciously, knowing she was listening. "Malfoy wife or not, it's what I'm going to use you for. As soon as the Dark Lord confirms we won't be stuck having to marry you, I'm going to let my friends have a go with you as well."

He began to rub her harder. "Look how wet you're getting. You're such a slut…you like this don't you? Your body says you do."

Hermione fought the coiling within her. His words were helping to keep her from reaching her peak. His hand was doing the opposite. He stopped talking. After a couple of minutes, she couldn't stop her core from convulsing with her release, milking him as he tensed with his own climax. No longer under the compulsion to ride him, her worn out muscles just wouldn't support her. She couldn't prevent it as she collapsed forward onto him. He stiffened in shock for a moment before roughly shoving her off him as he slid out of the bed.

"Kneel on the floor," he demanded as he walked away into her bathroom. She cautiously and slowly slid out of the bed and onto her knees. She heard the shower turn on and wondered if he was going to make her bathe him again. Then, she heard the water change as he stepped into it and realized he was going to leave her kneeling for now. His shower seemed to go on forever. Hermione closed her eyes, feeling herself drift off as her head fell forward. Only to be startled awake as her body obeyed his command to remain kneeling when she started to topple over.

It seemed like forever before Draco walked out of the loo. He was naked and toweling his hair as he approached her. "Stand up."

She almost fell over as her stiff knees and aching body complied. He watched her without expression and then pointed toward the corner of the room. "Go stand in the corner. Face it and stay there until I come for you again or your six am summons arrives."

She winced with dread, her body starting to tremble when she realized he wasn't going to allow her to sleep. "Please, Malfoy. Please, don't do this. I need to sleep. I'm so tired." He ignored her words, his eyes glinting with malicious glee. She realized then he knew exactly what he was doing to her. "Do it, Mudblood."

Her body forced her to walk to the far corner of the room and stood in front of it. He grinned, thoroughly enjoying her misery. She was visibly shaking with fatigue and pain. "No, do it right. Nestle yourself in there. I want your nose almost touching the corner," he commanded.

She moved closer, so that her nose was almost touching. She heard him flip pages and wondered what he was doing. What is he reading?

"Snape is training his pet to be a full blown submissive. You know what that is?" He answered her unspoken question.

What? She thought to herself. She had no idea what he was talking about.

He continued. "It's pretty kinky. I'm thinking I might like a submissive." She heard more pages turn. "I mean, technically, you're already my submissive, because you do what I say. But I want a real one. A witch who does it because she likes it. I'm thinking I'll practice on you, though." After a
minute, he continued. "Father say's Snape's been into D/s for ages, ever since he first became a Death Eater. Ginny seems to be into it as well."

Hermione was surprised when he used Ginny's given name. Hermione didn't know what a submissive was, but she could guess. She heard of D/s before, but didn't really know what it was. It made her concerned for Ginny. Then again, it couldn't be much worse than what Hermione was enduring, right? At least, she hoped not.

She heard the sound of more pages and then a heavy sigh. "I'm too tired to practice tonight, though. I'm going to bed. You stay there."

She heard the closing of the door and felt unwelcome, worthless tears once again prick her eyes. She leaned her head forward and winced in pain when the gash on her forehead met the wall. She quickly pulled back as she felt a tear escape. Bloody, fucking, useless tears. Enough, Hermione! She stood, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, trying to give her back a rest. After a few minutes, she heard a loud pop. There was silence, and then she felt something soft around her neck.

It was a pillow. One that wedged between her shoulder and her head. She felt relief as she slightly tilted her head and felt the strain on her neck and shoulders subside. The pillow absorbed the weight of her head. It felt heavenly. She next felt something soft press up against her back and something jetted out where her bottom was, allowing her lean slightly into it. This softness held her as she leaned back into it. She couldn't quite sit completely, but she could sort of half stand, half sit.

"Tinny, what if Draco comes back and finds me like this? He'll kill both of us!"

She heard Tinny's small voice. "Tinny will stay with young Miss all night and will release spell if Master Draco comes."

"But you should rest! You've been working all day. You must be tired."

"Young Miss must not worries about Tinny. Tinny will takes care of Tinny."

"Oh Tinny, thank you. If you get tired, though, you must release the spell and go to bed. I won't have you being tortured or punished for helping me."

"Dobby was right about young Miss. Dobby said young Miss was a good witch. Dobby was Tinny's brother. Tinny misses Dobby and will take care of Dobby's friend."

Hermione shook with fresh tears for Tinny's kindness and for Dobby's soul. "Dobby was a wonderful elf and a good friend to Harry Potter. He was a good friend to me! He died saving us. I owe him so much."

It was silent for a couple of minutes. "Young Miss must try to rest, Tinny will watch over the good witch."

The night dragged. Hermione was so grateful for Tinny's help and knew that without it she would have been in a dreadful situation. It was bad enough, but so much better than it could be. She felt herself doze for short spurts, but knew it was no more than a few minutes at a time as the bond forced her to maintain her feet on the floor and her nose close to the wall. Tinny could only help her so much.

As the night progressed, Hermione felt more and more terrible. One moment, she was so hot and the next she was freezing. The chills overcame her despite Tinny draping a blanket around her. Her teeth were chattering and she felt nauseous. Her head really hurt, throbbing behind her eyes. Each minute seemed like an hour. Tinny, bless her kind soul, did not seem to mind when Hermione asked her for
the time repeatedly. She felt like she was in a fog of delirium, when her heart began to speed up and pound. She recognized the symptoms of the pull of her bond and somewhere in her subconscious realized six am must be approaching. She felt weightless as the softness behind her disappeared and her head fell forward as her neck pillow vanished.

"Comes, young Miss. Tinny will takes you."

Tinny took Hermione's hand and the vacuum feel of apparition came over her. Upon landing in Lucius' suite, a horrible wave a nausea overcame her as her head whirled uncontrollably. Black spots exploded in front of her eyes, and her legs couldn't support her weight. Her knees buckled and she fell forward, crashing into a table. It pitched over, causing a glass lamp to fall and shatter. The sound reverberated through the room as she fought to remain conscious.

Lucius woke with a start. What the…? He sat up in bed, throwing the covers off and scanning the room. He found Hermione near the door, collapsed on the floor at Tinny's feet. She looked so small and… naked? Where is her night gown?

"Tinny, what happened?" He jumped out of bed and dashed to Hermione's side. His tone was abrupt and scolding. Even in the dim light he could see the bruises that littered her abused frame. Oh my Gods, what the hell?

Hermione came to the defense of her friend, her words coming out slurred with exhaustion. "Not Tin's fault…Draco…he…” Lucius crouched before her, sliding his palms underneath and lifting her into his arms. Merlin, she's burning up! He watched, feeling slightly sick, as her eyes rolled back into her head, her body went limp for a moment. Even with the dead weight of her in his arms, she was so light. She felt like she weighed less than the first time he had held her like this. Had that really only been less than forty-eight hours ago?

"Tinny, get Healer Jacobs." He demanded, his tone of voice conveying the slight panic he felt. Tinny disappeared with a snap and a loud pop.

He stood, looking at her face as he held her. "Draco what? What did Draco do?" He asked, his words urgent. He wanted answers.

Hermione slowly opened her eyes. He stared into the soft caramel orbs as she watched him. Soft tendrils of hair framed her face, which was still heavily bruised. "He…” she swallowed hard, and he winced at the sound. It seemed painful. "He made me stand in the corner." She swallowed again. "All night.” Her words were barely a whisper. Her voice sounded as though someone had taken sand paper to her vocal chords. She seemed so frail and was shivering in his arms.

"He came to your room? Last night?” Lucius' tone was much more abrupt than he intended. He had told Draco to leave her alone. Damn the boy! She had so obviously needed to rest.

"Miss Granger." She didn't open her eyes. "Hermione! Did Draco come to your room last night?"

Hermione's eyes flickered again. "Yes, just after dinner." She leaned her head on his shoulder. Her body sinking against his bare chest as if she trusted him.

As Lucius questioned her, he walked out the door and hurried down the hall. He turned into another connecting hallway and then into Hermione's suite. The heat radiating off her made him feel over warm. Her skin was flushed, and she had very dark circles under her eyes. He laid her back onto her bed and then dashed into her bathroom. After quickly running a flannel under cool water, he rushed
back to her side where he began to dab her face and her neck. She was naked and her entire body was colored with heat.

"Where is that blasted elf?" He snapped aloud to no one in particular.

"Tinny is an angel." Hermione was barely able to speak, but muttered out the words anyhow. Her lips curved into a soft smile. Lucius was amazed that the girl had anything to even smile about. Draco had been wrong, she was much stronger than either of her abusers gave her credit for. This included himself.

She flinched as he brushed the gash over her eye. It looked worse than this morning – angry, red, and swollen. "How did you hurt your head?"

"I'm so tired," she mumbled, turning her face away from him.

He sighed. "I know, Princess. Just a couple more questions."

"Mm, Princess…that's nice. Makes me feel almost…human. I miss feeling like a person." She opened her lovely, caramel eyes and looked at him with their fathomless depths. "You aren't like Draco. You're…almost…well…" she sighed, trailing off. Her eyes fluttered again, settling closed after a moment. "Thank you for not hitting me."

Oh, dear Merlin! He felt a knot in his throat as he swallowed. To be thanked for not doing more than raping her. For Merlin's-fucking-sake! "How did you hurt your head, Hermione?" Lucius needed to know what had happened.

He smoothed some hair off her forehead and watched as she struggled to open her eyes again. Small slits could be seen as she answered him. "Draco slapped me. Knocked me into his nightstand."

Lucius' hand on her face tensed with that revelation. The movement was answered with Hermione's eyes flying wide as she cringed away from him. He pulled back from her abruptly. "I'm not going to hurt you, Pet." His voice was strangled. "I'm getting you some help. Do you need some water?"

"Please." It was a very quiet rasp. Lucius entered her adjoining bathroom to find a small crystal tumbler at the sink. He filled it and returned to her bedside. Sitting carefully on the edge of the bed, trying not to jostle her too much, he whispered her name. "Draco slapped me. Knocked me into his nightstand."

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Once she seemed finished with the water, he spoke soothingly. "Get some rest, Hermione. It's going to be all right." Gently, he guided her back to the pillows before smoothing a tumble of curls off her face.

After a moment of watching long, thick, dark lashes laying shadowed against her cheeks, Lucius turned towards the sound of Apparition. "Over here." The grey-haired healer with glasses looked from Lucius to the naked girl laying on the bed.

Lucius stood and moved out of the way as the healer walked quickly over to Hermione and waved his wand over her body.

"I can tell you right away she has a serious kidney infection. She's also severely sleep deprived," he said, pausing over her abdomen. He accio'd his bag and pulled out another wand, passing it over her body again. A blue glow hovered over her head. "She also has a slight concussion." He moved the
wand slowly down the length of her form, stopping to hover over her pelvis. He let out a heavy sigh. "I will need to do a pelvic exam."

Lucius stepped back, another wave of nausea rolling through him. "Just do whatever she needs." He gestured towards her. "Make sure she'll be all right."

Lucius stood watching, his anger escalated as he thought about Draco's defiance and abuse. Unable to just stand there and do nothing, he marched out of Hermione's room and apparated to Draco's – which was on another wing. He barged into the young man's suite. Approaching the bed, he found the soundly sleeping form of his son.

"Draco, wake up!" he snapped. When there was no response, Lucius shook his shoulder. "Draco, wake up."

Draco groaned and slowly opened his eyes. "Wha-at," he drawled out, yawning.

"What did you do to Hermione?" he demanded.

Draco stretched. "Father, I'm tired. Let's talk later." He started to roll away from Lucius.

"Draco Malfoy, you sit up and answer me this instant!" His tone was angry and adamant.

Draco sighed heavily and slowly pushed himself up into a sitting position, his eyes only half open. Lucius noticed the D/s magazines tossed on the other side of the bed and his anger increased. Think about that later.

"Tell me what you did to Miss Granger. Healer Jones is with her right now and based on his demeanor and what he said, it's serious! What did you do to her?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "I fucked her and made her stand in the corner for the night."

Lucius shook his head. "I told you she needed to rest! I told you she'd be no bloody good to us in the state she was in!" he raged. "What else have you done? How did she get the gash on her head and the bruise on her face?" He wanted to hear his son say it. Wanted to hear the boy tell him why he had done what he had done. There was no reply. "She has a concussion, Draco!"

Draco sighed heavily. "Father, what's the big deal? She was being disrespectful. I taught her a lesson or two."

Lucius sighed, crossing his arms. "Enough is enough. I won't have our witch battered and bruised. It's not attractive or enjoyable having her injured and maltreated and flinching every time we touch her."

"She's just a Mudblood, who cares?" Draco responded, dismissively.

"She's not just a Mudblood, Draco! Get it through your head! You might be married to her one day. I might be married to her one day! She might be your wife or stepmother! Do you want to be married to a woman who despises and fears you?"

"Frankly, Father, I don't really care if she hates me or not. I don't understand why you suddenly care so much." A pale, blond eyebrow rose as Draco studied his father's face.

Lucius took a deep breath, trying to dispel some of his anger. The last thing he needed was for Draco to think he was trying to protect the girl for anything other than his own pleasure with her appearance. Lucius was terrified the insolent brat, that his son was, would accidently kill the girl.
Then they'd really have the Dark Lord's wrath come down on them. "I never thought of her as someone we would abuse Draco." He sighed, rubbing his eyes. "There obviously isn't any point in trying to explain it to you. Use your brain! Think! Leave her alone. Fuck her, but don't harm her."

"Father. News flash. We raped her. Or had you forgotten?" Draco quipped, an evil smirk splitting his face. He obviously had no remorse.

Lucius' jaw tensed. "You know we were being watched that evening. We had no choice."

Draco pointed at the sleeping portrait of Abraxas in the corner of his room. "The portraits are still watching, Father. They are always watching, and the Dark Lord will always know what goes on in this house because of it."

Lucius let out a huff. Draco was right, but he was also so very wrong. "Yes. Clearly, we are under a constant eye, but that doesn't mean you have to beat her!"

Draco stared at his father for a minute, his expression contemplative. Lucius had a flicker of hope that he was actually getting through to the boy before it fizzled and died. "You treat her as you see fit and I'll do the same. We'll see where the bludger lands. The Dark Lord is finally showing me favor. It's taken a very long time, but it's happening because he no longer sees me as weak."

Lucius was taken aback by his son's tone. Draco had never challenged him in such a way. "Beating a wandless witch doesn't make you strong, Draco."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Whatever. You mind leaving so that I can get some more sleep?"

Lucius watched him for a minute. "Fine, but do yourself a favor and back off her. I fear you'll live to regret this behavior if you don't."

Lucius left his son's suite and apparated to his suite to shower and dress before heading back to Hermione. He arrived to find Healer Jacobs still at her bedside. Tinny was next to him, organizing flasks and jars on her bedside table.

"Ah, Mr. Malfoy. So, Miss Granger is quite ill. I shudder to think what would have happened if this had gone untreated much longer. UTIs can be very dangerous when left unattended."

Lucius swallowed heavily, realizing he was as much to blame as Draco. Hermione had told him she had a urinary tract infection, he should have gotten the potions she needed immediately. "She'll get better?"

Healer Jacobs gave a firm nod. "Yes, physically she will heal. Emotionally…mentally?" He paused, seemingly hesitant to say more. "Miss Granger is suffering from severe depression. My psychological evaluation showed she has had suicidal ideations in the last forty-eight hours." He dropped a few items in his bag and turned to face Lucius fully. "Her perineum has been brutalized. I've never seen a witch as torn up as she is." Lucius visibly flinched when the healer couldn't keep the disgust out of his voice.

"She needs to heal before any more sexual activity occurs." Jacobs looked at Tinny and then at Hermione. "I have given Tinny healing balms, bruise paste, a mood lifting potion, and a systemic anti-infection potion. She has been instructed in their use." He paused before adding. "Miss Granger's head gash was infected as well."

Lucius wondered how the healer knew Hermione's name, but quickly dismissed the curiosity as he listened to the healer.
Jacobs placed the last of his items in his bag and closed it. He looked at Lucius. "She needs to heal and rest. A *minimum* of two days to let the healing potions work."

Lucius looked at the sleeping girl and sighed. "Thank you, Healer Jacobs. We'll be in touch if we need further assistance."

The healer paused before leaving. "I would like to stop by to check on her tomorrow, if that is acceptable?"

Lucius nodded. "Yes, of course. Whatever you think is best."

Healer Jacobs was Apparated by Tinny, leaving Lucius to watch over the now sleeping witch. She looked so incredibly young.

A flicker of movement over the mantle caught his attention. Lucius turned and saw her approach, walking through the field of poppies. He closed his eyes and took a breath, trying to quell the swell of emotion at seeing her beautiful face.

"Luc, something needs to be done about this," her soft voice whispered.

He scanned the room, confirming there were no other "visitors" in any of the other paintings in the suite. He could only talk freely when they were alone. "Yes, love. I fear our Draco has started show the signs."
Chapter Seven

Chapter by Snowblind12

These characters and the magical world they live in belong to JK Rowling and her publishers.

Thanks to my amazing co-writer and best friend, LissaDream. I love you, LD! Please be sure to check out our other co-written story, Master Mine.

Thanks for all comments, kudos, bookmarks and subscriptions. These little nods of appreciation are what inspire us to keep writing ;)

Chapter Seven

Lucius stood beside the bed, watching the frail, sleeping witch. Internally, he reprimanded himself for being reckless and careless. If the girl had died, merely two days after being gifted, he shuddered to think what the Dark Lord would have done. Knowing the man's unpredictability, it could have been a mere shrug of his shoulders or a crucio followed by months in a dank dungeon. Lucius had learned long ago there was no way to envisage the Dark Lord's reactions.

The Malfoy patriarch paced lightly about the bedroom, taking the time to note where the portraits and paintings were positioned. He wasn't sure if he had ever stepped foot in this room before this morning. It was simply a typical guest suite in Malfoy Manor. At least a dozen just like it were scattered throughout each wing.

As he paced the space, he was happy to find there actually weren't any portraits hanging on the walls, however, this would not prevent visitors. Narcissa had made her way here, after all. It did, however, mean none of his ancestors or subjects painted throughout the Manor would be spending a lot of time in this suite. Unsettling was the best word he could find, knowing he was being watched at any and every moment in most any part of the Manor. It's not that he had anything to hide, per se, but he valued his privacy and knew reports of his activities were being given to the Dark Lord. Some of his ancestors, namely his father, were highly embarrassed of the actions the small Malfoy family had taken during the Battle of Hogwarts. Abraxas Malfoy had even expressed his approval of Narcissa being executed for trying to protect Potter.

Lucius sighed, and continued to walk around the room, studying each painting on the wall. Only a fraction of the artwork in the Manor depicted Malfoy ancestors. The Hall of Portraits, off the entrance foyer, held over seventy-five portraits of witches and wizards who were prominent figures in wizarding history. Some of them dated back to the 1600's. His great grandfather times ten, Lucius' namesake, had even aspired to secure the hand of Queen Elizabeth I. This was before the statute of secrecy laws were in effect; when the Malfoys mingled with English Nobility. There were paintings of many of the English Royalty from that time scattered throughout the expansive house.

As his thoughts wandered back to the paintings in this particular suite, he was surprised to discover at least half were Muggle in origin. He studied the Muggle canvases and found them lacking. There was one that had quite stunning colors and while the images were pleasant, they were also very blurred. Glancing at the bottom corner, Lucius noted the signature Monet. Clearly this artist had not gone very far in life, the fool must have needed glasses. His Grandmother, Elizabella, had fancied herself an art collector, he wondered if she was the one who had amassed a large collection of what was likely worthless wall coverings.

Lucius' attention was turned back to the young witch when he heard her moan and sigh loudly.
Grudgingly, he had to admit that she was a beautiful girl, if one fancied wild, untamed, bushy, and riotous curls. Hair aside, she had lovely facial features – dainty and feminine. She had a heart shaped face with soft cheekbones, arched brows, and quite stunning, large, luminous eyes. Lucius closed his own eyes, trying to hold back his frustration with the situation. Hermione's eyes were a problem for Lucius, especially as the second day had progressed. Draco had been unnecessarily brutal with her. While Lucius did not condone or exhibit the same behavior, her furious accusations and obvious pain and fatigue had rung clear in those luminescent, golden orbs. She seemingly directed all her expressive looks at Lucius, almost as if she hoped he would protect her. How could he? He hadn't even been able protect his own wife. Why should he try to protect a Mudblood girl?

He returned his gaze to her bruised face, Hermione's eyes were moving rapidly behind her lids. *Hmm. Dreaming. Why didn't the healer give her Dreamless Sleep Potion? Clearly, she needed it.*

He was started out of his thoughts by a large crack of Apparation, Tinny had arrived. "Tinny, fetch some Dreamless Sleep from the Manor Apothecary. I believe Severus restocked our supplies yesterday. Miss Granger is restless in her sleep from dreaming."

Tinny looked up at Lucius, clearly struggling with something. The little elf's eyes were large and her ears were twitching nervously. She looked toward Hermione and back up at him, something like resolve coming over her as she finally spoke. "Tinny will iron her ears, Master Lucius, but Tinny cannots give young Miss Dreamless Sleep Potion. Healer Jacobs tolds Tinny nots to."

"Why ever not?" Lucius asked, his tone impatient and his head cocked.

The elf was now twisting her tea towel nervously. "Healer Jacobs says Miss must be woken every four hours for her potions and pastes. Dreamless Sleep will prevent her from being able to takes her medicines."

Lucius hmphed and looked back at the witch. "Fine. You do not need to iron your ears." He looked back down at her. "Make sure Master Draco is awake and at breakfast by eight. Have Bilby wake him if you are tending to Miss Granger."

He promptly Apparated to his suite finding he wanted to be alone. Thinking back on the events of the morning, he swallowed down the heartache that still overcame him at random times. The remembrance of her appearing again this morning was to blame for today's episode. Narcissa had startled him when she awoke in her portrait two weeks before. He had been napping and had wakened to the feeling of being watched. He had known she would awaken at some point, but had not known when. His father had taken over six months to wake up.

Narcissa had insisted they have their portraits done and the proper charm applied the minute the Dark Lord had returned. Astutely realizing the possibility of an early demise, she had commissioned the paintings quickly. Lucius had told her she was being silly and paranoid, but she had been right.

Bloody hell, this was just one of the many things he owed his late wife an apology for. His other faults were even more damning. He had loved Narcissa more than anything in this world. Society had dictated his actions, though and he had been occasionally unfaithful to her. Somehow, the fact she had never found out about his infidelity made it worse. He had been disrespectful and demeaning at times – actually more times than he cared to remember. Other times he had been rudely dismissive and cold. He wished he could turn back the clock and make it right. If he ever found love again, even if it was just a fraction of the love he had for his Narcissa, he would treat the witch with more respect and he would keep his vows. He had married too young, had not really been ready. Unfortunately, marrying young was the way of the wizarding world.

He crossed the room on sat in hos favorite chair, his gaze drawn to the flames in the hearth.
When Narcissa had first awoken, he had sobbed on the floor in front of her. Lucius felt he had failed her, had not protected her enough at the Hogwarts Battle. How could he have protected her from the Dark Lord's wand, though? She had made a grave error, lying about Potter being dead. The simple truth was she shouldn't have even been there, she wasn't a fighter. The Dark Lord had insisted all his followers be there, however. He felt his anger start to spike and concentrated hard on ridding himself of that feeling and its source. The Dark Lord was a powerful Legilimens; it would mean Lucius' death if he caught wind of the Malfoy patriarch's feelings, or picked up on that resentment.

Since the first appearance, she had only come to him three more times - the third being this morning. She tended to follow Draco around, keeping a watch on the person she had always loved the most. Lucius didn't blame her, Draco had worshipped his mother, and they had been very close. The boys' heartbreak was still buried inside. Lucius didn't think Draco had even shed a tear yet. He had hoped that perhaps a female presence would be good for him, but clearly all he was doing was subconsciously taking out his resentment from his mother's death on the young witch. At least he hoped that's what this was. The alternative was...well, he wasn't quite ready to think the worst yet. Narcissa's words this morning had given him hope.

Deciding he needed to start his day, he arrived downstairs just before eight, as he did every morning. Taking his seat, he wondered if he should arrange with Bilby to send something up for Hermione. Then dismissed the thought, knowing Tinny would see to her.

He glanced over his paper as Draco sauntered in, yawning. "I trust you were able to get some more sleep?"

Draco sat in his chair and immediately picked up and took a deep sip of the hot cup of tea that had appeared before him. "I was able to doze a little more," he answered after he swallowed.

Bilby appeared and snapped his fingers, covered platters materialized in front of them. The lids were lifted, revealing omelets with spinach, tomato, and feta as well as toast and muffins with warm butter and pumpkin spice spread.

Lucius put down the paper and spoke as he draped his napkin across his lap. "Miss Granger is to be left alone for at least forty-eight hours. She is very ill and Healer Jacobs indicated she could have died if left untreated much longer."

Draco remained expressionless as he picked up his fork. Lucius chewed a bite of omelet and swallowed before continuing. "Perhaps, it would be wise to not be so...rough...with Miss Granger. It might be nice if she enjoyed our attentions, don't you think?" He watched his son take a bite of a muffin slathered with butter and pumpkin spread. Draco chewed and swallowed before setting it down on his plate and raising his face to his father.

"No." Draco's answer was impertinent. Lucius clenched his jaw.

"I'm serious, Draco. The Dark Lord will not appreciate us killing her before he is ready for her to be dead," he struggled to keep his voice calm, inside he was boiling with fury.

"I will not kill her," Draco said simply, still not looking at his father.

"You almost did!" Lucius had a hard time keeping the condescension out of his voice.

"I didn't." His son's calm, indifferent demeanor sent chills through him.

"Draco." Lucius closed his eyes as grief overcame him. Draco was all he had left in this world. "We must keep Miss Granger safe. Yes – it is compulsory that we sleep with her - it maintains the
bonding – but this is all supposed to be with a purpose. You must remember our objective here. The Dark Lord wants to use her to his advantage! She needs to be swayed to seeing the right of things. It is not necessary or helpful, therefore, to work her to death or beat her until she is black and blue. She had a bloody concussion, Draco!"

"As I said earlier, Father," Draco snapped, his face contorting with ire. "I will do as I please, you may do as you please. By all means, heal the Mudblood when she's with you. A blank canvas is always nice." Haughtily, Draco reached for his cup of tea. "I have my way of persuasion and you have yours."

"What has gotten into you, Draco?" Lucius demanded softly. "I know you do not like Granger, but I did not raise you to treat women this way."

"She is not a woman, Father," Draco sneered. "She is a Mudblood whore, a dog who needs to be trained."

The blatant cruelty in his son's voice gave Lucius pause. The sneer on Draco's face matched the one Lucius had watched on his sister-in-law's cold mug for the last three years. He suddenly felt like he needed to choose his words carefully. Suppressing a shudder, he changed his tactic.

"Do as you see fit, Draco, but for the next forty-eight hours, she is completely off limits. Healer's orders!" he ground out harshly when it looked as though Draco would protest. Lucius conceded to his son treating Granger poorly with a condition of his own. "After her healing period, she will be left alone every night from ten until the next morning when she is woken for my summons so that she may have time to rest." He wiped a hand down his face, struggling to get the image of the young girl's battered and bruised body out of his mind. Granger was so very young. The horrors she and Draco had been through at their tender age was tragic. She may be a Mudblood, but even he had to concede it wasn't exactly her fault.

"She will need to sleep in order to have the stamina for our…attentions, and your rather excessive chore list." The last bit was said with an underlying sarcasm. He sighed before continuing. "I will make sure your extracurricular activities with her do not become detrimental to her health." That statement made Lucius feel slightly nauseated, but what else could he say? At the moment, he did not feel he was able to trust his son.

"Midnight to six," Draco countered with a furious expression.

"Eleven," Lucius growled his final offer with a glare of his own. "With that compromise, I demand she be left alone daily following lunch for an hour to rest. I will give her this command. It will override any orders you give her, since my orders supersede yours as the patriarch of this home." He met Draco's narrowed gaze.

"Father, don't tell me you feel…sorry…for the dirty little thing?" Draco's voice was laced with an underlying threat.

"No," Lucius' voice gave nothing away. "I simply insist we take care of the gift the Dark Lord gave us until he is ready for her to be disposed of." He gave his son an evil smile, masking his disgust at the thought of wasting Granger's life that way. "You might like your women battered and bruised, but I much prefer mine with creamy skin and no weeping wounds."

"Fine." Draco's face was still a mask of fury, but Lucius could see resignation in his eyes.

"One last thing," Lucius did not look at Draco. "No more facial wounds. Leave her unmarked there."
"Father!" Draco started to protest.

"No, Draco!" Lucius thundered, slamming a hand down on the table. "I am still your father, you will do as I tell you! No more marks on her face!"

Draco threw his napkin on the table. His voice was deadly calm. "You seem to forget she was gifted to both of us."

Neither wizard spoke again. Lucius was trying to keep his anger in check, his disappointment concealed. His son was turning into someone he didn't recognize right before his eyes.

Draco, on the other hand, felt himself calm as he realized he would simply need to conceal any facial markings and forbid her from telling Lucius. Glamour charms were very effective.

He stood from the table, "I'm going out. Theo and Blaise are waiting for me."

Lucius watched his son as he cockily sauntered out the room without a backwards glance.

Lucius felt compelled to stay at the Manor the rest of the day. It was a Thursday and normally he would be at Malfoy Enterprises, but he just didn't trust his son to leave the young witch alone.

He Apparated to her suite and was pleased to find Tinny sitting in a small chair next to her bed. "Any change?"

Tinny stood and addressed her Master. "Young Miss has been sleeping. She's is tossing and turning less. The potions is already helping."

Lucius let out a heavy sigh. "Good. Stay with her. If Draco comes here, let me know. I wish to speak with him." He took another hard look at the sleeping girl and left.

After a couple hours in his study, Lucius leaned back in his chair and rubbed his eyes. He was working on another winery acquisition in France that he was very excited about, work was one of the few pleasures left in his life.

"Luc, you're tired. You need some rest."

Lucius turned his chair towards the portrait to the left of his desk, next to the fireplace. He looked at her with soft eyes, surprised by her second appearance today. "Cissa, it's not the same with you gone." He glanced around the office confirming there were no other visitors in the picture frames scattered about his study. "I miss you," he whispered sincerely, looking up at her.

Her expression was warm, her eyes knowing. "I know, darling, but I'm not there anymore. You know that this portrait is merely a representation of me." Narcissa's portrait watched him for a minute. "What of the Mudblood girl? How is she?"

Lucius sighed heavily. "She will heal, if only for Draco to harm her all over again."

Narcissa's eyes were suddenly sharp. "Draco will come back to himself, Luc. We talked about this only hours ago. This is grief. He is a good boy...a loving boy. You need to be a good father and show him the right way. Words will mean nothing."

As much as he doubted her and feared she was wrong, he would not be dismissive of her thoughts. He would never do that again. "Yes, my flower. I'm sure you are right."

He watched with disappointment as her eyes fluttered closed and her head fell forward for a nap. She
slept most of the time, which is normal for most magical portraits. The newly deceased sleep far more than the others, however. He was told she would be like this for months.

With a heavy sigh he pushed away from his desk and Apparated to Hermione's suite once again. What he found infuriated him. Hermione was sound asleep and Draco was in her room with Theo and Blaise. Tinny was standing in the corner, trembling. He cut a glance at her, but knew this was Draco's fault. He had likely forbidden the elf from leaving.

Lucius said nothing as he slowly took in the scene before him. Hermione was under her comforter and was sleeping. It appeared she had not been exposed or touched. He set his face in a hard mask and merely stared at Draco, expressing his displeasure without words.

Draco gave his father a defiant look as he stated. "I just wanted to check on our witch, Father. I was...worried." He cut a smirk at Blaise who attempted to suppress a smile. Theo, on the other hand, swallowed heavily as his eyes shot from the sleeping witch to Lucius to Draco.

Draco shrugged nonchalantly. "We were just leaving. Come on, guys," he said, glancing back at his friends as he made for the door.

Lucius said nothing to Draco but nodded a friendly hello to the two visiting wizards as they walked passed him. After the door closed, Tinny immediately spoke up. "Tinny's was comings to get Master Lucius, when young master demanded Tinny stay."

Lucius sighed as he nodded at the clearly terrified little elf. Am I really that scary? "Tinny, I know you would not disobey me without cause. I'm not angry." He looked back at Hermione. "Has she eaten?"

Tinny hung her shoulders, "Only some soup, Master. Tinny offered to makes young miss whatever young miss likes, but young miss just sleeps and sleeps."

Lucius made a quick decision in that moment. "Tinny, transfer Miss Granger to the mistress suite connected to my own." Tinny's eyes grew wide with surprise.

"Yes. I know the suite hasn't been used in over a century, but I feel it's a necessary move to keep a better eye on her. I wish to keep her close." He quickly reprimanded himself for speaking aloud. Glancing quickly around the room, he was relieved to find his slipup would not come back to haunt him. He added for good measure. "It will also provide me with easy access to her charms without the inconvenience of Apparition."

Hermione stretched and rolled over, flipping her pillow. Her eyes opened lazily as she slowly woke and remembered where she was. Not wanting to face that nightmare, she closed them again, but bright sun was filtering into the room. Something's different. Her eyes popped open and she sat up slowly, taking in the huge suite surrounding her. Where am I? She smiled to herself when all she could see were the tips of little elf ears beside her bed. "Tinny?"

Hermione peeked over the side of the bed to find the elf was standing next to her bedside table. She looked at the floor and then at the bed. The bed was very high off the ground and was huge, larger than a king if she had to guess. The dark purple comforter was luxurious and felt smooth as silk. The grey sheets were the softest she had ever touched.

Tinny was looking up at her. "Good witch needs to takes her potions."

"Tinny, where am I?"
"Master Lucius makes Tinny move good witch to mistress suite."

Hermione's forehead crinkled as she once again looked around, paying closer attention. *Mistress suite! Well, that can't be good.*

Tinny had no patience for Hermione's curiosity. "Good witch will takes her potions."

"Yes, Tinny whatever you say," Hermione conceded to her new friend. Tinny hopped on the bed beside Hermione, balancing a tray with the potions which Hermione had become well acquainted with. She swallowed the first bitter vial and asked, "When was I moved?"

Tinny handed Hermione the next vial. "Yesterday afternoon," Tinny replied in a no-nonsense tone. With a wave of Tinny's hand, Hermione felt the familiar cool balm coat between her legs. *Yesterday?*

"I need to use the Loo, Tinny." The elf hopped off the bed and placed the tray on the bedside table before positioning a step stool for Hermione's convenience. Hermione slid out of the monstrous bed onto the stool and stepped onto the plush Turkish carpeting. She couldn't help but glance about the room as she walked, taking in the huge fireplace to her left with a large sitting area in front of it. The sofa was a large burgundy, red Victorian style with scroll arm rests. It had soft velvet upholstery with tufted button details. On either side of the sofa were Victorian curved back armchairs with the same soft velvet tufted upholstery. A stunning oval oriental rug in deep hues of reds, greens and golds was the centerpiece of the settee. Bookshelves lined the wall to the left and right of the fireplace. Further to the right, in the corner, was a table with a place setting. The table had two chairs and was large enough for two people to comfortably dine. Straight ahead was a balcony with large French doors, covered with fine, white lace curtains. To the right of the balcony was the loo. The suite was almost as large as Lucius'.

She stepped into the en-suite bathroom and was shocked at the extravagance. A huge tub, which was more like a small swimming pool, had colorful turquoise and blue Turkish tiles. Next to the tub, a large picture window looked over a similar view to Lucius'. Only instead of being able to see the quidditch pitch, she could see part of the garden. The swimming pool was surrounded by gazebo type structures and chaise lounges. In the distance, the stables loomed magnificently. White Arabian horses were being led out of the structure by two people. Hermione could only guess how many servants were required to run an estate like this. She watched as their harnesses were released and they galloped into the large green pasture, celebrating their freedom. They weren't really free, though, not really. Hermione could commiserate.

Her bladder was protesting loudly, so she stepped into the small room next to the large his and her shower. A toilet and bidet were side by side. She sat on the toilet and relief coursed through her as her bladder emptied a large amount without any burning at all. She glanced at her arms and found no marks of any kind. On her way out of the loo, she stepped to the large gold-gilded mirror which hung over the gorgeous, pale green marble vanity. She looked at herself, disappointed to find she still had a rather large bruise on her left cheek and the gash on her forehead was still present. They were far better than earlier, though. The bruising was in its last stages of healing and the gash looked much less angry. She wondered if it would leave a scar, not that she really cared.

As she walked back to the bed, she exhaled with relief that the tenderness of her muscles was gone as well. "Tinny, what time is it?"

Tinny fluffed Hermione's pillows before hopping off the bed and answering. "Seven-thirty. Tinny's will bring good witch breakfast before good witch sleeps more." Tinny snapped her fingers and disappeared with the familiar pop.

Surprisingly, Hermione was actually hungry. She couldn't help the renewed hope she felt. She felt
more like herself, physically and mentally stronger, but knew it would be short lived. She was still a slave to rapists and abusers who would likely appear at any minute.

She almost barked a laugh at the irony when Lucius entered the suite from a door at the foot of her bed. His eyebrows shot up in surprise as he looked her up and down. "You're better." It was a statement and not a question. "Have you eaten?"

Hermione decided to be civil. "Tinny is getting me some breakfast."

He nodded formally. "Well then, that's good." There was an awkward silence. "Alright, I'll leave you…for now." He started to walk back through the same door when he paused and looked back at her. "I have instructed Draco to leave you alone until tomorrow." Hermione saw a flash of what looked like embarrassment or uncertainty on his face. He opened his mouth as if to say something more, but abruptly left the suite instead.

She stood watching the door, confused by his behavior. She didn't have time to think about it, as Tinny reappeared with a platter and placed it on the dining table in the corner of the room. Hermione stepped over and sat down, her heart accelerating as the lid was lifted to reveal strawberry covered waffles, scrambled eggs, sausage, muffins, hot tea, cranberry juice and cut fruit. She was ravenous and ate more than half before she had to stop. Her stomach full to bursting, she climbed back in bed and nestled under the covers. Sleep claimed her again, quickly.

Lucius visited a second time after he finished his breakfast. Draco had joined him at the table, as usual, but the conversation had revolved around Malfoy Enterprises and some deeds the Dark Lord was requiring. Draco had been recruited on another Muggle round up mission. The Dark Lord had acquired new potions that needed testing and he needed test subjects. He liked his subjects young and healthy and old and frail. He liked to compare the effects and the intensity. Draco and seven others would spread out over the UK and "acquire" two individuals each. Because Draco was young and handsome, he was usually assigned to attract young women. Draco was very good at turning on the charm and never disappointed.

Lucius was relieved that Hermione would be left alone today, and he felt he could return to work. Fortunately, Lucius had not left before Healer Jacobs had visited. The healer was pleased to find Hermione much improved, but insisted she still needed her rest. Hermione was conscious for this visit and kept a wary eye on Lucius who hovered in one corner of the room.

The Healer reassured her with a smile and soft pat on the shoulder that she would be good as new. His eyes were kind, but knowing, and Hermione felt a flush of embarrassment.

Lucius stepped over at this point and Hermione was surprised by the concerned look on his face as he spoke. "So…she'll recover fully? No ill effects from the concussion?"

Hermione eyes widened. Concussion? That bastard!

The healer glanced back at Hermione and then replied. "No, it was a minor concussion, but it's important she suffer no more head injuries."

Lucius cast a troubled look over the Healer's shoulder at Hermione. He then whispered. "And…her emotional and psychological frame of mind?"

The Healer sighed heavily, rubbed his brow and spoke softly. "Mr. Malfoy, she has had no new ideations since yesterday, but I imagine she's been barely conscious most of that time."

Lucius stared at the man astutely. The healer didn't back down and added. "Also, it's not my
business, but I noticed she is not protected against pregnancy. If that is not a concern, then I shall be on my way.

Lucius felt the blood drain from his face, his eyes darting to Hermione when he heard her let out a small shriek of horror.

The Healer, interpreting their reactions, quickly reassured them both. "She's not pregnant. But if this is not desired, and I'm assuming by both your reactions that it's not, we should address this issue promptly." He blanched when he realized he had made a supposition. "Unless…of course…and I apologize if I was out of line…you two are not…" The Healer's face had gone from ashen white to bright red.

Lucius couldn't resist the opportunity. "Yes, a very wild assumption on your part. Miss Granger is merely in my care," he lied convincingly.

The healer was completely flustered. "Yes, yes, of course. Forgive me."

Lucius' superior tone continued. "However, since you brought it up and considering Miss Granger's nature, perhaps a form of contraception would be wise."

Hermione's jaw fell open, outraged. She scowled severely at Lucius before the words flew from her mouth. "My nature?!" she cried. "It was you..."

Lucius looked at her commandingly, interrupting her with simple words. "Close your mouth, Miss Granger."

Hermione's mouth snapped shut and she cursed the binding internally for taking away her ability to defend herself. Her face was flaming with rage and embarrassment as she stared at the elder Malfoy with hatred blazing in her eyes.

The Healer had his back to Hermione and missed her reaction completely. Lucius cocked an eyebrow, slightly amused with her wonderfully ferocious expression, and continued. "Relax, Miss Granger. It's my job to care for you. Lay back and close your eyes."

Lucius watched with a smidge of guilt and a lot of relief as her facial muscles relaxed. She simply rested back into her pillows and closed her eyes.

He looked back at the Healer. "What are her options?"

The Healer looked slightly uncomfortable and shot a glance back at Hermione. "I really should be discussing this with her..."

Lucius interrupted him, his tone condescending. "Healer Jacobs, this witch is here under my care at the directive of the Dark Lord. Perhaps you would like to explain to him your reservations?"

Once again, the man paled. "No! Heavens no. That won't be necessary."

After a brief education on the available forms of contraception, Lucius decided on a weekly potion. He didn't want anything more frequent because it would be tedious and he didn't want anything long term in case the Dark Lord were to desire her pregnant in the future.

The Healer took his leave as quickly as possible after providing a month's worth of potions. Lucius watched Hermione's petite form for a long while after the Healer was gone. She was still in the position he had commanded of her. Guilt increasing a bit, Lucius had to admit that the complete control over another human being was not nearly as pleasurable as one may think. Startled, he
abruptly realized she had tears slipping down her temples.

"You may do as you please, now, Miss Granger," Lucius said quickly, his voice gruff. Immediately, she unhinged her jaw and gasped in a deep breath that choked on a startling sob as she rolled away from him.

"Heaven's, child," he said, trying to keep the panicked sound out of his voice at her sudden demeanor change. "What on earth is the matter?"

"Just go!" Her cry was half sob, half begging, and all hatred. Lucius gritted his teeth at her insolence. Like hell he was going to leave when he didn't know what was wrong. "Is it your head? Do you need a headache potion?"

She didn't answer and he sighed heavily. "Please tell me what is wrong, Miss Granger. I will endeavor to remedy the problem."

These words seemed to spur some sort of enraged reaction from her. Hermione rolled and literally leapt from the bed, wild hair curling out at all angles from her head and face. She was wearing a lavender colored, silk, cap sleeved nightgown that clung to her every curve. He swallowed hard as a finger was pointed at him accusingly. "Fix it? You think you can fix this?! Do you really want to know what's wrong?" She didn't wait for an answer as she advanced on him, finger still raised. "I will tell you what's wrong!" Her finger collided with his chest. "YOU are what's wrong! You and your abomination of a human being son, are what's wrong. You and him having so much bloody control over me and my actions is what's wrong. More control than I think even you realize! What's wrong is that I thought you had left without undoing your commands!"

Somewhere in the back of his mind Lucius knew he should not be allowing her to speak to him like this, but for some reason he was unable to stop her.

"Your commands that made me keep my mouth shut, on my back, with my eyes closed, and relax! Do you have any idea what my day would have been like if you had left without removing your inane control from me? Everyone would have thought I was sleeping! I wouldn't have been able to ask for help!" She broke off as another angry sob left her chest and whirled away from him, grasping her hair in frustration. "It was your bloody fucking son putting that god-damned Silencio on me, and leaving me to scrub a floor on my hands and knees for six fucking hours, all over again!"

Lucius watched her temper tantrum (and he could admittedly see why he was being raged at) with utter fascination. She was articulate and intelligent and completely…captivating…when angry. Not even her vulgarity bothered him.

Her cheeks were flushed hot pink, those brilliant eyes sparked with life and fury. She was wonderfully furious, Lucius could feel her magic crackling around the room. Her rant continued. "Only this time – this time – I would have been forced to eventually lay in my piss for a while and not eat until supper. I suppose that's only suitable punishment for a dirty little Mudblood, though, huh?"

Lucius winced internally when she called herself a Mudblood, flashing back to when he called her princess. "That's nice," she had said. "Makes me feel almost…human."

He realized she was still screaming at him a few minutes later, he had apparently tuned out her words, spellbound by her presence and gestures. In another life, in an alternate universe, he would have hauled her into that huge bed to tame her, to calm her fire with delicious heat and sweet words in her ears. Alas, it was not to be. As enchanting as he found her in this state of undress, full of
uninhibited ferociousness, he unfortunately had to get to work.

It was time to put an end to her histrionics, even if they were somewhat justified. He would not allow any witch to talk to him in such a way, much less a bound Mudblood captive. He reached out and snatched the wrist of the hand that had returned to point painfully into his pectorals. "That is quite enough, Miss Granger," he growled. She stilled, eyes widening in obvious fear. For the second time in as many days he wondered if he were really, truly that terrifying. Instead of apologizing for her fear, he growled at her, making her jump.

"In the future, it would be best you do not take that tone of voice with me or there will be… consequences." He watched regretfully as her eyes dulled, the fire abruptly going out. The sheen of wetness they portrayed a couple of seconds later unsettled him. "That being said, my dear, you have made your point quite clearly. I will be more cautious with my commands in the future." Her eyes widened in surprise and her mouth fell slightly open. Pleased by her reaction, he added, "I will go one step further and give you a directive now – if you are forgotten about for more than two hours, I command that you are to be released from whatever you are doing. If this happens, you are to seek me out and tell me afterwards. Do you understand?"

She gave a startled nod before tentatively pulling at her wrist. He released it, frowning when he saw the reddened skin there as she raised her other hand to rub it. He hadn't meant to hurt her.

"I must get to work, Miss Granger," he said softly after a minute of silence where she stared at him warily. "Draco will be out for the entire day, you need not worry about him. Tinny will see to any of your needs. Help yourself to the little library here," he gestured to the bookcases that flanked the fireplace. "I do hope you enjoy your free time, you will be joining us for dinner at seven o'clock. Wear something nice."

He spun on his heel and stalked to the door. Pausing under the frame, he sent a tentative glance back at her. She was gaping at him. "I am glad you are better, Miss Granger." Then, he was gone, leaving behind a very perplexed Gryffindor.

Exhaustion reclaiming her, Hermione climbed back into her bed, contemplating what had just happened. Lucius Malfoy was really beginning to confuse her. He wasn't a monster, but he wasn't a good man, either. He had raped her, after all. However, he seemed to be reasonable, if not nice. Reasonable was perfectly good with her. She could live with reasonable. He seemed to not wish her actual harm, at least not serious harm.

Draco, on the other hand, Draco was sub-human. He wasn't just abusive, he got off on it. He was a true psychopath. He had no conscience and had little regard for the feelings of others, including his supposed girlfriend, Pansy. He had lied to the girl and manipulated her so easily, seemingly without a second thought. She realized she needed to tread lightly around him. It would be best if she could learn to ignore his taunts. If she could become boring to him, maybe he would leave her alone. Maybe he would grow tired of his new toy, as most spoiled children were prone to do.

A toy. Is that really what I've become? Is that all I'll ever be the rest of my life? Was Draco right? Would the rest of her life be condemned to being, what was it he had said? "A vessel for the pleasure of better wizards?" No. She scolded herself for even considering it. You will not let him win.

She tossed onto her side, angrily staring at the wall. She promised herself right then and there that Draco Malfoy would not get the best of her. He would not destroy her spirit or her intellect. He may have use of her body, but he would not destroy her mind. She needed to remind herself of that truth, and knew she would need to do so frequently. Certainly, as long as she stayed under his control.
Nine hours later, it was six-fifty in the evening and Hermione was expected for dinner. She absently stared at her reflection in the full-length mirror Tinny had conjured. She was freshly bathed, shaved, buffed and dressed in what most witches would be giddy to be wearing. Her hair was not braided tonight, but had been charmed into soft, large curls. Hermione marveled at how long her hair had grown.

The dress was pink silk, light and flowing. It hugged her breasts, small waist and hips, and then draped to the floor. It even had a small train. The neckline was a low V-cut that dipped down between her breasts, the front of the loose sleeves came to her wrists, the back draped with the full length of the gown to the floor. The large opal pendant necklace and earrings were beautiful, especially against the pink silk of her gown, the color picking up the fire in the opals. Tinny really knew how to dress her up, but the elf had been dressing Malfoy wives for a hundred years. Hermione looked at the jewelry, wondering what Malfoy matriarchs would think about a Mudblood (she internally rolled her eyes) wearing the family jewels.

Chancing a glance around the portraits in her suite, she found she actually was being watched. An elderly looking witch with silver-grey hair in a loose chignon, a kind face and Victorian era gown was observing her with curiosity. Hermione contemplated saying something, but dropped the idea when her heart started to race a little as her seven o'clock dinner summons began to plague her. She looked around the large suite and spotted a glowing parchment beside the door on the far side of the suite.

A portkey ride later she stood directly outside of the dining room doors. Her summons was still calling her, so she knew she needed to act more quickly, but was nervous. This would be her first time seeing Draco in almost forty-eight hours. She placed both palms flat on the hinged French doors, took a deep breath, and pushed her way through. Head held high, feeling more like herself than she had in weeks and weeks, she felt almost haughty when both Malfoy men stood, watching her with barely hidden lust. Well, she shouldn't say that. Draco was leering at her, lust clearly in his eyes. Lucius, however...he was looking at her with a soft, almost appreciative gaze. It made her feel pretty and she was disappointed in herself to realize this pleased her. Why should his appreciation or approval matter? Let's face it Hermione, you have a penchant for wanting to please...for getting the right answer...for belonging.

She confidently (even though she was a trembling mess inside) made her way to what she was beginning to think of as "her" chair. Lucius immediately stepped next to it and pulled it out from the table. He offered his hand to help her sit, and Hermione felt her body automatically respond to the polite gesture as she hand been commanded. His hand was cool and soft, making her self-conscious of her sweaty palms.

"You look lovely tonight, Miss Granger," he said softly in her ear as he pushed her chair in for her. Hermione swallowed nervously before replying.

"Thank you." Her voice was so soft it was almost inaudible. That would not do. She raised her fist to her mouth and delicately cleared her throat to try again. "Thank you, Mr. Malfoy."

He nodded his approval as he returned to his seat.

"I have to admit, Granger," Draco's tone was unnaturally smooth and almost...polite. "My father is right, you are much more pleasing on the eyes when you're not covered with bruises. Perhaps you will stop acting in such a manner that lands you with more, now that you're feeling better?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "Perhaps I will," she answered primly. "No promises, however." Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Lucius smirk. Feeling the pull of being watched intently, her eyes glanced back to Draco. He was indeed staring at her, a knowing look on his face and a hint of a
malicious smile.

"Now, now," Lucius said after a brief break in the conversation. "Let us all try and remain cordial."
Just as those words were spoken, the customary silver domes appeared in front of them along with a
rack of apparition and Bilby.

Five minutes later, Hermione was staring at her dinner, mouth watering. A New York strip steak was
topped with glazed onions and Manhattan sauce. More delightful than that presentation, however,
was it also sported two, huge, seared sea scallops sprinkled with fresh chives. It was presented on a
bed of crisp asparagus. There was a separate plate with a dinner roll that had a pat of butter melting
on top.

Hermione almost burst into tears at the sheer beauty of it. She loved seafood. For over the last year,
meals had been scarce. When they'd had enough to eat, it was always simple. Something scrounged
together. Something easy like scrambled eggs, peanut butter sandwiches, the occasional spaghetti
night. She couldn't remember the last time she had eaten scallops.

"Is something the matter, Miss Granger?" Lucius frowned at her. He was hoping that her appetite
would pick up now that she was healed. She was entirely too thin from her weeks of captivity.

"No," she whispered. "No, nothing is wrong. This looks wonderful."

"Are you going to stare at it all night, or are you going to eat? You know we have to wait until the
lady of the house starts her meal." Again, except for the sarcastic inflection on the word "lady,"
Draco's tone was pleasant…almost teasing. Hermione eyed him carefully for a moment before
picking up her fork and knife and slicing into a scallop.

It was incredible.

Divine.

Nothing had ever tasted so good.

Ever.

She was embarrassed when a low moan of pleasure escaped her throat. Lucius, however, seemed to
find it amusing. He grinned at her over his wine goblet. "You like the scallops?" he asked, watching
her take another bite. Her eyes closed with pure bliss as the second bite melted on her tongue the
way the first had, only better.

She swallowed and looked to him, giving him a very small, cautious smile. It was hard not to, he
looked so pleased with her. "I do. I love seafood."

"We will have to put more into the rotation," Lucius said, almost off-handedly. "I've always enjoyed
all sorts of seafood myself, but Narcissa – " He broke himself off, face going quite pale. Hermione
looked up curiously. Not for the first time, she wondered what had happened to the Malfoy
matriarch. She wasn't about to ask, however, especially when she saw the flushed, angry look on
Draco's face. Her eyes dropped back to her plate and she took another bite in the awkward silence.
Nothing was going to put her off this meal.

Lucius guardedly continued a few moments later. "Let's just suffice it to say, it was never a big
favorite here."

Hermione had just finished a sip of a tart, delightful red wine. "I would eat almost any kind of
seafood," she attempted to make the conversation less awkward. "Scallops are by far my favorite,
however. My compliments."

Neither of the conversationalists missed the quiet, sarcastic grunt from the opposite side of the table, but neither did they seem to think it warranted a comment. The fact that Draco had not said one scathing remark since her entrance was a definite curiosity. It made her extremely nervous.

Lucius, on the other hand, was fervently pleased his tête-à-tête from earlier had seemed to make the boy feel a little guilt. He was being much kinder to Hermione – almost like his old self in polite, albeit unfavorable, company.

The meal went off without a hitch. It was mostly quiet, but the conversation exchanged was at least civil. When pudding had been served, Lucius was again delighted to find Hermione eating with a renewed vigor. Her eyes had lit spectacularly when the beautifully presented piece of tiramisu topped with fresh raspberries and blueberries appeared in front of her.

Dessert was another of Hermione's favorites, and she vaguely wondered if Tinny had something to do with the food choices this evening. She almost wept with joy for the second time that night, the flavor of the espresso and cream on her tongue burst with harmonious perfection. Thanking the elf would be her first priority when she next saw Tinny.

The silence was almost comfortable as dessert wrapped up. Then Draco chose to break it.

"You are feeling better, Miss Granger?" he said, not unkindly, watching her closely. Hermione wasn't sure what to think and glanced at Lucius for help. Lucius did not look at her, and his expression was off, almost as if he knew what was coming. A sense of foreboding filled her body.

"I am, thank you for asking," she answered softly. They had been polite all evening, she could be, too. As long as the situation warranted it.

"I'm pleased to hear that," Draco said. What only could be classified as an evil, devilish smile crossed his face. Her stomach dropped. His eyes stayed on her. "Isn't that wonderful, Father? The Mudblood is feeling better."

Hermione's face froze in a look of disinterest at the slur, pretending it had not been said. She would not let him goad her. She found herself disappointed when the older Malfoy didn't say anything. Their dinner conversation had been civil, why was he allowing Draco to turn the tide now?

"We shall have to work on your…constitution. You're rather weak to fall ill so easily." He glanced at his father, who was calmly watching him, seemingly bored. Draco returned his attention to Hermione. "The healer said we had to leave you alone for forty-eight hours." He tossed his linen napkin on the table and leaned back causally in his chair. "The way your jaw was flapping tonight, I think the healer overestimated your healing time."

"Draco," Lucius said quietly, his tone held a slight warning.

Draco rolled his eyes and then sighed as he looked at his father, "Relax, father. I won't touch her. You have made the schedule perfectly clear to me. However, the Mudblood will resume her morning visits starting tomorrow."

He looked back at Hermione. "Six o'clock, Granger. Six o'clock you will go to my father and after he has had his fill, you will come to my bed and kneel beside it as I instructed."

Hermione didn't say anything, she merely stared over his shoulder at a collection of small paintings, not comprehending their subjects. She was simply using all her willpower to remain calm and not give him the satisfaction of provoking or upsetting her.
"Did you hear me?" Draco asked, speaking the words slowly and clearly, as though she were mentally incapable.

It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Hermione lost her temper. She slowly met his gaze. "Yes, I heard you, you priapic, sadistic flea on a turd."

There was complete and utter silence for about five seconds before Lucius Malfoy snorted an incredulous laugh. A laugh that turned completely genuine and had him clutching his stomach in under fifteen seconds.

Hermione stared at the man with wide, horrified eyes. Had she really said that aloud? Was Lucius Malfoy really laughing at what she had said? At his son's expense? Hermione looked from an almost hysterical Lucius, to Draco who was purple with his outrage. She wondered if he even knew what priapic meant, and frankly hoped that he didn't. Calling him a flea with a constant hard on was not particularly smart, even if it was justified.

As Lucius' laughter died down, Draco spoke in a menacing voice. "I see you have decided not to act and speak appropriately." He gave her a slow, evil smile that sent a shudder of fear down her spine. "That's all right, Miss Granger. You'll receive your punishment in the morning." Hermione wondered if all the blood had drained from her face, it certainly felt like it had. Their gazes were locked, he obviously relished her fear, his grin did not slip. As she tried to maintain a façade of indifference externally, she scolded herself internally for her loss of control.

Lucius cleared his throat causing both pairs of eyes to look his way. He looked from Draco to Hermione, his expression looked...uneasy? "Yes, Miss Granger, Draco is correct. I do have some adaptations to your schedule, however." Hermione cringed internally. "It has been decided, and I am now giving an order, that no matter what you have been told, no matter where you are, at eleven o'clock every evening, you are free to do as you please. Be that read, sleep, bathe, etc. You will be left alone until your six-a.m. summons. Likewise, you will also have free time for one hour each day after lunch."

Hermione sat in stony silence, her face unreadable, eyes once again fixed to the artwork she wasn't really seeing. While she was pleased that she would be left alone at night, she couldn't help the bile of resentment that caused her anger to flare. Being told what to do like this, being controlled. Merlin, she would never get used to it. (Merlin help her if she ever did.) She forced herself to continue showing no emotion or evidence of frustration on her face. She would not give Draco any more ammunition to use against her in the morning. Her insult had certainly been more than enough.

There was an awkward silence. As it became uncomfortable, Lucius' expression remained indifferent as he pushed his chair back and stood, tossing his napkin on the table. "It has been a long day. I think we should each retire for the evening."

Draco stood as well, watching his father walk to Hermione's chair and assist her to stand. He smirked at Hermione. "Yes, sleep...well Mudblood. You're going to need it."
Chapter Eight

Chapter by Snowblind12

Same disclaimer as always.

Thanks to my very talented best friend and co-writer, LissaDream. Please check out our other co-written story, Master Mine.

As always, a big thanks to all who take the time to comment, leave kudos, bookmark and subscribe :)

Chapter Eight

Instead of Apparating her back to her suite, Lucius led her through the halls by her hand. Him holding her hand gently was extremely baffling. Not seeing that old look of disgust in his eyes was even more puzzling.

Hermione began to wonder if he had an ulterior motive he hoped to achieve with his kindness. Wouldn't it make sense, though, for Draco to be kind as well – so they would have a better chance of succeeding at whatever they were trying to do? Well…unless they were playing good cop, bad cop? Her face hardened at that thought and she tugged her hand out of his grasp and stopped walking forward.

"Miss Granger?" Lucius questioned. He turned to her as she stood stock still in the elaborate hall. She could hear murmurings of whispers from the portraits that lined it. She ignored them, he did not. He glanced cautiously around, making note of who was watching.

"What is it that you want from me? What is the purpose of all this?" Hermione stated bluntly, getting right to the point. She needed to know. What could she do to get out of this mess she was in? Whatever it was, she'd do it, even if it meant she was just one step closer to dying. At least it wouldn't be this day in and day out torture of her body and soul.

"I'm afraid I am not sure what you're asking me." Lucius cocked his head to the side, studying her with new eyes. Bloody hell, the girl was smart and forthright. Her eyes were bright, her expression determined. It was obvious to him now that she hadn't been well even that first night. And why would she have been well? She had spent six weeks in a cell, living off bread and water and gruel. She hadn't seen the sun, had to live in her own filth, and had been confined to a ten by ten-foot room. She had been dragged to be presented to the Dark Lord, Crucio'd twice, raped twice, and then not allowed to sleep more than an hour at a time for the next two days while she was raped a half dozen more times. No wonder her immune system had broken down so quickly.

Her fire and spirit were stunning. The fact that she had survived this war and could still hold on to her sharp tongue and wit was a testament to the type of person she was. Priapic, sadistic flea on a turd. What a fucking intellectual insult! Although, he really shouldn't have laughed. It was most likely what had stroked Draco's ire.

"Like hell you don't know what I mean!" she snapped, her hands fisting at her sides in her anger.

In a quick movement that startled her by evidence of a squeak, Lucius reached out and snatched her jaw in one of his hands. He wasn't unnecessarily brutal, but he wasn't tender or gentle, either. It was
a show of dominance at its finest. "We spoke this morning about the way you address me, girl," he told her in a dangerous tone. Why did it bother him when her eyes dropped, when the color drained from her face, when she jerked out of his grasp?

"You will be respectful to me, as I have been respectful to you." Lucius ignored her snort of disbelief. She really didn't realize how controlled he had been with her. Perhaps he should make her understand? Part of him wanted to lash out at her, to make her regret not fearing him the way she should. If he had to be, he could be just as cruel as Draco. More so. He didn't want to be, though. He was tired of the violence. Seeing fear in her lovely eyes was the last thing he desired. "Do you understand, Miss Granger?!" Again, his tone was cold, a touch of cruelty evident.

"Yes," she said sharply. "I understand, Mr. Malfoy." Their eyes were locked onto each other's and Lucius found himself disappointed he had been forced to play this hand.

He chose to ignore her tone and started walking again. "To answer your question," he said after a few moments of silence in which he could hear her heels clacking softly against the floor as she followed him. "It is not for me to tell you what the Dark Lord wants. He will tell you when he's ready."

She didn't answer, and she didn't ask any more questions. After a long stretch of silence and walking, Lucius arrived at his suite and pushed the door open, beckoning her inside. Her eyes looked wild, and he realized that she didn't know this was the easiest way into the mistress's chamber. She probably thought he had brought her here to have his way with her. Damned if he didn't want to, either. The way she was done up tonight was delectable. Her hair done in long, soft curls, his fingers itched to sink into the tresses. He gave himself a mental shake.

"Your chamber is through here," he told her softly. Walking over to a blank stretch of wall, he tapped a small knot on the woodwork with the tip of his wand. An archway appeared and he stepped aside to let Hermione through. He didn't miss the relieved look on her face.

Carefully, she studied him for a moment before whispering. "You are unexpected, Mr. Malfoy." Then she quickly disappeared into the room, the enchantment closing behind her almost instantly.

"As are you, Miss Granger," he replied to the empty suite.

Hermione was happy to find Tinny waiting for her. The elf helped Hermione out of her dress and into an emerald, silk camisole nightgown that came to her mid-thigh. She studied her reflection as she brushed her teeth. After she wiped her mouth she looked at Tinny who was standing expectantly beside her, holding a vial with a potion she needed to take. Hermione knew better than to ask her question before swallowing the said potion. Tinny may be small, but Hermione had never met a more determined or fastidious elf.

Handing the empty vial back to her unexpected friend, she asked. "Tinny, my first night I slept in a sheath that could barely count as a gown, and now I find myself sleeping in silk and satin. Why the change?"

Tinny set the empty vial aside and handed Hermione her next potion. "Malfoy Manor has great magic. The rooms and the wardrobes adapt to the Master's desires. When good witch first comes, the guest suite presented Tinny with what the Manor felt the masters would chooses." She took the now empty flask from Hermione and continued. "The next night, Tinny's finds pretty gowns in night drawer." Tinny and Hermione walked out of the bathroom into the expansive suite. "When Tinny's brings good witch to mistress suite, Tinny finds clothes and jewelries Tinny would find in Madam Malfoy's wardrobes."
Hermione thought about that as she stepped on the step stool and climbed into the inviting bed. She wondered what had changed. Why did the Manor feel Lucius and Draco would want her dressed like this? Perhaps it was simply because she was in the Mistress suite?

As she sank down into the soft sheets, welcoming mattress, and plush comforter, she drifted off to sleep before she could give it much more thought. Little did she know, Tinny had handed her an extra potion, a calming draught mixed with just a pinch of dreamless sleep. As of tonight, she was finished with her potions, and Tinny would have no need to wake her for further doses.

Hermione awoke the next morning to soft light filtering into her suite. She lazily opened her eyes and looked at the clock. Five-thirty. Yawning and stretching, and having to pee, she slid out of bed and padded to the bathroom where she emptied her bladder and brushed her teeth. She stepped back into her suite and turned to her right, curious about the balcony. The door opened easily and she drew in a breath of surprise at the beauty before her. The sun was just rising over the pasture in front of her. Soft clouds of vapor and mist hovered over the green grass. Twinkles of light reflected off the pool water as birds chirped loudly from the scattered massive trees around the grounds.

The irony caused her to laugh without humor. A foreboding Mansion of torture and rape surrounded by serenity and beauty. Sort of like her battered and bruised body dressed in formal gowns.

She looked around the balcony. Beautiful cast iron chairs, a love seat, and a table were arranged so that one might enjoy breakfast or time in the sun. The cushions were damp, but would dry quickly once the sun beat down on them for a bit. It would be lovely to sit out here with a cup of tea and good book. Ha! As if you'll ever have that opportunity. Then she remembered that every day, for an hour after lunch, she could do as she pleased.

She stepped back inside, realizing she still had a few minutes until the bond would pull her to the older, mercurial Malfoy. She stepped over to the bookshelves and glanced at the titles. "Madam Bovary," "The Awakening," "Candide." As she glanced at the other titles, she realized they were all pre-twentieth century releases and were scandalous muggle fiction in their time. She was disappointed to find very little that interested her. There was nothing academic and very little that pertained to the wizarding world. She wondered when this suite was last used and why there was so much muggle literature.

She didn't wonder for long, though, as the pull to Lucius was taking hold. This time, there was no parchment. She knew the door at the foot of her bed led to his suite and that's where the compulsion led her. She found the door open and his suite dark. It took her eyes a minute to adjust, but she could just make out the shape of his large four poster on the other side of the expansive space.

As she stepped through, the door magically disappeared behind her, leaving an archway that morphed into a blank stretch of wall. She turned back towards the bed, swallowing her apprehension. Perhaps she was a fool, but she didn't think Lucius would hurt her. He didn't scare her, not like his son.

She climbed into his bed the same way as before, by stepping on the footboard and grabbing the corner post to hoist herself up. She remembered how difficult it had been last time. She remembered how sore she had been, how tender and battered she had felt. This time, it was much easier and she was much less afraid. She would do as he ordered, nothing more and nothing less. She felt no shame, only frustration and resentment.

She crawled up the bed until she was laying close to him and the pull of the bond relented its force. She lay still, this time letting her head fall gently on the pillow next to his. She closed her eyes, hoping he would simply sleep and leave her alone. He shifted next to her, but seemed to still be sleeping. She rolled onto her left side, facing away from him. After a couple minutes she began to
drift off to sleep.

Her eyes shot open when she felt him move up closer behind her, and a large, warm hand slid around her waist. Lucius' fingers rubbed her flat stomach, bunching the fabric of her green, satin gown. His voice was raspy from sleep. "Why are you wearing this? Take it off."

Hermione rolled her eyes as she shimmied the gown up her body and pulled it over her head, tossing it at the foot of the bed. She lay back down, once again on her left side. He pulled her close so that she was pressed up against him. His hand once again rubbing her now bare stomach before moving up to cup her breast. "Rest, kitten. It's Saturday," he whispered. He was still as he lay behind her and after a couple minutes she could hear the soft even breathing indicating he had fallen back to sleep.

Again, this man confused her. Again, she couldn't help but think that he was entirely not what she had suspected him to be. Her jumbled, whirring thoughts prevented her from slipping back into sleep for a long time. She was startled at one point when Lucius' hand moved from her breast to wrap around her waist, pulling her closer to him before throwing a leg over her body. He was naked, as well, and she could feel his semi hard erection pressing into her bum. Here we go, she though, a thrill of trepidation danced up her spine. He settled back in, though, and his breathing returned to the evenness of sleep. He was warm, and the gentle, human contact was as comforting as it was peculiar. Eventually it lulled her back to sleep.

Lucius woke, feeling slightly off kilter, a while later. He was warm, a bit too warm, if he wasn't mistaken. There was something on his face. Starting to reach up, he realized his arm was stuck. Moving the other instead, he cracked his eyes open. A mass of riotous brown curls covered more than half his face, he brushed them away in surprise. He was even more shocked when he took in the position of the girl. At some point, they had shifted. Lucius was laying on his back, and Hermione… he swallowed hard…the Mudblood was wrapped around him. Her face was pressed again his chest, one of her arms tucked behind his shoulders while the other wrapped around his stomach. She had one leg entangled with his. Her breathing was deep, and peaceful.

Carefully, he brushed her hair out of her face. He was relieved to find that her lovely features were no longer covered in bruises. The gash on her head was mostly obscured where her face pressed into his chest, but what he could see looked pale pink. It appeared she would have a small scar. The displeasure that thought caused to course through him was as disconcerting as Hermione all snuggled up to him like she was. He shifted awkwardly and heard her breathing change slightly. He paused, not really sure he wanted to wake her. Very slowly, he slid himself out from underneath her and made his way to the bathroom. He relieved himself and washed his hands. Taking a deep breath, he fought with his own internal demons before deciding it was best to just get this over with.

He hesitated, though, upon returning to his chamber. She had shifted, but appeared to still be sleeping. She was on her back, hair sprawled all over his pillows. The sheet had pulled down, revealing her beautiful breasts. The cool air had her nipples standing erect. He wiped a hand down his face. Bloody fuck, if she wasn't undeniably appealing. One of her arms was laying palm up above to her head, the other wrapped lightly over her abdomen. One leg was hidden away under the blankets, but the other sprawled at an angle on the outside of the sheets. Lucius' body reacted hungrily, his cock springing to life. He closed his eyes. Just get it over with, he told himself for the second time in less than ten minutes. He crawled up onto the bed, slowly smoothing a palm up her slender leg, over her abdomen to a breast. It was smooth and heavy in his palm.

Instantly, every thought of quickly moving through the motions flew from his mind. A determination settled into his soul; a disquieting need to make her enjoy this, to give her pleasure, overtook him. Unthinkingly, he went with it, dipping his head to gently nibble at one taught nipple. It hardened further as he laved it with his tongue. A small noise left her, but she didn't wake. He slowly slid the
blankets down her body, leaving her completely bare. Reluctantly, he turned his attention away from her breasts and moved between her legs, gently spreading them. He slipped a finger through her nether lips, parting them. She was slightly wet and the uninhibited, innocent reaction she was having to his touch while she slept made his heart race.

He trailed his fingers up her thighs, pushing them further apart and was just about to put his mouth on her when he noticed wide, luminescent eyes starting at him warily. "What are you doing?" she whispered fearfully.

"I'm going to make you feel good, Miss Granger," he answered just as softly. "Please, don't fight me. Give in to the sensation."

Knowing his words wouldn't give her a choice made him feel guilt he didn't want. He was surprised to see her give him a slight nod before she let her eyes flutter shut. Lucius didn't question it. This was much easier for both of them when she didn't resist. Leisurely, he slid a flattened tongue into her folds, loving the gasp she wasn't able to smother. He sought out her clit, flicking it gently with his tongue, pulling another licentious sound from her. He worked her clit until her hips were rolling of their own accord. He almost pulled away from her as if burned when he felt tentative fingers on his head. Lucius glanced up at her and was thrilled to see uncertain, but glazed eyes staring back at him. He returned to her clit, not missing the way her head fell back. He did miss the tears in her eyes, though. Tears that would have told him this was not wanted, that it was incredibly confusing.

Desperation for the release of the delicious coil that was winding in her womb, coupled with the feeling of revulsion for the way he was making her body respond, was tearing her apart.

Lucius slipped two fingers into her, a moan rumbling from his lips to her core when he found her drenched. He curled his fingers against the bumpy expanse of her g-spot. The muscles of her inner walls exploded almost immediately, her hips arching from the bed as she let out a desperate little whimper, her breathing heavy and erratic. He didn't wait, just hooked her legs with his arms as he slid up her body and into her.

Seeing Hermione's face fully, guilt crashed down on him. Her eyes were squeezed tight, dampness on her temples, and her bottom lip was caught between her teeth, bloodless with the fierceness of her attempts not to cry out. It was infuriating, the way this little Mudblood wench made his composure crack. He nuzzled her neck, trailing hot, wet kisses down the tendons that stood out, trying to get her to relax again without giving her an order and taking away her free will.

It was all Hermione could do not to cry out when she felt him stretching her apart with his cock. Now that she was no longer tender and sore, it was just unparalleled sensation. With him being so gentle and giving, the feeling was filled with unwelcomed pleasure. She clamped down on her lip hard, stifling a moan as he grazed that spot inside of her that was magical. It had to be magical…what it did to her was…oh, gods!

His mouth was on her neck, and unconsciously, she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, her short nails digging into them. Whimpers left her throat without her permission. His breath was ragged and hot on her collar bone. His speed picked up and he used his hand to encourage her to wrap her legs around his waist, before sliding it between their bodies to stimulate her clit some more. She wasn't sure why she wasn't protesting, but she didn’t and then…oh, fuck! She was coming again. Again?! Tears leaked out her closed eyes. Why did her body betray her like this? She didn't want this, she…oh, oh, fuck. Why did it feel good when she didn't want it?

Lucius couldn't believe how calm she was, he expected her to rage at him, to ask him to stop as she had both times they had been together previously. He was prepared for it (or thought he was), but she remained quiet, with the exception of the little gasps and whimpers she wasn't able to swallow.
When he brought her to climax the second time, he let himself go, quickly following suit with a low, rumbled groan in his throat, claiming her completely. He rolled off her fairly quickly, letting her roll away from him to compose herself.

An unsettling feeling of shame coursed through him as he watched her. She curled into an impossibly tiny ball, her face occluded by her curls. Kindly, he pulled a blanket over her to give her some sort of dignity.

"I have to go," she said quietly. The sound of terror in her voice confused him further. "I have to go to Draco." Suddenly, she was scrambling. She pulled herself to the edge of the bed, rounding the foot quickly and snatching up her nightgown.

"What are your directives from Draco?" A terrifying feeling of protectiveness washed over him as he observed her. She avoided his eyes. "Tell me, Miss Granger."

"When you are through with me, I am to go to his room and kneel by his bed until he wakes. I am not allowed to wake him. He will fuck one of my orifices," she spat the word. "Then I'm to bathe him." The words left her mouth without conscious thought even as her cheeks heated with embarrassment, but her heart was starting to race with discomfort.

"You can relax, Miss Granger," he said. Lucius' voice was clipped, trying to hide the frustration he had with his son. "I am not through with you. On Saturday mornings, we eat breakfast in our rooms. Draco usually doesn't have breakfast until closer to ten-thirty. It is only a quarter to eight. You will go shower, and then you will eat with me. Casual attire is perfectly acceptable for this morning." He paused, watching the relief that sagged her body. Well, at least he knew she preferred his company to his son's…not that that was saying much.

Hermione almost burst into tears when the pull of the bond suddenly disappeared. Apparently, Lucius could override Draco's orders. The reprieve he was granting her was precious. Granted, it was only prolonging the inevitable, but … at least he was saving her from two plus hours of kneeling on the floor.

"I will see you back here in forty minutes, Miss Granger," he told her softly. When Hermione looked at him she swore she saw a flash of sympathy cross his face before it became an unreadable mask.

"Thank you, sir," she whispered, and started to move towards the blank expanse of wall where the door to the mistress suite was hidden. When nothing happened, she looked back to him. He was watching her expectantly. "Um…Mr. Malfoy…how do I get back…?"

"The password is Domina Gloria," he said, a small smirk passed over his features. "Not that I expect you to be honored by this, Miss Granger, but you are the first woman to use that room in over a hundred years."

Her face darkened, and Lucius almost smiled with glee. Damn, he loved seeing her riled up. "How wonderful," she said with no little hint of snark before muttering the password and disappearing through the archway.

Hermione's head was still spinning with the conundrum that was Lucius Malfoy. Their breakfast had been almost…nice. He had shared his paper with her. They had simply eaten together in comfortable silence. Reading, like any normal couple might do on a Saturday morning. Only they were anything but, a normal couple. The sex had been…frustrating. Frustrating and…wonderful. She didn't want it, but knew it would do no good to ask him to stop. So, her plan had been to simply lay there and take it. Until, and it pained her to admit this, until she felt the desire to put her arms around him. Until she
could no longer deny that what he was doing felt incredible. She had let herself imagine this was something she wanted, something she had some control over, something she desired. It was an illusion, but it helped.

It was rape, but it wasn't brutal or painful or... stop it, Hermione. It was rape! And now you have to go to his son, the devil himself, and who's to say Lucius isn't the devil in sheep's clothing? The truth is, you know nothing, Hermione!

No longer able to resist the pull, she placed her hand on the glowing parchment in her suite. She knew this was going to be...difficult? Degrading? Painful? All of the above? You and your big mouth. You need to learn to hold your tongue! What the hell were you thinking insulting him like that?

When she landed in his suite, she slowly turned to face the large space. The bed was made and he was nowhere to be seen. She slowly stepped forward, wondering where he was and internally prayed he had gone out, perhaps forgetting about her.

"Ahh, the Mudblood has decided to grace me with her presence." Hermione nearly jumped in surprise as he stepped out of his closet, to her right. His face was stone, expressionless. His voice devoid of emotion. He seemed so much taller all of a sudden. She swallowed as she looked up at his towering form. "It's only..." He looked toward the clock. "...ten-thirty." He stepped back, looking her up and down. "Father kept you occupied for four and a half hours?"

Hermione didn't know how to answer. She opted for cautiously. "Yes, he kept me under his control until we finished breakfast, which was just now."

A flash of irritation broke through his stone façade. "You already ate? He fed you?"

She shifted her feet nervously. "Uh, yeah. We ate in his suite."

"Well, I have not eaten and had insisted the kitchen elves prepare a special breakfast, just for you." The right side of his mouth curled up in a crooked grin. "No matter, another time."

"I see you are dressed for the day." He cocked an eyebrow as he scanned down the teal gown that hugged her chest and waist in silk, flaring out at the hips as it draped to the floor. It was sleeveless and a light shawl of matching silk and lace draped over her shoulders and arms.

His eyes went back to hers. "You really shouldn't have bothered. Take it off, now."

He stepped away, slipping off his outer robes. Thankfully, this dress buttoned up the side. As she unbuttoned it, he stepped back into his closet, hanging up his robes. The dress and shawl were sliding to the floor as he reappeared and slowly approached her.

"You are not permitted to wear panties. Take them off and don't let me find you wearing them again."

She internally rolled her eyes as she slid them down her legs, leaving her naked. The minute she stood back up, she saw stars as he slapped her so hard she fell to the floor. Her hand shot to her left cheek and tears stung her eyes from the pain. He leaned over her. "If you ever insult me at the dinner table again, or in front of another person, I will beat you black and blue. Do you understand, Mudblood?"

She nodded as she continued cradling her cheek trying to stifle the tears still threatening to spill.

"Not good enough, Mudblood." He grabbed her hair and yanked her up until she was standing on
her tip toes, his eyes dark with disgust and hatred. "Say it, you filthy whore."

The words came out broken and choked, "I, I un..understand."

He held her in the same position, her scalp burning with pain. "See that you do, Mudblood." After another few seconds, he released her.

Hermione's hands moved to her head and began to rub her tender scalp. He turned and walked towards his desk where he picked up a magazine.

"I've been reading about punishments. Punishments some women get off on." He was leaning against his desk with his ankles crossed as he flipped through the pages. "I feel like practicing."

His eyes moved from the magazine to the bed. "Go to the bed. Keep your feet on the floor and lay your stomach, left cheek flat on the mattress."

Hermione's body responded to his command, and her legs headed to the bed without her giving it a conscious thought. While her body was quick to respond and was in the present, her brain was reeling with anger at him and at herself for provoking him last night. Her cheek and scalp were still burning and now she was going to have Lord knows what prevailed upon her.

As soon as she was in position, he stalked up behind her and began to rub her bottom. He continued in a conversational tone, as though they were friends. "So, apparently, I'm supposed to spank you lightly a few times to warm up your skin."

She closed her eyes and let out a slow breath, mentally preparing herself for the first hit. She felt a slap come on her left butt cheek and then her right. Four more slaps came down in different spots, each harder than the one before. It was starting to sting when he stepped back.

"Well, I'll admit your ass is nice and pink but, my hand hurts. That won't do." Once again, his tone was conversational. She didn't respond. She heard him pick up a magazine and begin flipping pages. She remained still, dreading what might come next.

"Oh yeah, need to see if you're..." He said the words softly to himself as his hand reached between her legs and rubbed her. He sighed. "Nope, not wet."

"Maybe a different magazine." She heard him toss one down and pick another up. He began to read aloud. "Number one, talk to your partner. Communication is key. Tell her what you desire and ask her what she desires." He paused. "That's not so hard." He leaned forward and peeked at her. "Mudblood, I desire to spank you and you desire to be spanked." He straightened back up. "Ok, that step is done."

"Number two. Set some rules and discuss your limits." He was quiet for a minute. "Limits. Uh, Mudblood, what are your limits? None? Perfect!" He chuckled, "I don't have any either. See how compatible we are?" Hermione knew better than to speak.

"Number three. Choose a safeword that will put an immediate stop to the situation." He let out bark of a laugh. "Well, that's just silly. If I want to stop, I'll stop." Hermione heard him toss the magazine aside. "Ok, I think I'm ready."

She heard him let out a frustrated, pained hiss. "Fuck. I'm being summoned." He stepped back. "Stand up, quickly!" His voice was urgent, slightly panicked, the teasing cockiness of only a moment ago was long gone. "Look at me," he demanded. Hermione was confused as she slid off the bed and turned to him. He studied her face and then waved his wand over her left cheek as he whispered an incantation. After a satisfied nod, he added, "you are not allowed to tell anyone I hit you. You are
not allowed to tell anyone your face is sore or that you are in pain. Go back to your suite, Mudblood, I'll come for you later."

Two hours later, Hermione was smiling at Tinny as the small elf smiled back. "Dobby was always helping Tinnys like that." The elf continued brushing Hermione's long hair.

"Oh, Tinny. Thank you for being my friend. You are the one bright spot to my otherwise miserable time here in this God-forsaken Manor."

Tinny beamed at her in the mirror. "Good witch deserves to be happy and Tinny is honored to have good witch call Tinny her friend."

Tinny and Hermione both froze as the figure appeared in the mirror behind them.

"Tinny, what did you call her? What did you call the Mudblood?" Draco's voice wasn't loud and it wasn't threatening. Which made it even more terrifying. He was leaning casually against the doorframe, his arms crossed. His body language wasn't threatening, but his eyes betrayed him. There was no mistaking the calculated hatred.

Tinny's tiny form trembled as she looked up at the foreboding and towering presence of the younger Malfoy. Her voice was shaky. "Tinny called the young Miss good witch."

Draco pursed his lips as if in casual thought. Quietly, almost a whisper, he said, "Hmm, good witch."

Slowly, he pushed himself away from the door frame and stepped closer. Hermione kept her face expressionless as fear and trepidation caused her heart to race. His eyes met hers in the mirror as Tinny jumped off the step stool behind Hermione's chair.

Draco waved his wand, magicking the step stool away. He moved closer behind Hermione, holding his hand out to the terrified elf. Tinny handed the brush to him.

Draco cocked his head to the side as he studied Hermione in the mirror, as though he were contemplating her. He gently stroked the brush down her hair. "Good witch, you say?" Neither elf nor Hermione said anything as Draco continued to gently brush Hermione's hair in meticulous strokes.

His voice was slow and condescending. He spoke as though he were teaching a basic principle to a small child. "Tinny, what you need to understand, is that this thing in front of me is hardly a witch. She's a Mudblood." His strokes began to be rougher and Hermione's head was slightly jerked backwards with each swipe of the brush, she forced herself not to looked down at the elf. "Say it with me." He raised his eyebrows and smiled evilly at the small creature. "Muuuudddbloooood." He drew the word out slowly. "Say it, Tinny."

Tinny swallowed and said in a soft voice, "Mudblood."

"Very good," Draco said as his eyes went back to Hermione's in the mirror. "In this case, this particular Mudblood, isn't just a Mudblood. She's a Mudblood whore." He looked back at the elf and smiled maliciously. "Say it, Tinny."

Tinny looked from Draco to Hermione and back at Draco before whispering, her voice trembling with terror. "Mudblood whore."

Draco watched Hermione in the mirror for a minute, an evil expression still on his face. Hermione had stopped listening to him and was trying to think about anything other than the words coming out
of his mouth. She hated how cruel this bastard was being to her only friend in the world. At least, the only friend she had contact with. It wouldn't do to think on it, though, it would only make the situation worse.

She stared at Draco so hard he was blurry in the mirror as she recited her favorite Shakespeare comedy in her head.

*Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour*
*Draws on apace; four happy days bring in*
*Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow*
*This old moon wanes!*

"Muuuuudddloooood." He drew the word out slowly. "Say it, Tinny."

*Don't listen!* Hermione drew a breath as she imagined the scene before her; Theseus holding Hippolyta in his arms as he continued speaking.

*She lingers my desires,*
*Like to a step-dame or a dowager*
*Long withering out a young man revenue.*

"She's a Mudblood whore. Say it, Tinny." *Ignore him, Hermione. Hippolyta, think of Hippolyta.* She let out a breath as she maintained her stoic face while her brain recited the next phrase.

*Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;*
*Four nights will quickly dream away the time;*
*And then the moon, like to a silver bow*
*New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night*
*Of our solemnities.*

Ignoring the trembling voice of her little friend, ignoring the hand that was now fisting itself into the back of her head, pulling her hair, causing her already tender scalp to scream, she continued with her distraction. Theseus…Theseus then says,

*Go, Philostrate,*
*Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;*
*Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;*

"Say it again, Tinny. Mudblood whore." *Don't Listen!*

*Turn melancholy forth to funerals;*
*The pale companion is not for our pomp*

Draco yanked her head back painfully, one hand rubbing down the front of her gown, under the neckline, over her breast. Roughly, he twisted her tender flesh. "Mudblood whore is what this filth is, Tinny. She's not a *good witch.*"

*Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,*
*And won thy love, doing thee injuries;*
*But I will wed thee in another key,*
*With pomp, with triumph and with reveling.*

"You are forbidden to call her good witch. If you call her that again you will be punished severely." Her heart began to pound in her chest, anger beginning to boil. *Hermione stop, concentrate!* Yes, she would think of Egeus. Think of his entrance,
"You are forbidden to speak to her, at all. Forbidden to do more than bathe, feed and dress her." No! Shit, stay calm...stay calm. Still trying to mentally evict his presence, she ignored his other hand as it grabbed the beautiful teal fabric of her dress, ripping it open to reveal her breasts. Her body responded automatically and without thought when he commanded, "Stand up, Mudblood. Turn around and kneel before me...before your superior, your better, your master." Just do it, don't think! Her body did that on its own already, though. Her body always did what it was commanded to do by the Malfoy men. It did it without a conscious thought.

On her knees before him, she was finding it harder and harder to concentrate on anything. "Now, Mudblood whore, undo my belt, take out my cock and suck it like you love it. Moan like the pathetic little slut you are."

Don't think about it! Think about Theseus...yes, Theseus. But, her brain was too far gone to recite the play any further. She couldn't remember the next line, despite being able to recite the entire play without a thought, normally.

Hermione's eyes welled with tears of anger as her mouth complied and her throat let out raspy moans. Draco's hand fisted into her hair once again, holding her still as he forcefully and viciously thrust himself into her mouth, causing her to gag. "If your teeth touch me, I'll punish Tinny. If you in any way resist my cock, Tinny pays the price."

Hermione felt fury building within herself unlike any she had ever felt. How dare he threaten an innocent like Tinny! She used her mouth and her tongue as best she could as he rammed in and out of her. Her jaw was beginning to hurt from the tension of keeping her teeth off him. Relief and dread struck her at once as his disgusting hot liquid spurted into her mouth, him grunting over her.

After a minute, he pulled back from her. "Take off that dress and climb on your bed. On all fours, like the hound you are."

She found her body complying even as she saw Tinny watching with terror out of the corner of her eye. "Leave, Tinny." Hermione whispered frantically at the elf.

"No, Tinny. You stay. You watch. This is what happens to this Mudblood whore if you ever speak to her again. This is just a taste of what will come."

Tears of fury slid down Hermione's flaming cheeks. Her body felt like it was on fire with rage. Her clothes off, she climbed onto the bed and assumed the commanded position. She could hear him sliding his belt through his belt loops.

He approached the bed and Hermione could feel his eyes on her. He stepped closer, reaching his hand out to rub her bottom.

It was practically psychotic the way he changed his tone, once again. Just like in his suite earlier, he spoke to her as though she were a companion whom he was discussing the weather, as though he had not just brutalized her and raped her mouth. "So, back to where we were earlier before the Dark Lord desired my company." Hermione scoffed internally. She doubted the Dark Lord desired anyone's company.

Her focus was back on Draco as he continued, conversationally, "I really don't think I'll use my hand to warm you up. I don't see the point of that at all. It made my hand hurt this morning. This is your punishment, not mine." She could sense him step back from her and heard the jingle of his belt buckle as it shifted in his hand.
Hermione's breathing was rapid, as she braced and tensed for what was sure to be excruciating pain in any second. She heard a swishing sound and then a loud slap followed by a sting and a burn across both her butt cheeks. *Fuck, that hurt!*

Her breath came out in pants and her forehead crinkled as another crack of the belt came down on her lower back. She let out a yelp in pain. It felt like he had whipped her with fire.

"Oops, missed my target." He peaked around to her face. "Sorry," he said without a touch of sincerity in his voice. She heard him let out a breath. "Wow, this is fun." Suddenly her thighs were blazing as the belt came down at the junction just below were her buttocks met her legs. She couldn't help but sob uncontrollably as the belt began rapidly raining down on her tender flesh, strike after strike...on her bottom, her legs, her back. It hurt like nothing she had ever experienced, outside of the Cruciatus curse. She was trembling and sobbing. No longer able to hold herself up, she collapsed onto her stomach. Her heart started racing with the panic from disobeying his order and she felt her body fight to resume her demanded position.

"Tinny, get over here." He spoke to Tinny, once again as though she were a small child. "Look at the Mudblood. This is what will happen to her every time to you speak to her. Every time you are nice to her. Just to be sure you understand, bend over."

"Draco, no!" The words were out of Hermione's mouth before she even knew she had something to say. "Punish me, it's all my fault! Tinny has done nothing wrong!"

"Tsk, tsk. Oh, but she did, Mudblood whore. She has disgraced the Malfoy Estate by befriending you. She has shamed her ancestors who faithfully served this house for hundreds of years by calling you a good witch. By thinking of you as her friend! You are not worthy of friendship, Mudblood. Not even by a lowly house elf."

She heard him move around, but couldn't see him. "Bend over, Tinny. Right here. You need to know what the Mudblood whore will experience."

Hermione screamed "STOP!" as she heard the crack of the belt on the tiny elf and the cry from Tinny's sweet mouth.

Rage possessed her, unlike anything she had ever experienced. Her body shot up, overcoming the bond, and turned toward Draco. Before he had a chance to comprehend, she rolled into a tall kneel on the bed and stared down at him. She focused on the wand in his pocket as he started to reach for it and wished with all her might it would come to her. "Expelliarmus!" she yelled. The wand flew into her grasp instantly and magic flooded through her body as it tingled in her hand. Her magic sparked from her, and Draco's eyes grew wide as he could practically see the magic swirling around her.

Tinny dashed behind the sofa as Hermione pointed the wand at Draco. He seemed to regain his senses and was opening his mouth. "Silencio!" she screamed. "Don't you fucking touch her again, you sadistic asshole!"

Draco turned to run, but Hermione was quick as she flicked the wand and whispered, "Locomotor Mortis." The leg binding spell caused him to fall forward with a loud crash. She jumped off the bed, watching him try to crawl away like the worm he was. Before she knew what she was saying, the forbidden curse started to spill from her lips. "Cruci." Somehow, despite her rage, despite her desire to flay the skin from his disgusting body, she stopped herself short of whispering the unforgivable. Her voice trembling with continued fury, she whispered in a barely controlled voice. "You are a vile, vicious, cruel and pathetic specimen of a human being. If being a pure blood gives someone the right to be what you've become, then I'm proud to be a mudblood."
She heard movement behind her and turned to see Tinny peek out from behind the sofa. Forgetting about Draco, she dashed back to the trembling elf. "Tinny, are you alright?" Tinny nodded with wide tear ridden eyes and didn't speak, reminding Hermione of Draco's awful command that she could never speak to Hermione again.

Hermione turned back to the sadistic bastard, and upon seeing him crawling rapidly towards the door, almost escaping, fury overcame her, once again. Before giving it a conscious thought, she waved the wand in her hand and yelled "impedimenta!" The spell shot forward with incredible force, hitting Draco from behind, lifting him from the ground and throwing him into the table where the glowing parchment had been earlier. He crumbled to the floor not moving. Hermione's breathing was rapid and her pulse was racing as she cautiously stepped forward. All her fury left as the pool of blood began to form around the blond's head.

When the rage was gone, fear began to take its place. A feeling of dread overwhelmed her as her heart began to pound, the bond taking hold once again. The compulsion to climb on the bed and resume the commanded position on all fours was more than she could bear. Tinny slowly crept out from behind the sofa, her eyes looking from the unconscious blond on the floor back up to Hermione. The tears fell as she watched Hermione resume her earlier position.

After a moment, Hermione realized she had no choice. "Tinny. Tinny, get Lucius."
Chapter Nine

Chapter by Snowblind12

Same disclaimer as always. We own none of this and make no money from it.

Thanks to my fabulous and talented co-writer, LissaDream. We will also be posting chapter 10 of Master Mine very soon, likely this weekend, and possibly today. :)

Thanks so much to all who comment! We love hearing your thoughts :)

Another pop and Hermione knew the elf was gone. Hermione didn't move and didn't make a sound. Wishing she could disappear into the bed, she simply listened. Listened for any indication she hadn't killed him. "Draco, please Draco! Wake up," she heard Lucius plead. She could hear the mumbling of voices from the picture frames throughout the suite, but kept her head down.

Lucius' voice was strangled. "Miss Granger, what happened?"

Her response was choked with dread. "I…I'm sorry. I didn't mean to…!"

She heard rapid, thundering steps and then felt a strong grip on her arm, yanking her off the bed. She saw a blur as his other hand snatched the wand off the bed. His brutal and strong grip was the only thing that kept her upright. Her legs were weak and trembling with terror. She felt her back slam into the wall, and a sharp pain as her head hit the hard surface. A thick, muscular thigh wedge between her legs and she gasped with surprised pain as the movement caused her backside to burn with the friction it caused against the wall. Suddenly, she was very aware of the flames of discomfort to her backside from the whipping she had just received. Tears tumbled down her face as the enraged, maddened face of the man she had just this morning trusted to not be dangerous was staring down at her. How wrong she had been. This man was terrifying. His voice was deep, growling, and menacing. His right hand was still gripping her left arm painfully, his left arm was pressed against her collarbone, only inches from her delicate neck. "What…did…you…do?!

"I...I..." She couldn't get the words out, so deep was her terror.

His eyes were dark and piercing and she flinched with surprised agony when she felt him penetrate her mind. She had not known he was a Legilimens, but clearly, he was. She saw what he saw - her wand raised at Draco's retreating, bound form as he made his way toward the door. She watched as she lifted her wand to the defenseless wizard's back and blasted him off his feet, causing his head to slam into the corner of the stand beside the door. Lucius growled with rage as he forcefully shoved himself away from her, causing her to once again be forced into the wall. It made her cry out, a sob hitching in her throat.

She slid to the floor, her head pounding, her heart racing. She watched as the frantic wizard ran back to his son's side. A son who still wasn't moving. She wanted to explain, to defend herself. She had been provoked! Lucius hadn't gone far enough into her memory! She didn't dare speak, fearful that one wrong move would cause him to curse her. Words failed her, anyhow, as she stared at the sight before her: a pool of blood, a desperate father, cradling his bleeding and unconscious son. It didn't matter that he had been kind to her, that he had seemed to want to protect her. She knew now – that sliver of kindness and concern would be a thing of the past. Hermione hadn't realized until this moment how much she had come to depend on Lucius. She hadn't trusted him, was sure she would never have been able to trust him, but she had dared to hope. Seeing the grief and anger on this man's face made it clear to her that those hopes were now dashed. If Draco were permanently injured…or if he died…? She was terrified she had just signed her own death certificate.

"Where is that blasted Healer!" Lucius snapped, startling her.

"Uuuhhh." A soft, moan came from the younger Malfoy and Hermione huffed in a huge breath of relief.

"Draco! Open your eyes!"

Hermione watched, now with trepidation. What would Draco do to her for this? What would Lucius do?
Before Draco had a chance to respond, Tinny appeared with Healer Jacobs. Lucius gently laid his son's head back on the floor and stood, stepping back allowing the Healer better access. Lucius was ignoring her completely, standing over the Healer as he whispered incantations and waved his wand over the barely conscious Malfoy.

Healer Jacobs' words were reassuring. "He's going to be all right. He's sustained a concussion, slightly worse than Miss Granger's was. He'll come around shortly, but he'll need to rest. He needs to stay calm and let his body heal. I have potions I'll leave to help with the pain and the swelling."

Lucius tightened and released his fists at his sides as he stared down at his son. Hermione could see he was trembling. Healer Jacobs stood, waving his wand and magicking away the blood. He turned to Lucius. "Head wounds bleed easily. They often times look much worse than they are. He will truly be fine, Mr. Malfoy."

Sensing another presence in the room, Healer Jacobs looked behind them and across the suite. Hermione noticed his eyebrows shoot up in obvious surprise at her naked, cowering presence. She pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around them to hide her nakedness. He cleared his throat and quickly looked away, evidently not wanting to know what was going on.

Lucius, suddenly remembering her presence, turned back to her. His expression was every bit as enraged as before, but his voice was more controlled. "Put some clothes on and come to Draco's suite."

Hermione watched as Lucius waved his wand, levitating Draco's semi-conscious form, and led him out of the room. Healer Jacobs followed. Tinny looked back at Hermione briefly before disappearing with a pop.

Ten minutes later, the same ripped dress back on, Hermione picked up the glowing piece of parchment and felt a dreaded pull to the room she hated above all others. Upon arriving, she tentatively turned to face Draco's bed. He was sitting up, his hand over the side of his head. "I'm fine! Just leave me alone!"

"Draco, you need to relax and rest. You heard Healer Jacobs before he left; you will slow your recovery if you resist these simple instructions."

Draco's scowl intensified when he noticed Hermione. His voice was quiet, rage in his eyes. "You're going to regret this, Granger. You have no idea how deeply you're going to regret this."

Lucius had his hands on his son's shoulders, trying to convince him to lay down. Realizing Hermione's presence wasn't helping, he turned to her. She recoiled at the icy expression on his face, whimpering in fright.

"Bilby," Lucius called out.

The house elf instantly appeared and bowed. "Master Malfoy calls for Bilby?"

Lucius was staring at Hermione with cold, hard eyes. She could feel utter panic crawl up her body. He wasn't going to let her explain, he wasn't going to listen. He was going to hurt her – terribly – his expression promised it without words. She swallowed down the sobs threatening to take over. "Take Miss Granger to cell number two and leave her there." He paused and then continued. "Clearly, the Mudblood needs to be taught a lesson. Please be sure all the…accoutrements normally in that cell are present."

Hermione felt dizzy, and knew the blood must be draining from her face. "Oh, god," she whispered.
"Please! I'm sorry! Please!" She lost control of the sobs as her pleas fell on deaf ears. Draco had a malicious smile on his face as he laid back down. Lucius was whispering soothing words of comfort as the elf gripped her wrist and Disapparated her away.

It had been at least an hour since the male house elf had left her in the dungeon. Hermione hadn't realized how it would affect her – being back in a prison cell. Overwhelmingly suffocating was an understatement, and she had worked herself into a right state before she must have hyperventilated into a faint. Upon awakening, she had come face to face with a tray of terrifying instruments that were charmed under an impenetrable covering. She wasn't able to touch them – not that she would have wanted to. Her imagination ran away from her as she pondered what they were to be used for and she had wound up cowering in a corner of the dank cell, sobbing for what felt like an eternity. What she wouldn't give to wake up and find this had all been a nightmare. Opening her eyes as an eleven-year-old, safe at home with her mum and dad would be incredible. Having magic never exist was her idea of a perfect world after all the horrors she had been through.

Most of her anguish came from her own self-loathing for being so stupid. She shouldn't have hurt Draco, she should have just let him run out once she had gotten his wand. It had clearly terrified him that she had disarmed him. The truth was, she would have never even attempted it – would have never gotten angry enough – if he hadn't hurt Tinny. Hermione was ready and willing to endure whatever Draco dished out in order to survive. However, she was not prepared to stand idly by while he tortured an innocent. It just wasn't in her nature.

She was still sniffling softly, tears streaming down her face when there was a loud crack of Apparation. She looked up fearfully to find the ever-imposing Lucius Malfoy caressing his fingers over the tray of torture implements. Absolute terror gripped her heart, and she couldn't have stopped the words if she had tried. "Mr. Malfoy, please - !" He didn't let her finish. Almost lazily he flicked his wand at her. "Crucio," he hissed. Fire, knives, hot irons, boiling oil, breaking bones – it felt like all of it combined at once to encapsulate her body in utter agony. She screamed – writhing, twisting, and thrashing.

It was over in seconds that felt like hours and she lay face down on the cold, wet cobble stone floor, sobbing. She attempted to curl herself into a ball and cried out from the after-pain of the curse combined with the burning remnants of the lashes that had broken the skin on her back and buttocks and thighs.

"Did you think I was teasing you when I told you to behave yourself, Miss Granger?" Lucius' voice was cold, hard, and void of all emotion. Hermione didn't look at him. She could barely move – could barely breathe – let alone answer him. She continued to weep wordlessly, struggling to catch her breath. She needed to look at him, to make him look at her. To listen to her. She tried to push herself into a tall kneel, but cried out before collapsing back to the stone.

"Please," she whispered. "Please, don't." She was breathless from the pain, tears poured unceasingly down her face.

Lucius muttered the curse again, and red-hot chains burned into her bones, skin was peeled from muscle, teeth pulled out one by one – she screamed, and screamed, and screamed. It felt like a lifetime, two lifetimes, three. She would surely go mad before he lifted it. Her life was over now. All because she had tried to help an innocent little elf. Then it was done again, and she wept more forcefully than before. Gagging on her heaving breaths, Hermione hugged herself tightly, trying to stop the tremored aftershocks of the curse. She couldn't stifle the residual cries of torture that were being ripped unwillingly from her throat as she continued to cry.
"I asked you a question, Miss Granger. I highly recommend you answer me." His voice, so soft and kind this morning, now felt like ice slipping down her spine.

"Please…" Was all she could manage. She dragged in breath after breath, trying to calm her heaving chest so she could answer him properly. Anything to not feel that agony again. Anything. "Please… let…me. Ohhhh…!" Hermione groaned low, whimpering as a shock gripped her body. Lucius must have held the curse much longer that time, and she clenched her teeth in attempts to keep from crying out. She realized she had peed herself, it burned her thighs where her skin was flayed open from Draco's whipping. Tears and snot streamed down her face, and she couldn't even begin to contemplate raising a hand to wipe her face, though she wanted to desperately. Being weak in front of him was the last thing she wanted.

"Cru - !"

"NO! Please! P-please, Lu-Lucius, NO!" she bawled, begging him. Her tone was hysterical, her voice cracking in numerous places. "I didn't – I didn't mean to hurt him! I didn't! I was just…just trying to p-protect T-Tinny. Please…no more!" She couldn't breathe again. It had taken everything she had to force those words out. She wheezed, gasping breaths in through her mouth as her nose was completely blocked from her tears. She coughed agonizingly as the breaths caught in her throat. It hurt…so much. Another tremor wracked her body and she moaned loudly from it. How long had he held that curse on her? She couldn't remember ever feeling like this in the aftermath of it. Even with Voldemort…Bellatrix. She didn't want to die. She didn't want to die. It was all that she could wrap her mind around, the fierce desire to live. To be. To survive this mess.

Lucius had frozen the moment she had said his name. The desperation in her voice, the way it had broken over the syllables, had punched him square in the gut. What are you doing? He felt as though he had been jolted out of a fog. Suddenly, she was not his son's assailant anymore – she was a broken, beaten, and terrified slip of a girl bawling on the floor of a cell in his dungeon; begging for him to understand, to have mercy. His anger fled as quickly as it had come. He stepped back, his body colliding with the wall opposite of the one she was lying next to. He felt sick. The knife in his hand felt heavy and he looked down at it, disgusted with what he had been planning to do. It clattered to the ground and the girl jumped in fright, eyes rolling wildly to find the unfamiliar sound. She never looked his way, however, and eventually her eyes closed again.

Lucius was quiet for a long, long time. He stared at Hermione as she gasped and hiccupped; as she moaned with the pain of the aftershocks from the curse he had put on her. Occasionally she whispered his first name followed by more pleas of mercy, as if she hadn't realized he had stopped – that he was still. Guilt gripped him fiercely – and he hated it. Hated her for making him feel this way. That girl had split his son's head open. She could have killed him; she could have taken away the only person he had left in this world. Even with this thought, he was unable to bring back the rage that had encompassed him since he had found Draco in a pool of blood on her bedroom floor.

After an age, he realized she was quiet. Her breath was still shaky, but much deeper and more even. The groan and whimper of discomfort were much softer and there were longer periods of time between them.

"You have one chance to explain to me what happened, or we will continue, Miss Granger."

There was another lengthy pause, and he wondered if she had passed out.

When Hermione answered, her voice was so weak he flinched with surprise. "Please…" she said tearfully. "I…c-can't, talk. Please…l-look. I…w-won't resist." She rolled. It caused her obviously discomfort – a louder grunt of pain escaped her, along with a gasp and a sob that shook Lucius to the
core. Shame crashed around him. Had she always been so tiny? She looked like a small, broken child laying there like that.

At first her eyes were closed. He moved towards her cautiously, he understood she wanted him to use Legilimency. Kneeling beside her, he feared her eyes opening. When they finally fluttered, he knew he had been right to be so afraid. Her luminescent, golden irises were darkened with undiluted agony and grief; they were wet with unshed tears of anguish. "Please," she whimpered softly, slowly reaching out and grasping his wrist with her shaking, ice cold fingers. "Please…understand."

It took a moment to shake off the feeling her desperate touch caused. Eventually, he whispered another spell for the second time that day, slipping into her mind much more gently than before. Subconsciously, he did not want to cause her anymore pain. Lucius watched what had transpired between her and Draco earlier in the morning, followed by the scene with Hermione and Tinny sharing a kind of camaraderie in her dressing room. Draco had come upon them, he had hurt her, degraded her verbally and physically, and then saw him turn his attention to the little female elf. Lucius watched in utter fascination as Hermione (in all her naked splendor) had broken the slave bond by sheer force of will, wandlessly disarmed Draco, and proceeded to defended herself and the elf.

He observed in utter captivation as she had forced herself to not utter the curse Lucius had just used so ruthlessly on her. He pulled back from her mind as gently as he could and stared into her eyes for a long moment. She did not blink, he could not look away.

She had not attacked, she had defended.

She had defended not herself, but Tinny.

Lucius sat heavily on the floor of the cell to which he had sent an innocent eighteen-year-old girl with every intention of torturing her for defending his house elf from his son. After her eyes fluttered shut, he dropped his head into his hands, confusion flooding every pore of his being. Why should he care about this Mudblood chit? Why should he care that she was defending herself or Tinny? Why did her motivation even matter? She had attacked his son!

But it does. It mattered because what his son had done to Hermione, unprovoked no less, had sickened Lucius. Tentatively, without conscious thought, he reached out and brushed his fingers over her right cheekbone. Her eyes opened halfway, he was astonished when a small smile pulled at her lips. "You understand?" she whispered hoarsely. She didn't wait for his reply. "I'm so sorry," she reached up and cupped his hand with hers, pressing his fingers against her face. He had to stifle a gasp of surprise at her easy acceptance of him after what he had just done to her. Then she lost consciousness, her hand falling limply away from his.

Swearing softly, he gathered her small form into his arms and stood to Disaparate. He landed in her bathroom and gently laid her on the floor before flicking his wand to fill the tub. She smelled of salt and urine and had to be in absolute agony. He knew his fury had been such that he had held the Crucius curse too long the second time. He was probably lucky he hadn't caused her permanent brain damage.

He started removing his clothing, undressing until he just wore his underwear. Then he turned to Hermione and used his wand to unclove her. He cursed loudly when he saw the welted and broken stripes across her backside. There was dried blood smeared in a few places. She moaned a little in her oblivion when he gently reached to smooth one particularly angry line that started on her hip. He took a moment to set his wand close to the tub, so it was within reach if he needed it. Then, he pulled her into his arms and slid into the tub with her. She lay limp and boneless in his arms and he couldn't help but marvel at her. Her eyelashes were damp with tears, her lips were bloodless and slightly
parted, she was extremely pale – but she was still incredibly beautiful.

As the heat closed around her body, her eyes slowly opened. She let out a sound that was half moan of pain and half groan of pleasure. Shock and confusion coursed through him when she turned into him, slinging her arms around his shoulders and burying her face in his chest. Tears seemed to be wracking her body again and he could do nothing but wrap his arms around her naked form as she clung to him. To him. This incredible creature was seeking comfort from him for pain he had caused, comfort from pain he'd been unable to stop his son from inflicting.

After a long while, he felt her pull away and reluctantly let her go. Mystified as to why he wouldn't want to let the Mudblood out of an embrace, he grabbed his wand to summon the supplies he needed to wash her and set about his tasks with as much clinical detachment he could. Lucius avoided all contact with her expressive, devastating eyes. He turned her, so she sat between his legs, and poured water over her head, drenching her locks which pulled long and straight with the weight of the water. Setting the metal pitcher aside, he reached for some shampoo and squirted it into his hands before gently massaging it into her scalp. A sharp gasp of pain caused him to pause in surprise before he realized her head must be tender from Draco pulling her hair. With much chagrin, he remembered slamming her head into the wall while questioning her, as well. He casually forced those thoughts away before swiping up the pitcher again and rinsing her hair. After repeating his actions with the conditioner, he soaped a flannel. Lucius pushed her heavy hair over one shoulder and smoothed the soft fabric over her shoulders and down her spine, stopping above the line that marked the top of her damaged backside. Hermione remained quiet as he rinsed her again before pulling her back against his chest. Moving her hair again, he continued his ministrations over her collar bones, gently around her breasts, down her stomach, and between her thighs. He meant no sexual undertone to his actions, but unfortunately his body did not get the message.

Lucius felt her stiffen when he shifted as his straining erection pressed against her lower back. Choosing to ignore her response and pretending it wasn't actually happening, he quietly ordered her out of the tub. Hermione clambered out of the basin painfully, small grunts and gasps leaving her with every movement. He followed, frowning deeply at her discomfort. Snatching his wand up from his pile of clothing, he cast a drying spell on himself and his boxers before wrapping the girl in a huge, fluffy, lavender towel.

It bothered Lucius that she hadn't spoken, this was made worse by the fact she hadn't even attempted to look anywhere but the floor. He watched her carefully as he redressed.

"Miss Granger, look at me," he said finally as he finished tucking in his shirt. Hermione's head rose slowly, not having a choice. He was immediately disconcerted, and had to look away from her hastily. Her eyes were flat – dead – her face held no expression outside of a profound resignation. Almost as if she had accepted whatever horrible fate had been laid out for her – whatever hand he was about to deal her.

"Come." He said nothing else, just led her back to the bedroom. It was obvious from the way her breathing changed that she was suffering. Lucius felt an alarming need to remedy that. "Bilby!" The elf appeared with a crack and bow.

"Pain potion, healing potion, healing cream, sleeping potion, bruise paste, tremor potion, now." Lucius rattled off the list of what he needed. "Lay on the bed on your stomach, Miss Granger."

Her body automatically started to move, but her speech was not being commanded. "I need to dry my hair," she whispered, her voice was devoid of all emotion. It was the first words she had uttered since she had asked him to look into her mind, to understand what had truly happened.

Why did that bother him so? She had finally been put in her place after days of acting like she was
the new lady of the manor. She finally understood that she was not worth the dirt on his boots. *Lies!* his brain hissed at him. *Why lie to yourself, Lucius?* He shook his head hard, trying to dispel the troubling thoughts. "You may stop, I will dry your hair," he finally answered her. He watched, feeling slightly sick as her body came to an abrupt halt.

He used a spell he remembered Narcissa employing and Hermione's hair immediately dried straight and long, surprising them both. Clutching the towel with one hand, she fingered a lock of the hair that almost reached her hips now that it was no longer in tight, spiral curls.

Hermione refused to meet his gaze, the spell had been shocking, but she couldn't deny its effectiveness. Her hair was silky smooth and shiny. It felt incredible! If she ever got a wand back, she would have to ask him what he had done. It would have been almost laughable if she were anywhere else in the world. Lucius commanded her back to the bed, towel off, stomach down. She felt her body comply without her direction. There was a pop and Hermione assumed Bilby had returned with the ordered potions. Another pop indicated he was gone. The bed sunk as Lucius sat next to her.

The Malfoy patriarch fumbled through the vials that had been given to him, sighing. He set them aside for the moment. He needed to disinfect and heal the slashes on her back and bottom. He looked at them carefully, nausea rising in him once again. There were eleven total, three were broken open painfully, the others were raised welts. Quietly, he murmured the incantation to clean and then seal the open wounds, followed by one to reduce swelling and inflammation. He opened the tub of healing cream and gently massaged it into the marks. The only response he got from her was a sharply inhaled breath. He let the cream set, watching as the marks faded to look days old before his eyes. He then smoothed some bruise paste over the tender skin, which would take the night to make a difference.

The pain had obviously lessened considerably; he watched as her whole body melted. "Sit up and face me Miss Granger." He spoke to her while using his wand to silently summon a nightgown. The moment she was facing him, Lucius was slipping it over Hermione's head and helping her guide her arms through the sleeves of the teal and cream damask silk.

"Take these." In succession, Lucius handed her the healing potion, the pain potion, and the tremor potion. He watched with approving eyes as she downed each in quick turn. He vanished the tubes once she had finished. They watched each other quietly for a while. Not knowing why he did it, Lucius reached out to caress the left side of her face. It didn't surprise him when she flinched, but the hiss of pain confused him.

"What's wrong?"

She simply shook her head, teeth coming out to worry her lower lip. "Tell me, now."

Hermione was surprised when she immediately began to speak, especially being that Draco had strictly forbidden her from telling anyone. "My face hurts. I was struck this morning. I'm sure it's bruised, but Draco put a glamour on it."

She watched in fascination as Lucius' jaw clenched tightly. A silent, *Finite Incantatem* spell with his wand later and he let out a low, angry hiss as a large bruise bloomed across her cheek and around her eye in the shape of a hand print. He scooped up the bruise paste again and with wonderfully gentle fingers, he smoothed it into the mark on her face. "I'm sorry," he sighed. He froze, astounded with himself. Had he just apologized to a *Mudblood*? For something he had not even done? She didn't answer, didn't look at him. Part of him was glad, he didn't want to see her lifeless eyes, anyhow. Her apparent defeat was too painful for him to bear, Merlin only knew why.
When he was done, Lucius sent the creams to sit on Hermione's nightstand. Keeping his voice as cool as he could, he gave her directions he knew she would hate, but that were necessary.

"You will never use wandless magic against my son or myself ever again, tell me you understand." It was a demand.

"I understand." Her voice was soft, but flat. She didn't even attempt to meet his eyes.

"If Draco strikes your face, you are to tell me the next time you see me no matter what his directives are. I have asked him not to mark your face. It is not acceptable."

He watched with slight satisfaction as some color filled her cheeks and she bit her lip. Was that anger she was trying to dispel? That was a good sign – life returning to her.

"Physically, you have been punished enough for your transgressions today," he continued after a beat. He kept his voice casual, even though guilt was still eating him alive. "However, I have decided I will maintain the directive that Tinny not be allowed to speak with you." Hermione's head snapped up and it was all Lucius could do not to look away at the obvious desolation in her eyes. He knew exactly what he was doing to her; he was taking away the one thing – the only thing – that was good in her life. Lucius was no fool, he had known Tinny would be kind to the witch. After what had transpired today, though, he realized he couldn't let them build a relationship. It would be too dangerous.

"She will continue to provide for your needs and care for you, but she will not be allowed to converse with you. Your time together will be strictly professional, for lack of a better word. Tell me you understand." Her voice was rough with unshed tears when she spoke the words this time. He looked away shamefully.

He moved off the bed and started to walk to the door. "Dinner will be served in your room, there is a sleeping potion for afterwards if you need it. If you want another pain potion, you only need to ask Tinny for it." His words were met with more silence and he watched her with sad eyes as she rolled onto her side, facing away from him. Lucius sighed as he noticed her body start trembling, she was crying again. Again, he tried to reason why this bothered him.

Steeling himself for his final words, he placed his hand on the crystal doorknob. "If you ever do anything to hurt my son again, Miss Granger, I will not stop to listen to your reasoning. This is your final warning on this matter, I expect you to heed it." He heard her sob aloud as he pulled the door shut behind him, guilt once again taking hold. Once again, he didn't understand why.

Lucius stepped into his suite, exhausted from all that had happened. He was only partially surprised to find Narcissa was watching him warily from the portrait over the mantle.

"I've been watching Draco, he's been sleeping," she said, her voice tense with worry.

"Hmm," he responded softly and distractedly. Draco wasn't the injured party he was thinking about. His mind kept replaying the image of her small, writhing body, sobbing and begging for mercy on the cobblestone floor. He felt sick to his stomach. Why do I feel this way?

"Lucius, talk to me."

Lucius exhaled as he slumped into a chair, reaching to unzip his boots and slide them off. He stood, not answering her, as he slipped off his leather riding vest and began to unbutton his shirt. "What do you wish me to say, 'Cissa?"
He looked over his shoulder towards her when she didn't respond. Guilt overcame him when he saw the hurt in her eyes. His dismissive tone and words were reflective of how he had treated her far too often during their marriage. He walked towards her portrait. "I'm sorry, my flower. It's been a rough afternoon."

Narcissa's beautifully painted eyes became sympathetic.

He collapsed into a chair again, his shirt falling open as he propped his right ankle on his left knee. He rubbed his eyes and then smoothed his hand down his face. "I think, my darling, I am missing you so much, that I am becoming confused by the female in this house." He rolled his eyes. "When have I ever cared about a Mudblood? When have I ever concerned myself with such a piece of filth?"

Narcissa watched him, her brow lifting slightly with the surprise of his confession. She glanced around the room, confirming they were not being eavesdropped on. "Careful, my love. Such words will bring you into my existence long before your time."

Catching her meaning, he glanced about the room.

You're being reckless, you idiot.

After a minute, she pressed him. "Tell me. Tell me what you're thinking."

Lucius swallowed and hesitated to speak. "I... For some reason, unknown to me, I find myself concerned for the girl's wellbeing. I actually apologized to her, 'Cissa! Apologized for what Draco had done to her. Imagine me...apologizing to a Mudblood! It's absurd!' He snorted his derision, not noticing the surprised look on Narcissa's painted face.

He stood jerkily, and began to pace. "She's a slave. Placed here, where we have to fuck her practically daily to maintain a bond." He looked up at his wife's portrait, apologetically. She waved her hand as though it was no concern. He huffed and looked away as he continued his pacing. "A bond I care nothing for, a bond the Dark Lord wishes us to use to manipulate her into...I'm not even sure what. He wants to be able to use her – should he find her useful. He wants Draco and I to sway her to our side." He rolled his eyes, facing the portrait. "How do you sway someone like Hermione Granger? Tell me! She will never support a cause that she spent more than half her life fighting. She will never support the dictator she hates more than anyone. And why should she? Narcissa, tell me! Why should she? He stands against everything she is! She's stubborn enough to go to her death before being swayed." Narcissa raised an eyebrow at his almost admiring tone.

He collapsed back into the chair for the third time. His voice was now soft, resigned. "Yet, I find myself feeling sorry for her. Perhaps I'm just tired of the violence. I'm tired of abusing and I'm tired of being abused. I'm tired of being forced to fuck an eighteen-year-old girl. A girl our son's age!" He looked up at Narcissa. "Sometimes when I look at her, I think of the daughter we lost. The daughter we miscarried. She would have been close to Hermione's age." He closed his eyes and looked up at Cissa. "What makes it worse, is that I find her desirable. It sickens me. It's obscene! Me, Lucius Malfoy, finding an eighteen-year-old Mudblood desirable." He shook his head in clear aggravation. "I think it's because I'm missing you so much. She's here...and you're not."

Narcissa watched him carefully for a moment before speaking with conviction. "Lucius, you're a better man than you give yourself credit for, but you're also a red-blooded male. Of course, you desire her! As much as I hate to admit it, she's a striking girl. She has a lovely body and a sharp mind. I understand the beating yourself up over it. She's not your daughter. You have to...be intimate with her anyway, you may as well make the best of it. It's not as though you're falling in love with her!"

Lucius looked up at her in horrified shock. "Certainly not!"
They didn't speak for a minute, each contemplating what had been said. Lucius was about to continue undressing when Narcissa's voice sounded pained. "But, Lucius. The one you do love – your son! What of him? If the Mudblood had killed him, or seriously injured him..."

Lucius didn't let her finish; his voice was cold with its conviction. "She'd be dead right now."

"Elizabella told me what Draco did to her, Lucius. She saw the whole sordid thing."

Lucius' eyes glazed over, and he had to turn his face away from her. "It was awful, Narcissa. I saw it from the girl's mind - the unprovoked brutality. The glee he seemed to derive from her emotional and physical torture. The abuse of Tinny." He looked up at her, his tone conveying his doubt. "Do you still think it's grief?" He shook his head. "I could practically see the mad look of Bellatrix as I saw our son through Hermio...err, the Mudblood's eyes."

Narcissa's look became angry, her tone impatient. "Lucius, I know our son. I know Draco better than anyone! You are wrong! He is too young. When the madness overcame Bellatrix and all the other Blacks before her who were afflicted, it always came at an older age. Well into their twenties or thirties. He's too young. That's not what this is!" Lucius turned away, disbelieving. "Lucius, be a father. Talk to him. Try to get him to open up. You have to be a mother to him now as well, not just a father."

Lucius huffed, swallowing the retort he wanted to say, opting to say what Narcissa wanted to hear instead. "Yes, my flower. I'm sure you're right. I'll try to do better." He finished undressing, standing naked. "I'm going to shower now. Then I'm going to eat, then I'm going to bed." He paused. "Will you be here when I come out of the bath?"

She sighed apologetically. "Draco needs me. I'm going to watch over him so that if he wakes, I'm there."

Lucius' eyes stung as she disappeared from the frame, his heart breaking for her. Draco would not speak to her, he wouldn't even look at her. He hadn't acknowledged her presence even once since she had manifested. It was breaking Narcissa's dead heart and in turn, it made Lucius ache for her.
When Hermione awoke to the pull of the six am summons, a familiar wash of dread slivered over her like retreating wave water caresses the sand. Her room was dark, and she could hear the smack of raindrops on her balcony. Glancing at her clock, her eyes confirmed what she knew. Five-fifty.

She cautiously rolled out of bed, expecting the residual effects of the Cruciatus to slow her down. She was disappointed to find her expectations were spot on. Her body ached, and her legs quivered. Disappointment was becoming her only constant and dependable companion. It was the one thing she had learned she could count on in this new life.

She slowly made her way to the loo and, after relieving her bladder, stopped to ponder her reflection. After studying her face, she lifted her teal, silk night gown and studied the fading marks from Draco’s belt. The skin looked yellow, and remarkably it was only mildly tender to the touch. Lucius’ healing treatments had helped. But for how long? How long until the next beating?

Dismissing that inevitability, she dropped her gown and brushed her teeth, not really caring that her facial bruises were almost completely faded as well. Lucius was confusing, and yet he was also very predictable. He confused her by taking such an interest in her physical condition. He was painstakingly careful with her when he healed her, as though she were a butterfly and he was mending her paper-thin wings. He was also predictable. Predictable in his carnal use of her, predictable in his rage at her, and predictable in the defense of his son.

He can be reasoned with, though. He has a rational mind. Hermione scoffed and dismissed her inner hope. Not where his son is concerned. She remembered his words as he left her the night before. "If you ever do anything to hurt my son again, Miss Granger, I will not stop to listen to your reasoning. This is your final warning on this matter, I expect you to heed it."

Not bothering to comb her hair, she stepped back into her room and wearily made her way to the door connecting her suite to the Master’s. As she entered into the large living space, memory led her to the four-poster bed, light evading her straining eyes.

She struggled onto the bed and made her way to her usual place, hoping he would simply let her sleep. Within a moment of placing her head on the pillow, though, she felt his hands on her. "Do not come to me wearing a nightgown again."

Hermione was taken aback by his tone. He seemed angry and impatient. "Take it off and get on your hands and knees." Shit! Nothing good ever came of this command. She had been buggered and half beaten to death in this position. Nothing good comes in any position. She reminded herself. She
knew that wasn't the complete truth, though. She had experienced pleasure at the touch of this wizard. Pleasure she didn't want, but pleasure nonetheless. Somehow, she knew pleasure wasn't in the cards today.

Once in position, she felt him kneel behind her. She braced herself for the impending assault. His hand grasped her hips, lifting and slightly repositioning her. She felt fingers rub up and down the part of her body that was no longer her own. That part of herself that was hidden and had been saved for a man and a life she now knew she would never have. She wished she had slept with Ron. She had loved Ron and, more importantly, Ron had loved her. Even Viktor would have been ok. She wished she hadn't saved herself. It would have been nice to have been touched this way by someone who loved her, or even cared about her, even if it had only been once.

She heard the elder Malfoy let out a small sigh of what sounded like frustration. She saw him slip his hand under his pillow and pull out his wand. Then she felt a cool tingle between her legs as he whispered a spell she couldn't quite decipher. A quick thrust and he was inside her. It wasn't rough, and it wasn't painful, he was just there. As he began to move, her body was jolted forward with each thrust. His grip was tight on her hips, just shy of painful. Lucius' voice sounded slightly strained with his exertion. "Put your forehead on the pillow." Before she could analyze why, her head obeyed, and she understood. She could feel his thrusts were deeper.

Small grunts and pants accompanied the sound of flesh slapping flesh. He wasn't hurting her, but he was using her. She found she preferred the honesty of this position. This is what she was – exactly what Draco had told her – a vessel to be used for carnal pleasure. It was a relief there was no humiliating pleasure forced upon her leaving her no need to pretend this was something she wanted. She felt small as he leaned over her, his hips still pounding as his hands rested on the mattress beside her own. His right hand maneuvered under her, massaging her right breast. She felt him still as he let out a loud growl-moan with his release.

He remained hunched over her, until she felt his now soft cock slip from her, his seed spilling out with him. When his breathing began to calm, he righted himself before collapsing back in his usual spot. His eyes were closed, and his arm draped over his forehead.

"Leave. Brunch is at eleven-thirty," he whispered, still slightly out of breath.

She was frozen for just a moment before the bond kicked in, trying to come to terms that this was the same man who had thrown her over the ledge of pleasure twice yesterday morning. Then he had proceeded to give her the most pleasant morning she had had since she couldn't remember when. One stupid, emotional reaction in defense of her friend and she had lost that friend, as well as Lucius' kindness. Truly and completely, she now had nothing. A crushing feeling of loneliness enveloped her, and she had to stifle her tears as the bond forced her to move.

She grasped her nightgown and slid off the bed onto her shaky legs. Moving towards the hidden exit as quickly as her battered body would allow, she muttered the password. His command would not let her move at a slower pace. As soon as she was back in the confines of her own suite, she felt the sweet release of the bond. She exhaled a breath of solace and then drew in a breath of dread; she knew the pull to Draco would come at any second.

Voldemort was standing, his arms open in a gesture of welcome. His grey, thin lips pulled back to display yellowing teeth. His words were as blatantly false as his open arms. "Ahh, Draco. I always have time for my most promising and faithful."

Draco quickly kneeled before his serpent-faced Master with his head bowed. As the thin, spidery hand was held out, the young Malfoy instinctively leaned in and placed a chaste kiss on the icy skin.
Draco's storm-grey eyes looked up to meet the red tinged, vertically slit irises of the thing before him. The thing he was bound to serve for the rest of his life. "My Lord, my gracious and ever tolerant Master, I am sorry to intrude upon your Sunday morning."

The despot looked away and responded in a bored tone. "It is no matter. All days are the same tedium as the day before and the day after. It is the sacrifice I make for my subjects and for wizarding kind. Tell me what it is you require."

"The Mudblood. She is...yesterday, she..." Suddenly, Draco lost his voice, realizing the true extent of his humiliation at having been bested by her...a waif of a Mudblood...A bound slave had overpowered him so decidedly. He realized now that it had been foolish and impulsive to beg the Dark Lord's audience. His voice was shaky as he tried to backtrack. "My Lord, I realize now I have made an error in wasting your precious time. I will handle it, I will – "

Voldemort's tone was sharp as he hissed his impatient words. "My time has already been wasted. Look at me, Draco. Show me what it is you struggle to say. Do not try to Occlude me."

Draco swallowed gravely, as he looked into the non-human eyes of Voldemort. He saw what his Master saw; Draco's verbal and physical abuse followed by Hermione's wandless show of magic. Draco groaned with discomfort when the Dark Lord pulled back and dove in again, going deeper and looking at every minute detail of the Mudblood's display. This time, the Dark Lord carried the memory through to the end, all the way to Draco regaining consciousness.

Draco drew in a cool, calming, and shaky breath when the greatest Legilimens the world had ever known finally pulled out of his head. The assault to his memory happened no less than five times before the Dark Lord had had his fill. Draco's head was throbbing, and his ears were ringing. He remembered the healer cautioning him against further injury and the need to rest. He wondered if this would qualify as further injury.

His thoughts were interrupted by the surprisingly gleeful voice of his master. Draco glanced up at the Dark Lord, finding his snake-like face looked as joyful as his voice sounded. He slowly clapped his hands and smiled gruesomely. "That, Draco, was stunning. Thank you for sharing. I much prefer a display of exquisite magic to the tiresome memories of the sexual abuse you afflict upon the Mudblood so regularly."

He stood and moved away from Draco smoothly, almost slithering toward the large picture window that looked over a forest of greens and browns. He spoke as he gazed out at the view. "Abraxas came to me last night and told me of the spectacle."

This did not surprise Draco, although it did disappoint him. He could not understand how his Grandfather could continue to serve Voldemort and be such a traitor to family secrets. His attention was pulled back to Voldemort when the man continued to speak. "Of course, Abraxas' description did not convey the true beauty of the display." He let out a sigh and no small hint of disappointment as he continued. "Pity it was the Mudblood's magic that was so impressive, and not your own."

The humiliation of his Master's words furthered Draco's resolve to ask for what he needed so desperately. Swallowing his pride, he spoke. "My Lord, I let my guard down. If I had only – "

"Silence."

Draco didn't dare to speak another word. He kept his eyes down as his Master turned to face him.

"I saw what happened. You goaded the girl. You pushed her to the delicious moment where she lost control. You were the catalyst for something rare, and for that you are to be commended. I would
advise you to be careful not to let her best you again." He let out a mirthless chuckle. "Something tells me she might not be so merciful next time."

Humiliated, Draco could feel the hatred for the Mudblood simmering beneath his skin so intensely, it was practically a miracle boils weren't forming. He dug his nails into his thighs, forcing himself to remain calm. Despite desperately trying to prove his worth for many weeks, his Master now found him lacking once again. He needed to show his strength and prove his value.

"My Lord, please, let me…let me kill her. She is –"

The Dark Lord rounded on him, his voice incredulous. "Kill her?! Kill her, you ask? Why would I ever want to kill such a creature? Such strength and ability! Such fortitude!" He turned away, seemingly talking to himself. "Imagine, a Mudblood displaying such a thing." He turned back to Draco. "No, Draco. She will not be killed. At least not as long as her…talents can be utilized."

Draco felt his Master's eyes on him as he continued to stare at the unwavering ground beneath his knees. He felt as though the earth might crumble below him and swallow him whole, or perhaps that was simply just a wish.

"But still, the Mudblood should be taught a lesson. I suppose it's only fair for you to be the one to teach it."

Draco looked up at his Master, a small bloom of hope opening in his chest.

Hermione entered the dining room on shaking legs. Draco had not been in his rooms this morning. Because of this, she had knelt next to his bed until the bond had released her just in time to ready herself for her next compulsion – brunch. Her whole body shook with fatigue. Apparently almost five hours of kneeling was its own form of torture. It had most likely been the lesser of two evils, though. Draco's presence would have been much worse.

Lucius did not make eye contact or speak to her as she entered the room, he also did not stand to pull out her chair as he had done for every other meal they had attended together since she had arrived. She paused for a moment, the panic of the bond clawing at her. She wasn't supposed to sit unless the proper etiquette had been attended to.

After a few agonizing minutes, and only when her breath changed to reveal her discomfort, did Lucius glance at her indifferently. "What are you waiting for? Sit down!"

It was a relief when the bond released her to pull out her own chair and sit. She was starving, having been up since before six. She settled into her spot and slowly pulled her napkin into her lap. She was in a simple pewter colored gown with cap sleeves. It was fitted to under her bust and then draped in a flowing cascade to her ankles. She was cold, the material gave very little warmth against the chill of the large manor house.

The conversation remained nonexistent, even after they were served. Hermione found herself staring at her fingers, which were twisting and untwisting in her napkin. Lucius' complete obliviousness of her presence took her appetite away. She managed to choke down a few bites of the cherry cream cheese stuffed French toast, but it tasted like sand in her mouth. She sipped her tea, wishing he would at least offer her part of the paper like he had the morning before. Granted, he had only allowed her the social pages, but it was better than nothing.

Lucius watched her covertly from behind his copy of the morning Prophet. Her gait seemed unsteady
and it was with a twinge of guilt that he realized Draco had likely been gone all morning. Had he not been in his room when she arrived? How long had she been left kneeling? He knew he had given her a directive that if she was forgotten about for longer than two hours she should be released, but he was certain that Draco had not forgotten her. His sadistic son simply just didn't care about the girl's pain.

He barely dared to breathe when she came to a stop at her chair. He was determined not to talk to her unless absolutely necessary. He felt he needed to distance himself from her. To curb his confused emotions and odd waves of protection, he needed to think of her as a Mudblood slave. Not as the lovely, intelligent, and fiery young woman that she was. He was not doing himself any favors by making this situation more complicated than it needed to be. She was beneath him. She was a Mudblood not worthy of his concern.

He was pulled out of his thoughts by the change in her breathing. He recognized that sound. Despite his thoughts from only seconds before, guilt flooded him as he remembered his prior directive. She had been commanded to wait to be seated and allow polite dining etiquette without complaint. He closed his eyes very briefly before snapping at her because of his own frustration. "What are you waiting for? Sit down!"

Lucius refused to look at her, she was probably wearing something lovely. Tinny always dressed her well. Often, when she was embarrassed, flustered, or upset, her cheeks took on a beautiful blush that…Stop it, you fool! Pull yourself together!

He was surprised to see that breakfast had been served without his notice. He glanced at Hermione quickly from under his lashes to see she had barely touched anything. Her fingers were playing with her napkin. He jumped guiltily when the doors to the dining room burst open.

The French doors banged open with a resounding crash, making Hermione yelp and Lucius flinch. "On your feet, Mudblood!"

Draco's voice was laced with venom and Hermione's face drained of color. She missed the irritation that flashed upon the elder Malfoy's face before she turned her pleading eyes towards him. He gazed at Hermione quickly from under his lashes to see she had barely touched anything. Her fingers were playing with her napkin. He jumped guiltily when the doors to the dining room burst open.

"Take it easy, Draco," Lucius' voice surprised her, impassive as it was. "I don't want anything falling over or breaking." A sob caught in her chest at his cold tone. Heaven forbid her latest debasement or beating break some of the precious family crystal.

Hermione shot him a scandalized look as she leaned over the opposite end of the long table, biting her lip until it bled when Draco pulled up her skirt. She wasn't wearing any knickers – Draco had forbidden her to a couple of days back. No nightgowns with Lucius, no underwear with Draco. She wouldn't be surprised if she was forced to live naked by this time next week. She would not cry. She would not.

Draco spat in his hand and she felt him rub it into her quim, moistening her entrance which was bone dry. Another spit and she heard the sick, slick noise of wet skin on skin and assumed he was wetting
his disgusting knob. Without warning, he slammed into her. She was nowhere near ready for such an
intrusion, and the force of it combined with her unpreparedness made her cry out in pain. Tears stung
her eyes.

"Merlin's sake, Mudblood." Draco rolled his eyes, his voice staying cruel and detached. "Only thing
you're good for and you can't even get that right." After a few thrusts, she felt his hands in her hair,
smoothing it back into a gathered ponytail. Somewhere in her haze of embarrassment and anger at
being taken thus (in front of Lucius at the bloody brunch table, no less), she was surprised with how
gentle he was being with her curly locks. It was short lived, however, because once it was all
gathered, he twisted his fist and jerked her back. This pulled her head, neck, and upper torso off the
table and forced her to look at the senior Malfoy as Draco rode her from behind. Her palms pressed
flat against the table to push herself up, trying to take some of the weight from her screaming scalp.
The tears fell then, and she stifled a groan of pain.

Lucius hadn't meant to let Hermione catch him looking at her and his face froze in a forced mask of
indifference when her beautiful eyes silently plead with him to help her. He couldn't help her. If he
intervened, Draco would be furious. He knew Abraxas was lurking in the shadowy scenic portrait
off the sideboard – his father's portrait would definitely talk. He turned away from her, his stomach
clenching with self-loathing. He had to stifle a gag when he heard Draco's direction. Not only was he
going to humiliate her, he had decided to make a show out of it.

Carefully, he schooled his features. Picking up a tea cup, he made his voice cool and gave a warning
to be gentle disguised as concern for the crystal on the table. He didn't miss the sob she choked on
and his whole body went cold. *That was fucking cruel, Malfoy,* he chided himself. He refused to
look at the young couple at the end of the table. "Couple" was such an imperfect word to describe
them. His son was raping the girl at the bloody dinner table in full view of his father. Who did
something like that? When had Draco turned into this unrecognizable man?

His heart leapt when she cried out in obvious discomfort and his eyes flew to her as Draco castigated
her for something. Lucius didn't register the words, just the tone. Her face was pressed into the table
and Draco's hands were gathering her hair. Without warning, she was forced up to look right at him,
her hands slamming down on the table to help support her neck. Her face was twisted in pain and
flushed with humiliation. The silent splash of tears that cascaded down her cheeks almost made
Lucius jump to his feet and put an end to the barbaric demonstration. He quickly turned his attention
back to the paper, but he wasn't absorbing anything he tried to read. His heart was pounding in his
ears.

*It's not so different from what you did to the girl this morning – taking her from behind against her
will.*

A contradicting voice chimed in. *Yes, but that was in a bed. In the privacy of your rooms. You didn't
hurt her or verbally abuse her. You merely fucked her…as you are required to do.*

Once again, his mind shot out a counterpoint. *Yes. as Draco is required to do, as well.*

"I see you healed her punishment from yesterday, Father. How…sweet." Draco's voice was sarcastic
and a bit raspy from his exertions. Hermione squeezed her eyes shut, internally willing him to be
done quickly.

Lucius' voice betrayed nothing. "You broke her skin, I didn't want her bleeding on anything."
Hermione's eyes flew open in horror. He had healed her because he didn't want her dirty blood on
anything? How…typical. She should have never expected anything more, so why did it hurt her
feelings? She tilted her head slightly as she tried to detach herself from what was happening. In doing so, she caught the headline of the Daily Prophet - *Last Member of Order, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Sentenced to Dementor's Kiss!*

"I thought you were going to torture her for what she did to me?" Draco's breath was becoming more labored while they talked about her as if she weren't in the room.

"She was punished, then healed," Lucius sighed and continued with his meal, avoiding looking at the young adults. "I've told you, I don't wish for her to be marked and broken. She needs to be able to endure our attentions."

Hermione was unable to stifle a gasp of discomfort as Draco yanked on her hair again, upping his pace. Her fingers dug into the table; she felt as though he was ripping her in half. *Just fucking finish, already, you sick, twisted swine!* Neither young adult saw Lucius' glance of disgust. Hermione focused her eyes on the paper again. A smaller headline to the right of the main story made a trickle of grief run through her and more tears spilled down her cheeks. *Percy Weasley Killed in Attempted Apprehension.* Hermione barely stifled a sob.

"Whatever." Draco rolled his eyes, grunted, then continued, "I will be gone for a while, off and on. The time-frame isn't clear. Could be a few days, could be a few weeks." Hermione's heart leapt with joy, but it was short lived. "Obviously, I'll have to floo or portkey home at least every three days to fuck this thing and renew the slave bond. For the most part, I'll be gone, though." Draco continued to pump in and out of her while he conversed as though he were drinking tea.

His statement was met with silence from his father for a few beats, the only sound was flesh slapping flesh. Hermione wasn't sure if she was relieved or not when the penetration became easier as her body caught up with his and provided its natural lubrication. At least it no longer felt as though he were using sandpaper up her vaginal passage.

"Why?" Lucius finally asked.

"I'm being sent on a mission," Draco said evasively, his voice obviously strained as he neared his climax. "One I am not at liberty to discuss."

"You were with the Dark Lord this morning?" Lucius asked sharply.

"Ye-es," Draco's movements were becoming erratic and Hermione knew he was on the verge of coming. His hands in her hair relaxed a fraction. She was grateful he wasn't going to force her to orgasm.

"Where are you being sent?" Lucius inquired, now eyeing his son curiously.

"Abroad," Draco let out a grunt as he slammed into her core one last time. No other sound marked his climax, and he let go of her hair abruptly. She was just able to catch herself from slamming her face into the table. "Well, that's that." His tone was evilly indifferent as he watched Hermione bury her face into arms, attempting to hide herself from the two men in the room. He smirked nastily at the back of her head as he stepped back and adjusted his robes. Hermione kept her face buried in her arms, trying to conceal her degradation and embarrassment.

Lucius maintained his cool and detached façade while resolutely keeping his eyes off Draco and the spectacle before him. He didn't want to watch her debasement, he had no desire to let his son think he condoned this behavior. Lucius didn't condone this behavior, it was disgusting.

This was a new Draco. A Draco who no longer seemed to need his father's approval. Lucius was
frustrated that Draco felt the need to bring up her healed skin. It angered and disappointed him that Draco was blatantly disobeying his orders to not mark her. Especially her face. Merlin, that bruise across her face last night had nearly choked him with rage. It looked better today, from the couple quick glances he had gotten, but was still a yellow-green hue of destruction marring her pretty features. His eyes flew to Draco's face when he announced he was going to be gone.

"Where are you being sent?" It came out as more of a demand to be informed versus a question. His son's one-word answer didn't infuriate him enough to distract him from the fact Draco had let Hermione's hair go with no warning. He winced as he envisioned her face slamming into the table, causing her nose to break, and had to carefully let out a controlled breath of relief when she caught herself. Lucius' stomach clenched when she quickly buried her face in curled arms. How was he supposed to live with the knowledge of what his son was doing to her and not intervene? It was unspeakable. You have to get over it. You cannot care about and protect this girl – you must make her mean nothing to you. She does mean nothing to you!

"A few tidbits of news for you, Father," Draco said as he stepped back from Hermione and the table. Afraid to move or bring attention to herself, Hermione did not look up. Draco spoke with a hint of amusement. "Bella harmed her pet Longbottom. He's in a coma."

"She always did like to play with her food until it was unresponsive," Lucius shrugged his shoulders like this was no big deal.

Draco was readjusting the cuffs on the sleeves of his robes as he continued. "That stick up his ass, Percy Weasley, and his half-blood fiancé, Penelope Clearwater, were found yesterday. Weasley was killed in the attempted capture. I'm sure some people would say he was gallant, trying to protect Clearwater." He rolled his eyes. "Such a stupid, typical Gryffindor – rushing back to save the girl. She was given to Hogwarts this morning." The words were said crisply and clearly, Hermione knew she was meant to hear every one of them.

"Nice for our young men to have a new toy," Lucius responded in a toneless voice, still reading the paper. "Anything else?"

"No. That's all the new information I overheard. I best get to my packing. Good-bye, Father."

"Safe travels, Draco." The elder Malfoy bade his son farewell. Hermione heard the doors slam shut and just barely quelled a startled jump. Then there was silence, a deep and profound silence.

She turned her head to the side, out of the confines of her arms and suffocating hair so she could pull in clean, deep breaths – attempting to calm her racing heart and subdue her embarrassment and grief. Neville and Percy were gone. She pressed one hand to her aching heart and used the fingertips of the other to smooth away the moisture of tears that had collected under her eyes. After a time, she reached back and pushed her skirt down, so it flowed over her backside.

Slowly, with as much dignity as she could muster, Hermione straightened herself. She found Lucius staring directly at her and raised her chin defiantly, even though her face was flaming. For the first time since she arrived, she had no desire to defend herself, but she'd be damned if she let him see that weakness. His gaze dropped, and she watched his shoulders rise and fall with what looked like steadying breaths.

"You may either sit and finish your meal, Miss Granger. Or, if you prefer, you may be excused. I will leave the decision up to you," he told her finally. Hermione's jaw dropped slightly with surprise, but she quickly recovered her composure.
"I will excuse myself, please," she said crisply, desperately controlling her voice. She watched him carefully, looking for any sign of the man he had been the morning before.

"Yes, yes, you're excused." He flicked his hand at her without bothering to look her way. She quickly moved to the doors of the dining room and the glowing parchment that would take her back to her quarters.

Honestly, Lucius was glad to see the back of Draco as he let himself out of the dining room. It would be a relief not having to worry what injury he would be faced with every time he looked at her. She would be safe and fairly comfortable while Draco was gone. Well, as long as the insufferable bloke he currently called his son didn't decide to beat her half to death every time he stopped in to maintain the slave bond. Perhaps going away would help distract Draco from his abusive tendencies. Not likely.

As much as he had told himself he wouldn't look at her, wouldn't speak to her, wouldn't go out of his way to be kind to her, he couldn't rip his eyes away from the trembling mass of young woman in front on him. Hermione's hair was sprawled in all directions, and her breath was coming in short pants. He knew she was preparing to right herself when he watched a hand slide back and shove her dress down. Regrettably, Lucius himself was not ready for the deadened look in her eyes when she straightened. He was also not ready for his own reaction. He found it took every ounce of control he possessed not to fly across the table and pull her into a comforting hug.

He wanted her soft, fawn eyes to look up at him with understanding. For her to know that it was not his desire to abuse her. Lucius wanted her to realize that he simply wanted peace in his home, and perhaps her acceptance of the bond and what it entailed. He ignored the small voice that pointed out that his reactions hinted he wanted more than mere acceptance from the girl. He ignored the voice that told him he cared more than he should. It was evident by the way he desperately wanted to promise her it would be fine, that he wouldn't let Draco touch her again.

The flash of movement from the sideboard instantly crushed any thoughts of comforting her. He forced himself to freeze, to look at her blankly with no sign of any regret or other emotion that would give away the turmoil that roiled in his mind and heart. He dropped his eyes and sucked in air, trying to stay the sick from crawling up his esophagus.

"You may either sit and finish your meal, Miss Granger. Or, if you prefer, you may be excused. I will leave the decision up to you." He was glad to hear the words come out with no betrayal of his frustrations.

Her quivering voice answered him, and he closed his eyes against her shame, still resolutely not looking at her, even though he knew she was staring at him. He imagined her eyes full of hurt accusations. He deserved it, but he did not wish to see it.

He flicked his hand quickly, urging her to leave. "Yes, yes, you're excused." Go! Quickly! His eyes focused on her retreating back and the glowing parchment that would take her to the safety of her room. The moment the doors closed, Abraxas disappeared from the landscape.

Lucius waited for a beat before roaring his frustration. Frustration at his spying, traitorous father. Frustration at the son he didn't know anymore. Frustration at the girl that had wrecked the peace in his home and his mind. Above all, frustration with himself for not being able to ignore it all, to compartmentalize it.

His arm swung out, sending food and china and the damned fucking crystal to the ground.
When Hermione arrived in her room, she aimlessly wandered to her bed and leaned against the end of it. She could not believe that this was her life now. She heard what Draco said, and now understood another piece of the puzzle. They needed to fuck her to maintain the bond. So even if they tired of her, they would continue to force her. No matter what, as long as she remained bound to these two men, that's what her days would entail.

Her eyes shot up in surprise as the familiar sound of Apparation pulled her distant and non-focusing gaze to the small house elf…the house elf no longer allowed to speak to her. Her only friend, who was not even looking at her as she busied herself around Hermione's suite.

Looking away, she felt as though she were in fog. She noticed the French doors in front of her and found herself walking towards them, thinking some fresh air might be nice. The breeze was cool on her skin, and raised gooseflesh on her arms as she stepped onto the wet balcony. Moving to the banister, she looked out over the grounds. The sky remained grey with dark clouds and the air was damp. There was a low rumble of thunder in the distance. It matched her mood perfectly - darkness, despair, foreboding, helplessness.

Hermione let herself finally absorb the headlines she had seen and the words she had heard. Percy Weasley was dead. Kingsley Shacklebolt had been captured. She had not even known they were alive, but the paper had said Shacklebolt was the last standing member of the Order. That was probably true, she had seen almost everyone else in the Order die in the battle on that fateful day at Hogwarts. Everyone is either captured or dead.

"It's over," she whispered to herself. The reality of it was as assuring as it was suffocating. There was nothing left to fight for.

She let her thoughts drift to the other pieces of news she had gleaned from Draco's humiliating visit. Poor Penelope. Hermione had hardly known the Ravenclaw, but she had known that Percy loved her. If things had turned out differently, she might have been her sister-in-law. She could only imagine the horrors Penelope would endure at the hands of the adolescent boys of her former school. It was barbaric.

There is no hope, Hermione. This time there was no voice of reason to contradict her finalistic thoughts. Draco will continue to abuse you; Lucius will do nothing to stop it. You'll be nothing more than a sex object and a punching bag until the end of your days. You might very likely end up at Hogwarts, meeting the same end as Penelope. You have no control over your destiny. Tears trickled down her face without her notice as she resigned herself to her fate.

Then a new voice interjected and made itself heard. You do have a choice, Hermione. All you need to do is make the decision. Then this can all come to an end. You can be free.

In that moment, a feeling of clarity came over her. A wave of relief welcomed her like warm socks that had been sitting in front of the fire on a cold winter's morning. It was a deep-seated feeling of peace and power. She could finally take control. Her decision was instantaneous, there was no need to think it through.

"I can end this right now," she whispered as she peered over the balcony in front of her. The tranquility of it crept over her like the ivy on the bricks of her childhood home. It was so inviting, so luring. She could take away the control they so brutally held over her. She could take away the ability of anyone to ever hurt her or cause her pain again. She could see her friends.

The bannister railing was wet and cold, but she didn't care. She held tight as she lifted one leg and then the other over it. She stood for a moment with her hands behind her, grasping the slippery iron as she leaned forward slightly, her arms stretching out behind her. Her heels were firmly on the
balcony, but her toes were not. She looked out in front of her before sliding her eyes closed. A small smile curled her lips as she imagined the beaming faces of Harry and Ron. Her best friends were waiting for her.

She saw Fred and George laughing, their freckled complexions lit with joy. She could smell Molly's roast clearly as her mind's eye watched Arthur carve it. She looked around to see the Weasley's and Harry gathered at the table on Christmas Day. She could picture Sirius, Tonks, Remus, and Teddy arriving at the Burrow with gifts as Dumbledore strode up the path behind them. Luna was smiling and beckoning her forward, making it easy for her to let go.

She felt the breeze brush her skin as she released the railing and plunged to the ground beneath her. An odd sense of joy grasped her for just a moment. Within a flash of letting go, however, her motion stopped. She felt herself being slowly levitated back up and onto the balcony.

She felt the breeze brush her skin as she released the railing and plunged to the ground beneath her. An odd sense of joy grasped her for just a moment. Within a flash of letting go, however, her motion stopped. She felt herself being slowly levitated back up and onto the balcony.

What?! Anger, despair, and unrecognized relief flooded through her as she saw the small elf watching her with large bulbous eyes.

"No, good witch! No!" Tinny scolded from a few feet away.

Hermione looked away, unable to bear the devastation in her small friend's eyes. Her knees suddenly felt like Jell-O and the gravity of what she had almost done caused her stomach to roil and she began to tremble so fiercely her teeth started to chatter. Her legs gave out and she crumbled to the wet balcony floor. She didn't hear the crack of Tinny Disapparating. Hermione wanted to scream and rage, yet all that escaped her were wracking sobs. She had just wanted to die. Was that too much to ask? She just wanted it to be over!

No, Hermione. Stop this behavior! A small voice of reason, that sounded suspiciously like Harry, echoed in the recesses of her thoughts. "Please, just let me die. Just let me die," she choked out, her voice muffled by the rain.

It had started to downpour and, while she knew she was getting drenched, she didn't have the desire or the will to move. Her tears were so abundant, she could see nothing but blurs of shapes and colors in front of her. She drew her knees up into the fetal position, coiling herself into a small ball.

Seconds later – or perhaps it was minutes, or even hours – a pair of familiar, strong arms effortlessly lifted her. Warm. So warm. She didn't realize how cold she was until she found herself cradled and pressed against a muscular wall of heat. Her teeth were still chattering, and her vision continued to be obscured by tears, but she felt herself being carried back into her suite. His voice was soothing, and she cried even harder when the uttered words were kind. "Shhh, it's going to be all right, Hermione. I've got you."
Chapter Eleven

Chapter by Snowblind12

Disclaimer: we own none of this and make no money from it. This universe and its characters belong to JK Rowling and her publishers.

Thanks, as always, to LissaDream, my co-writer and soul sister half way across the country :) We are diligently working on the next few chapters of Master Mine, so be on the look out for an update, hopefully by week’s end!

Thanks to all who comment!

Things become a little easier for Hermione in this chapter. Hope you enjoy it!

"Master Malfoy, sir! Young miss…she jumped, sir! Tinny stopped her before she hit the ground!" the little elf cried frantically.

"What?" Lucius muttered, confused and slightly irritated by the elf's intrusion. "What are you – "

"No time Master Lucius, sir. Please, comes with Tinny." Lucius stared at the elf's hand in shock as it grabbed his own and Apparated him before giving him a chance to respond. His equilibrium slightly shaken, he re-grounded himself instantly upon landing and watched the panicked elf dash out onto the balcony. Understanding washed over him like a bucket of ice cold water.

In ten quick strides, he could see her. He felt his chest constrict when his eyes fell on her shivering, sopping wet form. Her hair was plastered to her face and shoulders as rain hammered all around her. Her drenched, silk gown clung to her tiny frame. Her body was coiled into itself as she lay on the cold concrete and tile of the balcony. He stood frozen, several emotions striking him at once. The most prevalent being sheer relief that she wasn't dead on the cold, hard ground two stories below. Her words came out muffled and barely coherent. "Please, just let me die. Just let me die." It felt like all the blood in his body pooled to his feet. Fuck!

Within a second, he swooped down and scooped her into his arms. "Shhh. It's going to be all right, Hermione. I've got you." She was so light, despite being dripping wet. He held her close, quickly moving out of the rain and into her suite.

Her voice shuddered its response and his ears strained to hear the words she muttered. Her hands were clutched on his shirt, her face buried into his chest. "No, no…it's not going to be ok. Please, just let me be…please."

He pulled her tighter, his own clothes now wet, but his blood was boiling too hot for him to notice. He looked at the house elf who was watching with wide, heartbroken eyes. "Tinny, a cashmere robe now!" Lucius looked down at the pale and broken doe in his arms. She was such an innocent and for the first time he felt true, crushing guilt and self-hatred for the situation and his part in it. This is your fault! You did this! You and your cursed son! He internally shook his head in dismay, not understanding these emotions. She was just a Muggle-born girl!

Noticing Tinny had started a fire, he carried her to the sofa and lay her down. "How about we get you out of this dress?" he asked softly.
"No!" Hermione flinched, her voice desperate. "Please, Lucius. No more. Don't touch me…please."

He watched her in dismay for a second. She called me Lucius again. She thinks I'm going to rape her. She doesn't trust me. Why does this bother me so much? As though he were speaking to a wounded animal he was trying to capture, he said gently, "We need to get you into dry clothes, Princess. I'm not going to touch you any more than to simply help you." He grabbed the robe Tinny held out for him. "See? It's just a robe."

Hermione nodded and pulled herself up, her breaths coming in hiccupping gasps as her fingers shook to unzip the dress. Lucius raked his hand through his hair as he stood back, feeling helpless. "Tinny, help her."

The elf was on Hermione in a blink, magicking the zipper and fastenings open instantly. Hermione peeled the dress down her shivering body. Another muttering from the elf and the girl was completely dry. Lucius stepped forward and draped the robe around her naked form, and Hermione quickly slid her arms through the long sleeves, enveloping herself in the soft warmth. She then pulled her knees up close to her chest, burying her head in them as she wrapped her arms around her legs.

Not knowing what to say, but knowing he should say something, he glanced around the suite. He was stunned and relieved to find there were no unwanted visitors in the portraits or landscapes. Hesitantly, he sat down beside her. "Hermione, I realize how hard this – "

Her words were sharp and impatient, her eyes piercing with their intensity. "No. You don't have a bloody clue. You can't possibly know what it's like to find out everyone you've ever loved or cared for is dead. To have absolutely no free will. To be raped over and over again. To be verbally and emotionally traumatized and physically brutalized…for…for something you have no control over!"

Her looked morphed from despair to disgust.

"You sit here in your…your castle…with your demonic son, living your life as you choose, with the exception of having this…Mudblood filth thrown into your care. How horrible it must be for you!"

Lucius wanted to rage at her, to tell her how wrong she was. To explain how his life was not his own. To defend his son, even though he knew there was no excuse. He watched as she buried her face into her knees again, sniffling and trying to subtlety wipe away her tears.

"Hermione, listen to me." He flinched when her eyes shot up to his with loathing, realizing that once again he had taken her free will. "What I mean is, please…Please, listen to me." He paused a moment, choosing his words carefully. "Despite what you think of me, and despite what I've done in the past, I take no pleasure in this situation."

Hermione's eyebrow shot up. Clearly, she didn't believe him.

He conceded the point. "Ok, let me re-phrase. Yes. I'm a man. I…enjoy our…well, yes, I enjoy…the sex with you. I won't lie to you."

He expected her to yell and to call him a rapist, but instead he was surprised by the contemplative look on her face. He continued, "What I don't like is this bond. I don't like being forced to force you. I don't like seeing you hurt – physically or otherwise." He spoke quietly in a whisper while shooting his eyes around the suite once again to confirm they were still sans portrait visitors. He looked back at her, his words earnest.

"I don't want violence in my life or in my home. I'm tired of it. I want peace. I don't condone my son's behavior, Hermione. I don't approve of it, but he…he has his own demons to face and – "
Once again, she interrupted him. Once again, he let her. "I don't want to hear anything you have to say about that twisted sadist you call a son, Mr. Malfoy. He may be your child, but he's my personal hell."

Lucius sighed and then said quietly, "You called me Lucius a moment ago. You may continue to do so, at least when we are alone." He watched as her gaze softened a touch as it locked with his. She seemed to be searching for something.

Suddenly, her eyes widened, and she stood up abruptly. Her words were furious as she stepped backwards and away from him, shaking her head. "No, no! I won't fall for your tricks again. I won't be led into the delusion that you are kind or that you care."

His jaw fell open in stunned silence from her outburst as she turned away from him and stomped to her bed. He was distracted slightly. Her stomp was so childlike that it reminded him how young she was. Far too young to be dealing the cards she had been dealt. He watched as she climbed onto the bed before once again curling into a ball. He heard her let out a shaky sigh, and then desperate words poured out of her, muffled from her face being buried in her pillow. "Stop pretending that you care, I can't...I just can't..."

He stood up and glanced around the suite, finding it was still safe to continue their talk. He sighed as he approached her, trying to swallow against the knot in his throat. "The truth is, Hermione, I do care. I...I can't explain it. I shouldn't care, but I can't seem to stop it. You are...a Mud...a Muggle-born, which is something I was raised to despise. I was preached to about your inferiority and the use of stolen magic. I was taught you are an abomination to all that is magically natural."

He didn't know what he expected. However...

He didn't expect her to roll over, face him, and meet his eyes with her own expressive orbs.

He didn't expect the defiant look to cross her delicate features that had been broken only moments before.

He didn't expect her to right herself and slide off the bed and step towards him, shrewdly meeting his stare with a furious glare.

He didn't expect her words to be spoken with such conviction. "I am not an abomination. I am not inferior, and I did not steal my magic."

He didn't expect her to be standing so close, staring up at him, not intimidated, and with fire in her eyes.

He didn't expect the meek doe of ten minutes ago to become a fiery wood nymph before his very eyes. "I am a powerful witch, Lucius Malfoy. Even you can't deny that! But I'm also a good person. I'm trustworthy and hardworking and so much more deserving of a better life than the shit storm I'm enduring right now. I shouldn't have to be standing here defending myself to an ill-informed bigot like you!"

He didn't expect to look down and discover her finger had been tapping his chest with every word she spoke.

He didn't expect to sense the exquisite magic that seemed to spark from her as her temper escalated.

He didn't expect to once again be completely captivated by her passion and conviction.

He didn't expect to be drawn to her...
…and he certainly…

…didn't expect to kiss her.

It was like a light switch was flipped with his ignorant, prejudicial words. Hermione was enraged. *How dare he?! How dare he call me an abomination*?! Gone was her despair and desperation. How thick could he be? As she slid out of bed and stalked towards him, her fury only intensified. How many purebloods could perform wandless magic? He certainly couldn't. Yet *she* could! Angry words started to pour out of her as she crossed to him.

Her voice was deliberate and crisp, all weakness and vulnerability gone. "I am a powerful witch, Lucius Malfoy. Even *you* can't deny that! But I'm also a good person. I'm trustworthy and hardworking and so much more deserving of a better life than the shit storm I'm enduring right now. I shouldn't have to be standing here defending myself to an ill-informed bigot like you!"

Her right hand's forefinger froze on his chest as she stared into his steel grey Malfoy eyes. She felt a slight flutter in her heart as those eyes darkened to a stormy grey. She knew it was coming…a scathing remark, a cruel command…

She didn't expect him to kiss her.

She didn't expect his lips to feel soft and warm.

She didn't expect her heart to race

She didn't expect to close her eyes.

She didn't expect him to freeze and pull back suddenly.

She didn't expect his hand to shoot to his mouth as though he were burned.

She didn't expect him to turn away and stride out of her room abruptly.

She *did* expect to feel disappointed. After all, disappointment was her only constant and dependable companion.

Lucius stormed into his bath, ripping his clothes off as he turned on the shower with a flick of his wand, making it extra hot. He needed to scald himself. "What the bloody hell was that?" he mumbled to himself.

He stepped into the hot spray of water, his heart still racing. Closing his eyes, he took calming breaths as he smoothed the water over his long, platinum locks.

*Merlin, what is wrong with me?* He vigorously scrubbed his face and body, as though the harder he scrubbed, the more of her and what she was doing to him would go down the drain.

Despite his efforts, he couldn't get her out of his mind. He slumped and leaned his forehead against the shower wall. *Suicide! Jumping to her death!* He had not really thought her capable of such a thing. *The healer warned you!* Guilt once again overwhelmed him as well as dread. Imagine if she had succeeded? He feared the Dark Lord's reaction. Did his Master know about her wandless magic? There was not much the Dark Lord didn't know, especially with Abraxas' portrait at his beck and call.
Standing tall again, he shut off the water and stepped out of the shower. As he towel-dried his body and hair, he realized there was a command he needed to make. It was an egregious oversight that he had not done so already. That kiss had completely wiped away his senses. He could not let that happen again.

As he pulled on his robe and walked into his dressing room, he scolded himself for speaking to her so openly in her suite. He had looked for visitors, yes, but it was still dangerous. If he felt the need to converse with her in the future, he would need to find a safe place – away from the prying eyes of his dead, traitorous father and the other various portraits who seemed to find amusement in his misery.

After dressing quickly, he magicked his hair dry and pulled it back into a black string tie. Not bothering to knock, he whispered the password and entered her suite. Looking around he didn’t see her and a sense of panic began to wash over him. The panic meter topped when he found her back on her balcony.

"Miss Granger, what are you doing?" he barked, sounding angrier than he truly meant to.

She jumped, clearly startled as she turned back towards him. She was holding a mug of tea and her expression was not one of despair. She seemed calm, perhaps even confident.

He stepped towards her, formally. "I regret I have another command that I have no choice but to make. You are not allowed to intentionally harm yourself, or end your own life."

Her posture stiffened slightly, matching his formality, and her chin rose in defiance. "No, of course not. I wouldn't want to deprive you or your son of that pleasure."

He was struck with a vision of the Dark Lord commanding him to kill her. He felt bile rise into his throat. He coughed lightly. "I believe our earlier conversation encompassed my feelings on that matter, Miss Granger. There is no need to revisit the topic." He could see a flash of movement in one of the paintings in the corner of her suite, near the table and chairs. "Dinner is at seven o'clock. I feel like keeping it informal. You will join me in my chambers at that time."

Hermione watched the retreating form of the enigma that was Lucius Malfoy. She looked back out over the grounds. The rain had passed and the sun was peeking through. The combination of retreating dark, grey clouds and approaching white, fluffy ones seemed symbolic.

Tinny had dried the furniture and surfaces of the balcony when Hermione had ventured back out here. The elf had also not left her side. Hermione glanced at her small keeper and gave her a gentle smile. Tinny's eyes remained large and wary, but Hermione didn't miss the slight nod of understanding the elf gave her in return.

Hermione turned her gaze back to the expansive estate before her. She had forced herself to step out here and face what she had done. She knew if she didn't, she might not ever be able to come out here again.

She looked down at the ground below her, morbid thoughts causing her to imagine her own disfigured and crumbled body. She couldn’t help but wonder if Lucius would have really cared. Something told her, and she hated herself for trusting that voice, that he would.

Seven o'clock was approaching fast. After a long nap, Tinny had her cleaned, shaved, buffed, and dressed in a simple, but pretty, lavender gown. Lucius had said it was an informal dinner, and while it was a dress, it wasn't a dress that would be appropriate for dinner in the formal dining room.
Hermione was stunned with the self-realization that she had learned something so worthless and trivial.

She rolled her eyes and sighed heavily as she caught her reflection in the mirror. Tinny had charmed her hair into soft waves and had pulled the front strands out of her face with a simple clip. Leaving it mostly long and draping over her shoulders and back.

She threw a quick glance at the clock as her heart began to pound from the ridiculous bond. Approaching the connecting door, Hermione drew in a deep, calming breath and pushed it open.

As she walked into his chambers, her jaw fell slightly in shock. Lucius was standing next to the small dining table dressed in a pair of faded Levi's and a t-shirt – a Rolling Stones 1976 European Tour t-shirt. It was also faded and slightly tight, but not in a bad way. On the contrary...

She nonchalantly moved her eyes down his form, and back up again, forcing herself to steel her features from betraying her inner dialogue.

Lucius Malfoy is hot!

She vaguely remembered thinking he had a nice body before, but, given their circumstances, it was hardly anything she had focused on.

What is the matter with you, Hermione? One little kiss and you're gawping like a love-struck teenager. Enough, already.

She was so distracted, she didn't see his slipper sticking out from beside the chair she was passing. Her foot landed on it awkwardly and she felt herself stumble forward, right into Lucius' strong arms, which caught her and righted her effortlessly.

Her eyes shot up to his and she felt an unwelcome blush creep over her face. His expression was flat, but then his forehead wrinkled in what appeared to be consideration. Great! Caught...blushing at one of the biggest pureblood bigots in the galaxy, not to mention your keeper and rapist. How daft are you?

"Are you all right?" he asked politely.

"Yes," she responded resolutely. "Thanks."

He let go of her arm and pulled the chair out for her. "Thank you," she said formally as he continued to assess her.

He stepped to his own seat and sat down. Neither spoke as Bilby arrived in Apparition, magicking two covered dinner trays before them. A snap of the elf's fingers and the lids disappeared revealing Spaghetti Bolognese. Fresh, warm, buttered French bread and a bottle of red wine were also on the table. Hermione was surprised when Lucius picked up the bottle and poured, first her glass and then his own.

He noticed her amazed look and tilted his head. "I told Bilby we would be fine on our own this evening. Even I get bored of the formality of fine dining sometimes."

They began to eat in silence, an awkwardness still present. Truthfully, Hermione couldn't remember ever not feeling slightly awkward around Lucius Malfoy – except perhaps breakfast the day before. This was different though, there was something between them now. He had kissed her – chastely, yes – but something had driven him to do it. Now, she found herself believing he really did care about her well-being. This left her feeling unsure of how to act.

Unable to bear the silence any longer, she looked at him curiously. "Rolling Stones?" She cocked her eyebrow playfully. "Don't tell me they're actually wizards."

He nodded with a small grin as he swallowed and wiped his mouth. "Uhh, no. Severus was a fan
when we were younger. He dragged me to a few shows."

"Hmm, I can't picture it. You and...him...at a Muggle rock concert?" She tried not to let out a giggle, but failed.

He pretended to be offended, but couldn't help but return her humor. "It was...an experience."

Hermione sipped her wine. "Yeah, but it was a **Muggle** concert! You like Muggle music?"

Lucius contemplated her question before answering. "I don't hate all things Muggle, Hermione. Certainly, there are Muggle things I enjoy. Muggle food and wines, for instance." He tilted his head. "And yes, some Muggle music is quite good, as well."

"But you – "

"Let me finish. What I have a problem with is the Muggle world encroaching on the wizarding world. Muggle-borns, they don't belong." He silenced the comment on the tip of her tongue her with a look. "I realize that you do not agree. How could you? And, I'll concede that you are an exception. I find it less offensive that you are a Muggle-born. You are...a deviation from the rule."

Hermione tried to stay her anger. It would do no good and she didn't want to fight with him. "We're all just human beings, you know. Magic or not, we are each of us entitled to live our lives," she half whispered diplomatically as she twirled her next fork of pasta in her spoon.

It was silent for a moment of contemplation before he answered her. "Let's discuss something else, shall we?" His words were more of a command than a request, but strangely, she found she didn't mind. At least he wasn't taking away her free will this time.

The silence was awkward, and Hermione wracked her brain for a conversation topic. Magic was what they had in common and if they couldn't discuss it.... **Hogwarts! They could discuss Hogwarts.** Sadly, that made her think of her dead friends and poor Penelope Clearwater, though. Perhaps the awkward silence would be better.

Hermione had eaten less than half of what was on her plate, but found she was quite full. Lucius refilled her wine glass after she swallowed the last drop, so she sipped at it as she watched him finish his meal.

When his plate was almost empty, he tossed his napkin on the table and leaned back in his chair. His eyes were on hers, it seemed he was contemplating something. Then he chanced a glance around the room, noticing Abraxas dozing in his portrait. He leaned forward. "I would like to show you something, would you be agreeable to coming with me?"

It was said in a quiet whisper that left Hermione a bit confused and she was astonished he was asking such a thing instead of simply demanding her compliance.

She nodded. "Uh, yes. Sure."

He pushed back from the table and then assisted her out of her chair. He smirked, and said teasingly, "Mind the slipper."

"Yes, thank you for that," she replied sarcastically. She was disturbed when her feet stepped to the side without her doing it. **Damn bond!**

Lucius had taken a few steps and turned back, giving her a curious look. "You told me to mind the slipper, so my feet went that way instead of following you." She gestured to where she had stepped.
Her eyes cocked up and she was about to say something derogatory when he interrupted her. "I do not require explanations for such tedious things, Miss Granger."

Hermione felt slightly stung by his comment. Had they not just enjoyed a somewhat civil dinner? He grabbed her hand and Apparated them away without warning.

She was jolted on landing and might have fallen if not for him holding her upright. "I hate side along Apparation," she mumbled.

"Well, it would have been quite a distance to walk, and given your propensity to clumsiness, it seemed – "

She pulled her hand away, interjecting before he could finish his sentence. "I am not clumsy! Jeez, I trip once and..." She didn't notice the teasing smirk on his face. Instead, her attention was on her surroundings. *The barn!* It was unlike any barn she had ever seen. It was huge and clean, and didn't smell of manure.

She jumped back as a large, white dog came bounding over and half jumped on Lucius. "Jupiter! Down boy, down!" Lucius spoke firmly and held his palm out in a stop gesture. The dog whimpered and sat, his tail going at least two hundred wags per minute. "That's my good boy," he spoke to the animal softly and stroked his head tenderly. Hermione's eyes moved from the dog to Lucius' expression. She was amazed to see the smile and look of total adoration on the man's face. The dog licked Lucius' hand and then seemed to calm, keeping his eyes on Lucius faithfully.

Lucius took a deep breath, as he looked around the huge space. "I love it out here. The smell of the leather, the tranquility of it. The animals."

Who is this man? Hermione felt more confused than ever as she took in his relaxed, pleased expression. His eyes turned to her and couldn't miss the look of surprise on her face. "What?" he asked.

"Nothing, it's just...you shocked me is all."

He watched her for a moment, contemplating. "I brought you out here because I need to speak with you...away from prying ears and eyes."

"What do you mean? We were alone in your suite...weren't we?"

He regarded her for a moment. "Hermione, I don't like what is going on under my roof. Unfortunately, if I say anything or intervene in any way, it is reported to the Dark Lord."

"I don't understand," she said quietly, her brow furrowed in frightened confusion.

"It's the portraits. They...that is...some of them -- some of them do not approve of you and are quick to report your doings, as well as mine and Draco's actions to the Dark Lord." He paused and watched her eyes grow large with understanding.

"We have been watched since the first night, and because of it, I have not been able to always be as...forthright as I would have preferred. Being watched requires me to act a certain way, and it prevents me from...well -- brunch today, for instance. What Draco did was..." He closed his eyes, obviously struggling to find the right words. "It was deplorable in my eyes, but Abraxas -- my dear father -- was watching. Then there's Draco. Draco is...Draco feels he has something to prove to the Dark Lord. I fear it makes him take things too far. He is grieving...and he -- "

Hermione interrupted him in a scathing tone. "Yes. You were concerned about him breaking the
crystal, if memory serves."

Lucius shook his head. "You prove my point, Hermione," he gave her a sad smile. "That was me acting the part. I was trying to dissuade his behavior, but not for fear of the crystal."

"Oh," she whispered, thinking back on Lucius' behavior. She recalled that he excused her right after the incident. Perhaps that had been meant as an act of kindness, not indifference.

Hermione had noticed the portraits, certainly, but she had never given much thought to them. She felt foolish for missing something so incredibly obvious. Phineas Nigellus Black had proven how useful portraits could be when she, Harry, and Ron were on the run. It was how Snape had located them in the forest. The memory of her friends caused her heart to clench, but the thought of Severus gave her pause.

Not wanting to play her hand by asking her most pressing questions outright, she beat around the bush, so to speak. "So...is there anything in particular you wish to clarify? Now that we're alone?"

He nodded. "In the future, if I send you to the stables for a task, it will be because I wish to speak openly with you about something."

"Ok," she said quietly, disappointed he had not shared something that would have given her hope. Something like, "I'm really working for the Order with Snape and you will be freed by dawn." She let out a mirthless soft laugh. She tried to hide her displeasure and attempted to find solace in the fact he was being kind to her and had the desire to be direct with her.

She looked up at him earnestly. Her voice came out barely above a whisper, "Lucius, am I going to be killed?" She had not planned to ask that question and was surprised the words had slipped from her mouth. She felt incredibly vulnerable in the wake of his kindness. "I'm...I'm scared." Her hands were grasping her dress, her eyes were wide and sincere as she looked up at him, silently pleading for him to tell her it would all be ok.

Hermione could swear she saw pain in his eyes. He answered honestly, but kindly. "Truthfully, Hermione, I don't know. But I will do my best to protect you. I do not wish you harm, I do not wish you dead." After a beat, he continued. "I also promise to give you a chance to explain if I ever find myself...angry with you again." He ran his hands through his hair. "I made a terrible mistake in the dungeon yesterday. I...I was impulsive and unfair."

She studied him closely, and could see what looked like genuine anguish. She took comfort in his words. "I believe you. Lucius. For some reason. I believe you."

He hesitated for a moment, but then added, "In the future, if you do something that would require me to punish you, I will send you to the dungeons where we cannot be observed. We will discuss what happened. I beg you not to do anything to force my hand."

She nodded slowly, understanding what he was saying.

They stared at each other for a moment before he inhaled and looked around. "We need to get back. We'll come back here again, soon. I'm sure you have more questions, but it's getting late and I'm tired."

He took her hand as though to Disapparate, but paused. He looked at her sternly. "You will sleep in my room from now on, Hermione. If circumstances change, we will discuss you sleeping in your own quarters again."

Hermione's jaw fell, and her heart started to race in anticipation of what that really meant. Lucius
shook his head in dismay, clarifying, "For the simple reason I feel the need to watch over you. Draco…I don't know when he'll show up, but I want to be able to run interference if I can. You have also given me many reasons to doubt your safety from yourself."

Hermione couldn't sleep. She wasn't exactly sure she'd ever be able to sleep again after what she had been through the last couple of days. It was all quite overwhelming.

Lucius had surprised her when he had told her that she would be sharing his bed, especially when he told her it would be a permanent change. He astounded her even more when he threw a couple pillows between them before indicating for her to take the left side of the bed. This had made it clear he was keeping his word – he would not be forcing his attentions on her this evening. She wondered how long that would last.

While sex with Lucius was far less torture then sex with Draco, she was too emotionally fragile to deal with the internal turmoil the act caused after the day she'd had. He seemed to sense this, and for that she was grateful.

He had also stunned her by asking if the books in her room were to her liking. When she said she wasn't into such frivolousness, he had chuckled and told her she could help herself to the library, implying he'd show her where it was the next day.

She rolled over to study her bedmate. She wondered if Lucius knew how young and unguarded he looked while he was sleeping. What he had done for her today had changed things immensely. This nightmare life she had been living had the tinge of a promise to be better. She now knew Lucius could not stop Draco from doing what he did to her. She now understood that the portraits were watching the Malfoy men – and probably herself, as well – at all times.

Lucius had implied that he would do his best to be kind to her, he had promised to do his best to keep her safe, but he had also made it clear he would have to seem indifferent and be harsh if they were being watched. He had told her he regretted torturing her, but he made her understand that he would still have to make a show of it by sending her to the dungeons where no portraits could sneak and watch.

She – Hermione Granger, Mudblood – had received all those words from him – Lucius Malfoy, Pureblood King. Sighing, she rolled onto her back again, pressing a hand to her fluttering stomach. She didn't understand what was happening, but she found herself having a reluctant affection for the man. Why? She couldn't begin to guess. He had raped her, tortured her, ignored her – but now it seemed he was determined to save her. Dare she let him?

Next to her, Lucius flipped restlessly in his sleep and she stopped breathing until he settled again. She was too restive. In her emotional upheaval, she had napped most of the afternoon away. This led her to the conclusion she had simply slept too much to be tired now. She had to get out of bed or she'd wake him for sure.

Hermione tiptoed to the loo and slowly went through the process or relieving herself and then washed her hands, trying to pass time. She paused just before opening the door, noticing a soft dressing gown that hung on the backside of it. Hesitating only momentarily, she pulled it on. She had to roll the sleeves three times to use her hands and it fell to well past her knees, but the material was warm and luxurious.

Hermione heaved another great sigh before leaving the bathroom. Gently, she closed the door and then pressed herself back against it, allowing her eyes to adjust from the low light of the moon that had flooded the bathroom to the almost complete darkness of the bedroom suite. Once she could at
least make out shapes, so she didn't fall over anything, she made her way to the door. It was pure curiosity that made her check, even though she highly doubted she could exit the room of her own volition. She froze in place, holding her breath, when the gentle click of the catch releasing the frame rang through the silent room. Her heart thudded heavily in her chest as she listened for any sign that Lucius had woken.

After a solid minute, she slipped out of the room into the hall. Only every third sconce was lit at night, giving off more shadow than light and making Hermione feel nervous. Yes, Lucius had told her he could help herself to the library. However, he hadn't said the middle of the night would be the time to do it. She wrapped her arms around herself.

She wandered the manor, doing her best to keep track of where she was so she could find her way back to Lucius' suite on her own. Although, if she got hopelessly lost, she was sure she could call for Tinny to help her. She peeked in rooms that were open and pulled open doors that were closed, but nothing was really catching her attention. There was apparently no library to be found on this floor. She had decided to stay on the same floor to minimize her chances of getting turned around, but after a time of wandering and finding only bedrooms and studies and bathrooms, she changed her mind.

Hermione descended to the first floor using the grand staircase that deposited her in the foyer. The stone under her feet was cold and she looked at the front doors of the manor home with longing in her heart. Could she open them? Could she run? She knew she wouldn't even if the doors would open for her. She'd never get away. Malfoy Manor most likely had extensive wards and she would be caught before she had even started across the grounds. The punishment would most likely be out of Lucius' hands – being he would most likely be punished for her attempt to escape, as well.

She moved her gaze to the first door to the right of the main entrance. Upon inspection, it was a large coat closet with benches to sit and remove shoes. She didn't bother to go in and explore, instead moving to the next door. Magically, a low light bloomed in the room upon its disturbance and Hermione's heart leapt into her throat before it started pounding with excitement.

It appeared to be a parlor of some sort. She did not miss the dozens of portraits that hung on the walls. She looked around warily for a moment, only noticing a slight shadow passing between the frames. This gave her pause, but she wasn't doing anything wrong, so decided she couldn't be bothered by them – even when they started whispering to each other. She couldn't be bothered, because in the middle of the room stood one of the most beautiful grand pianos she had ever seen in her life.

It was closed, and the low light prevented her from seeing the intricate details of the instrument, but it didn't stop her from feeling for them under her fingertips. Lightly, she dragged her hands over the glossy piano, feeling subtle inlays in the wood. Instinctively she reached to carefully flip the top board before grasping the corner of the lid in both hands and hefting it open. She felt around inside the instrument to locate the top board prop, she chose the short one and fitted it deftly into the cup. Once she was satisfied the lid was propped properly, she moved back to the front of the instrument.

The piano bench was heavy and quilted on top and made a rumbling sound that startled some of the portraits when she slid it out. "Hey, Mudblood girl, you shouldn't be playing around with something so expensive!" It was a female voice. Hermione decided to ignore the comment. They were only portraits. People dead and gone. They were just words, she wouldn't let the words hurt her. Best to ignore them all, she really was doing nothing wrong. There was nothing to report back to Voldemort. She sat herself on the bench and tapped the pedals underneath, muttering their names as she went. Soft and sustaining. The instrument was old enough there was no sostenuto pedal. She pressed the soft pedal down and decided she would leave it down. She was very far away from the master suite, and she could probably play at full forte with the long board prop up, but she felt it better to be safe.
than sorry. Lucius had told her she could use the library, not the piano.

She slid the fall board out of the way and her fingers smoothed across the glistening keys, they felt silky. How long had it been since she had done this? Over a year – she had definitely not played the piano while on the run. The Weasley’s didn’t own a piano, and she had spent the majority of the summer with them before she and boys started their mission. Before that she had been organizing her parents’ new lives and packing. It had to have been while she was still in school for sixth year. In the little music room near Professor Flitwick’s office. On that crappy little upright Bentley. Her lips quirked in a fond smile. It had been perfectly out of tune and the one F sharp key hadn’t worked properly.

Locating middle C, she started to play some soft chords and almost groaned with the pleasure of it. The tone reverberated around the room and bounced back to tickle her ears with stunning beauty. She wished she could make out the logo to know who it had been made by. Perhaps she could come here during the day and really get a good look at it. The portrait had been right – it was obviously an expensive piano.

She moved from gentle chords to scales, warming up rusty fingers. She had played the piano since she could remember. Her younger years had been crammed with lessons and recitals – her mother her biggest fan. She was quite good. Not concert pianist worthy, by any means. However, if she had been as interested in the piano as she had been her studies, she could have been a professional.

As it were, she played the piano for her own enjoyment. She had taken lessons until her piano instructor had insisted she couldn’t teach her anymore – that if she wanted to continue, to sign up for lessons through the University. Jean Granger had encouraged her daughter to do so, but then she received her Hogwarts letter.

Through the years she had maintained at least a weekly practice session. Often slipping away on her own to play for an hour or two. She took more time in the summers, especially when she was home with her parents. It was a talent that had fallen to the wayside, but the muscle memory was ingrained in her psyche. She paused in her chords to see if her memory could pull up a piece of music, beginning to end, to really give herself a work out. She gave a little melancholy smile when she realized she probably wouldn’t be able to remember anything until she started to play. So, she picked a chord and started automatically.

A few moments later, she registered that she was playing Air on the G String by Bach. Pretty, simple, and hauntingly lovely. Her left hand effortlessly moved through the walking bass and she allowed herself to get lost in the piece. So much so, that the faint smattering of applause when she finished made her give an undignified yelp of surprise.

One voice broke above all the others, snootily commenting. "A few errors here and there, but overall not too terrible. It’s been many years since someone has been able to properly play that thing. Would you consent to another piece?"

"I – I suppose I could," Hermione muttered ungraciously. Damned if she just wished she could be alone.

"Wonderful! How about some Beethoven?" Hermione wished she could see the portraits. What she wouldn’t give for a wand to light this room to its full potential.

"Any particular piece?" she asked the room at large.

"Für Elise," a different voice called out. "Do you think she can do it?" The same voice was no longer speaking directly to Hermione.
"I can do it," Hermione grumbled. *Snooty, hoity-toity portraits.* She almost growled her annoyance.

It was a bit of a faster piece than what she had been playing, but she was properly warmed up at this point. She began with the trill at a bit slower of a tempo then was called for, but quickly worked her way up to the poco moto that was dictated. She loved this piece of music, if she were honest. There was so much personal emotive translation that could be done throughout the piece. She lost herself.

"Lucius!" Narcissa hissed. "Lucius, wake up!"

"Wha-?" Lucius rolled, still half asleep, into a sitting position. "Cissa? What's wrong?"

"You must come see this," the portrait announced firmly. "Ladies Parlor."

"Wait…where's Herm – the Mudblood?"

Narcissa rolled her pretty painted eyes at him. "With me, Lucius, you can call her by her first name. Even Miss Granger would be fine. I don't think any of the other portraits would think anything of you calling her Miss Granger. Now, she's the reason I'm dragging you out of bed. Stay outside in the foyer, I think you'll be impressed."

Puzzled, but curious, Lucius went to retrieve his dressing gown only to find the bloody thing missing. He pulled a light robe out of his dressing room and headed directly for the grand staircase. He could hear the piano the moment he hit the top of the stairs and came to an abrupt halt.

He hadn't heard that piano played since before his mother passed away. It must have been going on almost twenty-five years. His heart constricted as she finished the current piece she had been playing. The ending notes of Für Elise drifted away and dissipated through the foyer. When she started the next piece, he slowly sunk to sit on the top step.

The haunting, melodious strains of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata caressed him gently as he closed his eyes. It wasn't perfect, she had hit a couple wrong notes that she professionally glossed over as if they didn't exist, but it was damn near. The emotion she was pouring into the music was getting him even more than the fact his mother's piano was being played well for the first time in decades.

Lucius wanted to see her play with a sudden ferociousness. Barely making a sound, he glided down the stairs and moved slowly to stand by the door. It was open just enough to make out her slender silhouette. He watched in utter fascination as her body swayed and moved with the music she was creating. Her head sometimes rolling back or to the side through tempos and crescendos and decrescendos. It was striking to behold, how she had lost herself in what she was doing.

It was hard to believe that the girl he watched playing with such intensity was the same girl who had tried to take her life this afternoon. He swallowed hard around a lump in his throat as he leaned against the wall to continue to watch her. The low flames of the one flickering candelabra threw shadows across her face, her eyes were closed and her mouth slightly ajar as she succumbed to the music. It was enchanting.

He decided then and there he would stay home from ME tomorrow and show her the entirety of the Manor. He would introduce her to this room properly and let her make it hers, if she desired. Lucius felt a tingling of hope. Perhaps between this room and the library she would find some happiness. Perhaps it would be enough to keep her sane and help her remember and realize there were still things worth living for – fighting for. Just like saving her was giving him something worthwhile to fight for.
Chapter Twelve

Chapter by LissaDream

Chapter Notes

Same disclaimer as always.

AN: A huge shout out to my co-writer LissaDream for her amazing talent. The beautiful descriptions of the Manor in this chapter are all her. I don’t even attempt this type of detail. There are links at the bottom of the chapter that will take you to the pictures that inspired her amazing talent.

LD and I are already working on the next chapter and will post as soon as it’s completed.

LissaDream has agreed to officially co-write the rest of The Affair with me which is really going to help move that story along. She has been basically writing it with me for quite a while now, so I wanted her to get the credit she deserves and have officially added her as co-author. We are going to work on getting one chapter posted and will then be getting back to Master Mine, which we know many of you are eager for the next update. We are eager to get back to that story as well!

Thanks for reading and reviewing!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 12

Lucius quickly crept back to bed when Hermione stopped playing the piano, leaving no indication he had been listening. A few minutes later, he pretended to be asleep when she quietly padded her way back to his chambers and climbed into the massive bed. He smiled to himself when she let out a small exhale of relief, believing her exploits had been undiscovered.

It didn’t take her long to drift off, but Lucius was left stirring. He simply couldn’t fall back to sleep. Not one for wasting time, he soundlessly slipped from the bed to his bedroom desk where he grabbed parchment and quill. He watched the sleeping girl as he penned a note explaining he would not be at Malfoy Enterprises that day. He placed the note in the outpost tray and within seconds it glowed and disappeared – on its way to the Mansion’s owlery.

He turned back to the slumbering beauty in his bed. It had been a long time since a companion had slept beside him for the entirety of a night. Narcissa preferred her own bed for sleeping and would silently and gracefully leave for her own chambers after he fell asleep. Even then, she only came to his bed for lovemaking, and that had substantially slowed over the years.

He slipped off his robe and climbed back into the bed, taking care not to wake the girl. Lucius knew sleep was a great healer. While her body was handily healed by the potions, creams, and balms, her
mind would only heal with rest and peace... and music and books.

Lucius rolled onto his back, thinking over the events of the day. He was curious where Draco had been sent by the Dark Lord. Draco was one who would typically brag about whatever task he had been entrusted with. It was odd he didn’t have the same puffed out chest and smirk of arrogance that was his typical display on these occasions. The fact he was keeping quiet had Lucius on edge. The boy was so desperate to prove his worth that Lucius didn’t necessarily trust his judgment. He worried Draco would act impulsively or without enough consideration for his person. All this to prove his worth to a master who, in all reality, held no value in anyone. Everyone was expendable to the Dark Lord.

Then there was the girl sleeping next to him. Lucius glanced at her; she was laying on her right side, facing him with her hands curled under her chin. Her face was so peaceful while she slept. Gone were the worry lines and the flickers of tension that normally peppered her expression. Even when she tried to be stoic and show no emotion, there were little tells that gave her away.

Hermione’s eyes betrayed her the most. They were exceptionally expressive. Today those orbs had been dulled, all hope had been gone. It had affected him more than he cared to admit to himself. He had witnessed such an array of emotion in those eyes over the course of her time in the Manor; from hope, to anger, to indignation, to despair and humiliation – he had even seen her humor. His favorite by far, however, had been her passionate, self-righteous fury – even though he told her he wouldn’t tolerate such outbursts. It was unfamiliar, yet somehow refreshing and invigorating to have this slip of a girl unleash her magnificent wrath on him. Even Narcissa had never dared such a thing. Knowing full well Lucius would not have allowed it, her ways of persuasion had been much more diplomatic. However, with Hermione, it had been captivating. It was what had driven him to kiss her... Circe, that kiss! The memory of the chaste taste of her soft, sweet mouth caused a stirring in him. His eyes moved to that inviting mouth, with its plump, pale-rose colored lips. He scolded himself for his reaction. You are a grown wizard! Stop reacting like a lust crazed adolescent!

He let out a puff of indignation as he turned abruptly to his right side, away from the sleeping temptress. The soft mewl that escaped her mouth at that moment may as well have been the French Belfry of Lille clanging away in the bed next to him. It jarred him and rattled the walls around his heart. The walls he had spent his life reinforcing.

In his entire adult life there had only been two people who’d had the power to crack that foundation; Draco and Narcissa. Draco from the moment he arrived, screaming and crying as he was forced to leave the safety and comfort of his mother’s womb. Narcissa, from the moment of her death. That was when Lucius realized the depths of his love for her – and it had been too late. Too late for him to do anything about and it had nearly destroyed him.

A small voice in his head whispered disturbing words. Disturbing words that terrified him and thrilled him at the same time. It’s not too late with this one. This could be only the beginning.

Hermione slowly opened her eyes as consciousness inched over her. The room was light, only it was not her room. Then she remembered. It was his bed, the biggest pureblood supremist of them all. Lucius Malfoy had commanded her to his bed...not for sex, but for sleep. So that he could watch over her and protect her from herself and his son. Lucius Malfoy had confided in her, made promises to her. Could it have been a dream?

As she continued to wake, she noticed the bed was empty next to her. She rolled over to face the massive suite and was surprised to find Lucius reading the paper on the leather wingback chair in front of his fireplace. She looked at the clock. Eight forty-five! She sat up quickly, why hadn’t he woken her for sex?
He studied her for a moment, smirking. “Were you cold last night?” he asked her in an offhanded manor. She was confused for a bit until she realized she had fallen back to sleep wrapped up in Lucius’ robe. Did he know she had wandered the manor last night?

“Y-yes,” she stammered. “I’m sorry.”

“No matter,” he turned his attention back to the paper. “Breakfast is on the table. When you’re through, Tinny will help you dress. After, I will take you on a tour of the manor.”

She stared at him in incomprehension. “Why are you not at work?” She was embarrassed when he looked at her appraisingly, his eyes wandering down her body. The robe was open, and her nightgown was not as modest as she would prefer.

“I felt it best I stay with you today, in light of yesterday’s events.” She flushed, pulling the robe more tightly around her. Begrudgingly, she accepted his reasoning.

Hermione ate the simple breakfast of fruit and oatmeal with more ravenousness than she had felt in weeks. “How am I expected to dress today?” she asked politely as she divested his robe to drape over the dining chair and sought out her own that was in the room somewhere – ah. There. She crossed to one of the chairs in front of the fireplace to pick up her soft robe, oblivious of the hungry eyes watching her every move.

“Casual is fine,” he answered, after clearing the thickness from his throat. It was obvious to him that she was completely unaware of her attractiveness. Why did that make her all the more appealing?

“I would love to find some jeans in my wardrobe,” she teased with a small smile. “Any chance you could tell your manor you’d like to see me in them?” She laughed at his surprised expression. She felt so buoyant and light this morning. Yesterday had changed…everything.

Lucius swallowed hard, not so sure wearing curve hugging Muggle jeans was the way he wanted her prancing around the manor. He’d never be able to keep his hands off her – he’d had a weakness for the way jeans made a female’s bum look, ever since that first Rolling Stones concert. “That’s fine, but you will not dress in them regularly. Only if you know there will be no company, or if I send you to the stables to work. I recommend you do not wear them when Draco is around. And certainly, never in the dining room, Miss Granger. Jeans in the dining room would likely spur my mother’s portrait into action. Merlin help us if Willow Malfoy were to snap out of her blessed ten-year silence!”

She nodded her agreement, chuckling as he spoke about his mother. His tone had been light, almost teasing. Had he been fond of his mother? Looking for clarification, she asked “Okay for today?”

“For this morning. You will change before lunch,” Lucius instructed.

“Deal,” she practically danced across the room to the entrance of the mistress suite.

Thirty minutes later, Lucius Malfoy was silently cursing himself as he watched the girl in skin tight Muggle jeans and a lovely cashmere sweater walk ahead of him in the manor while he talked about points of interest. He became even more grouchy when she started discussing the architecture with him, asking specific, intelligent questions. Her intellect just made her all the more attractive to him. Most of the women he had spent time with in his life were a pretty face or skilled in the bedroom. None were particularly good at conversation. Yet, here she was…a Muggle-born. Someone who was supposed to be a thief of magic and inferior in every way. Lucius did not find her inferior, however, not in her intellect, not in her appearance, and certainly not in her magic.
After explaining that the third and fourth floors were mostly bedroom suites and storage and that he wasn’t going to tour her through them, they moved through the uninteresting parts of the second floor. He showed her a study that he was willing to let her to use, if she’d like, but purposefully skipped taking her into the drawing room she had been tortured in – twice. Once by his sadistic sister-in-law, the second time by his cruel son.

He started the main floor tour in the back of the house, wanting the lady’s parlor and rose garden to be last on his agenda. She seemed enchanted by the ballrooms. There were two. The first was used for more intimate affairs and was decorated in creams with gold brocade. There were three large windows that were set with window seats, and a huge crystal and gold chandelier in the middle of the ceiling that sat high above the diamond square parquet-patterned bamboo floors.

The other ballroom was used for gatherings of hundreds, in fact it could easily seat five hundred guests as it had for his and Narcissa’s wedding. There were seven floor-to-ceiling windows made of leaded stained glass. The windows were set apart by golden square pillars with brocade at the top and large rectangular mirrors on each side. Rich, mahogany paneling circled the room to chair rail height and was stained dark brown. Seven-inch tall base board circled the floor of the entire room and was stained one shade darker than the paneling. There were two large sets of French doors that were encased in more gold and brocade and elaborate detailing. What was truly splendid about this room, however, was the ceiling. Large rectangular expanses of complicatedly beautiful brocade separated with intricately painted beams. Ovals of ancient portraits were set into each rectangle and framed with more gold. Where each beam cross sectioned another, a simple, elegant candelabra hung. There were ten light fixtures in all. The floor was a deep, darkly stained oak board set in a herringbone pattern and buffed to slippery-smoothness.

He watched with barely concealed amusement as she walked into the middle of the Grand Ballroom, staring up at the paintings with undisguised wonder in her eyes. She did a twirl as she looked all around and took it all in. “This is beautiful,” she whispered. It sounded much louder as her voice echoed through the empty space.

“Yes,” Lucius answered. “It was my favorite room as a child. I’d sneak down here in my stocking feet and run as fast as I could before I would attempt to stop and skid along the floor.”

Hermione stared, mouth agape, at this beautifully regal and aristocratic man and tried to picture him as a small boy. “Show me,” she dared. His incredulous look made her laugh aloud.

“Heavens, no,” he sneered, adopting his usual cool and detached manner.

“I dare you!” she teased.

“What are you? Five?” he teased her back.

“No.” She brought herself up a little taller, squaring her shoulders. “Technically… I’ll be twenty soon.” Then she chortled. “But that doesn’t mean I can’t have fun and be silly. In times like these, it’s all we have.”

He watched her carefully. The challenge was still in her eyes and he found himself wanting to answer it. What had it been? Almost thirty years since he held felt carefree enough to slide stocking-footed across the ballroom floor? Then he caught the eye of a portrait on the far wall. His father had been following them around all day. “Not today, Miss Granger,” he said in a cool tone. She didn’t miss his glance around the room, checking on other watching portraits. She immediately bowed her head, trying to show a submission she didn’t feel.

“Yes, Mr. Malfoy,” she answered softly, knowing she was going to have to play her own part in
keeping herself safe.

He looked slightly surprised while offering her his arm to lead her from the room before drawling up short, something she said registered suddenly in his brain.

“Wait a moment,” Lucius’ head was reeling. “Did you just say you’ll be twenty, soon? Weren’t you in Draco’s year?”

Hermione gave him a mischievous little smirk. “I was,” she answered sweetly. “But my birthday is right away in September, I was the oldest in our class.”

Lucius did the math – that meant that she was born in 1979 instead of 1980…but to be twenty, she would have been born in 1978, which would have put her a year ahead of Draco. “The math still doesn’t add up, you should just be turning nineteen.”

The twinkle in her eye increased as did her secretive smile. “You promise not to tell Draco?”

“Sure,” he said crisply, glancing around the hallway as they walked.

“It was my third year,” she started. “You know, when we can take extra courses? I couldn’t decide which ones, so I applied for a time turner.”

“You were granted a time turner in your third year?” Lucius was shocked, and impressed. She must have been very mature for such a request to be approved.

“I was,” she smiled. “I…overused it a bit. I would use it to attend my classes, but I would also used it to study, and catch up on sleep. The boys thought I gave it up at the end of my third year, but I used it for fourth and fifth year, too. I was forced to give it back after the incident at the ministry, however, as it was the only working time turner left.” Here, she gave him a sidelong, accusatory look. “I had to drop two classes for my sixth year, which really sucked,” she sighed. “Anyway, by the end of fifth year, I had added three hundred and forty-two days to my life. The ministry agreed to round up and my birth certificate was magically amended. I turn twenty on the nineteenth of September.”

Lucius felt like the weight of a world had been removed from his shoulders with the news that she was older than he had thought. Why did one year make such a vast difference in his reasoning for his attraction and feelings for her?

“How…interesting,” he said, his voice a bit husky. He cleared his throat. “I think you’ll find this next room exciting. I had it magically renovated when we sent Draco to Hogwarts for his first year. It’s by far the most modern room in the house. I took a bedroom suite and two studies. Cissy argued with me about the bedroom suite, but there are just so many in this damned place. He pushed open a heavy wooden door and Hermione was instantly reminded of going to the local health center with her parents. The heavy smell of pool chemicals hit her like a wall, but then she saw the room and her jaw dropped.

The space was a huge rectangle, as large as the Grand Ballroom. The back wall, the longest, held floor to ceiling windows separated by alternating thin and thick pillars. The thick pillars were made of granite, the thin pillars looked like some kind of hardwood. When she looked closer, the pattern actually went thin wooden pillar, large window, thin wooden pillar, thick granite pillar, thin wooden pillar, large window, and then it repeated. The view was…spectacular. It was like looking into the Forbidden Forest, only the trees were younger.

Hermione realized this must be the very back of the house, she had only seen the view facing the front of the house and the rolling grounds. Butting directly up against the windows was an infinity
pool. The basin of the pool was done in green marble and edged with the same dark granite as the pillars. Surrounding the pool on three sides were rough grained hardwood floors that reminded her of a ship deck. On the far left sat a sofa with end tables and a round dining table that looked to seat about eight. The other side held a small fire place, in front of which was an eight-person hot tub sunk into the wooden pool deck. There were three steps leading into tub with marble benches the same color as the pool basin to sit on. A door flanked each side of the fire place. There were six chaise lounges in three sets of two with end tables between each pair. They sat on the part of the pool deck that directly faced the pool and windows. There were sconces on each pillar as well as three medium crystal chandeliers hanging from what appeared to be a granite ceiling.

She turned huge eyes to Lucius, who looked insanely smug with her reaction. “This is…incredible,” she murmured. Lucius smirked knowingly.

It was quiet as she explored the room. After a few minutes, he quietly asked. “Do you swim, Hermione?”

She looked up in surprise at the use of her first name. He used it so rarely, usually calling her Miss Granger. He noticed her reaction. “This is a safe room – the humidity and potions to keep the pool water clean and clear make it a hostile environment for portraits. You may talk freely.”

“I do swim, Lucius.” She purposely used his first name, liking the power that it gave her. It put them on the same footing – instead of one of captive and captor, or older and younger. “This is unbelievable…” She looked around again. “Do you use it often?”

“I wish I used it more often,” he admitted. “Do you wish to be able to use it?”

Her eyes found their way back to his. “I’d like that very much,” she confessed. “It would be nice to have a way to keep myself physically fit. All this rich food you’re feeding me will be a problem once my appetite returns to normal.”

“What’s been wrong with your appetite?” Lucius was confused. She seemed to eat as much as any woman he’d ever known. Not really enough, in his opinion, but he had long ago learned to not mention eating habits to a woman if he wanted to keep his bollocks.

“Well, there’s the fact that I lived off bread, some sort of porridge, and water for almost two months. Then there’s been stress…and depression.” Her admission was reluctant, but she pressed on. “I have a very healthy appetite,” she shrugged. “I like food!” A chuckle escaped her this time. “If I don’t have a way to work it off, I’ll have to ask you to change the menus!”

He gave her a small smile, he understood. He knew Draco used his private workout room daily. He, himself, ran the grounds and rode horseback numerous times per week. He also very much enjoyed swimming – hence the massive expense of an indoor pool.

“What’s through the door ways?” she questioned, pointing towards the hearth.

“A sauna to the left and a bathroom to the right,” he informed her. “We should move on.”

She looked longingly at the pool again before turning to follow him. “I have two rooms left – I believe they will be your favorite.”

Lucius wasn’t wrong. When he gestured for her to open the next set of double doors and precede him, she had never imagined what she would see.

The Library was huge and went up two stories. The ceiling was cathedral in its making, painted in such a way it reminded her of the Sistine Chapel. There were huge world globes filling the center of
the expanse with a few nooks that held desks and lamps. Bookcases were separated with large, carved spiral columns, their bases blocked and intricately designed. The bookcases and walls were wooden and stained with warm, comforting tones of brown. The balcony was scalloped and ran the edges of the entire room. It was blocked off with an ornate iron barricade. The floors were stone with alternating square and diamond patterns in a creamy gold and a dark brown.

Her face was frozen in a mask of wonder. Lucius couldn’t help staring at her perfect O-shaped mouth hungrily as she took in the space. Her expression was that of orgasmic bliss.

“Do you think you’ll be able to find some reading material to your tastes in here, Miss Granger?” he teased with a snigger.

“Oh, yes,” she breathed, not even caring that the question was most likely rhetorical. She stepped to the nearest bookcase, running her fingers over the spines of ancient texts and tomes.

Lucius watched her with utter fascination as she moved through the library, at one point looking up as she walked backwards. Her eyes were positively glowing with hunger – for knowledge. He had only ever seen that look in a woman’s eyes when it came to pretty baubles or jewels, but the girl was looking at books – not diamonds. It was captivating.

He let her wander a few minutes before calling an end to explorations. “We must move on, Miss Granger. One room left and then you shall go dress for lunch.”

She followed him reluctantly, two books in hand. “Is it all right if I take these with?”

He glanced at the titles before raising his eyebrows. _Decoding B’alaj Chan K’awiil – Ancient Mayan Rulers and Potions, Herbs, Oils, and Brews_. This was her idea of reading for fun? “I do suppose that will be fine. Just so you are aware, the room is enchanted. When you are done with a book, you simply put them there,” he pointed to one of the small nooks that held a basket on a rectangular table, “and it will reshelving itself.”

“Outstanding.” Hermione took note before moving to tuck the books under her arm.

“I’ll carry those for you,” he offered, holding a hand out. She cocked her head at him in surprise. That was awfully…chivalrous.

Lucius had been taught not to let women carry objects that could burden their gracefulness, of course. However, he had also been taught that, as the Lord of the manor, he shouldn’t be burdened with such a mundane task, either. Normally, he would call for a house elf, but something was compelling him to take and keep her burden.

A few minutes later, they entered the foyer, and Hermione’s heart started to thud loudly in her ears when she realized Lucius was leading her to the piano room. She took a deep breath and followed him into the chamber.

It was very different in the day time. The room was incredibly bright and airy – so different from the rest of the manor, which was dark and masculine. The walls and trim work were all done in white. The ceiling was vaulted and sectioned into squares with beams, and was also completely white. There were large, floor to ceiling windows at the back of the room and what looked like a door that led out into a garden. The tapestries were all cream and gold and were thick and heavy. There were two gold and cream patterned davenports full of huge, fluffy throw pillows done in bronzes, golds, and mustards. Two small, bergère style chairs flanked the moderately sized fireplace, the pillars that held up the mantel were carved cherubs. The center of the room was covered with a large oriental rug done mostly in creams with mustard and crimson accents. In the center of the rug was a large,
upholstered coffee table done in gold with a large potted plant in on its middle and a few small vases circling it. End tables sat on the ends of each couch and held carved candelabras and a few (probably priceless) knickknacks. A few other plants in huge, beautiful crocks were placed in the room, giving it a homey feel.

Nearest to the entrance, though, sat the piano where Hermione had lost herself the night before and the breath whooshed out of her completely. It was so beautiful.

“Do you play?” Lucius asked softly, watching her face adamantly.

Hermione’s mind raced as she looked at the portraits lining the wall. Would they give her away if she lied? She didn’t know why, but for some reason she wanted to keep her talent to herself. She wanted to hold onto the secret a little longer. It was the only thing she had that was hers alone. Selfishly, she wanted to guard it.

“A little,” she whispered. “Not well enough to play for anyone.”

Lucius was just barely able to stop the surprise from showing on his face with her hesitant answer. She was lying – she had never outright lied to him before. Now he knew why, she was terrible at it. Her eyes were darting around the room and she was avoiding looking at the piano. 

Why would she lie about being able to play the piano? He glanced around the room at the portraits who were whispering quietly to each other. He needed to answer her.

“Ah.” He felt oddly hurt that she had decided not to share her talent willingly with him. “That is too bad, this is a lovely instrument. La Mort du Cygne – or The Dying Swan. It’s a baby grand piano that is made of solid, hand carved mahogany with a fruitwood veneer inlay. It was customized and built in 1906 and is an Erard. Are you familiar with Erard pianos, Miss Granger?”

Hermione’s eyes were once again fixed to the magnificent instrument. She had heard rumors of this piano, it had been lost in a fire in Germany in 1916. Apparently, it had really just been coveted by a Malfoy. “Does it do anything magical?” she asked.

“Not unless you count the fact that it will never play out of tune no matter how many years pass.” Lucius shrugged. They were quiet a few more moments before Lucius let his guard down just a bit.

“It was my mother’s piano, Miss Granger. Purchased for her when she was born and betrothed to my father.” He cleared his throat and continued in a more flippant matter. “I would like for you to make this room yours, Miss Granger. It is the Lady’s Parlor – it’s seems only right that the only female in the house utilizes the space. The French doors over there,” he pointed to the floor to ceiling windows at the back of the room, “lead to the rose garden. You will be allowed out there unsupervised. It has been warded to keep you confined to that garden space. If you wish to walk the grounds, you must ask either Draco or me to escort you.” When she shot him a withering look, he smirked at her. “I’ll add Tinny to that list, as well, being that I am at work most of the week.”

She nodded her understanding, and he watched as she ran her hands over the detailed inlay of the Erard. “If I were to choose to practice my piano playing, Mr. Malfoy, would that be all right?”

He studied her hard for a long minute before answering. “I would be delighted for you to play the piano, Miss Granger. No one has played it in over twenty years. It deserves some attention,” he glanced at the portraits and caught the eyes of his mother. He had not spoken with her portrait in a long time, she gave him a soft smile. Lucius tore his gaze away from her and placed it back on the girl.

“And now, Miss Granger, it is time for lunch.” He motioned for her to take his arm. “I’ll escort you to your rooms, so you may change.”
Lunch was served with the usual savoir faire. Hermione had been dressed in a simple day dress in a deep, royal blue that made her creamy skin look utterly delectable. He had to admit that he missed the jeans, they fit her personality much better. Their discussion remained light, mostly discussing the manor and all in it from her extensive tour.

There were no awkward pauses, the few silences had been filled with the need to chew and swallow and then conversation would start right up again. She was refreshingly witty, and so bright. Lucius felt a warmth in his person like he had never experience before, especially when her smile touched her eyes. At one point, she was passionately discussing the design of the balcony in the library, and she reached out to take hold of his wrist while she talked animatedly and gestured with her other hand. He was so stunned by her casual touch that he couldn’t help but stare at it, his lips slightly parted with his surprise. When she realized why he had gone still and quiet, a striking blush filled her cheeks and she quickly let him go. He chose not to say anything about it, and began telling her about the architect that had designed the library that had been remodeled when his father was a boy.

That was when everything had changed. The French doors Draco had slammed through only yesterday were thrown open again, startling them both. However, when Voldemort glided through them, all the happiness was sucked out of the room. Hermione let out a small gasp and sunk back into her chair, her head going down.

The smile on Lucius’ face fell instantly into a mask of indifference when he saw Voldemort. His heart started to pound.

“Ahh, Lucius, don’t get up!” Voldemort glided into the room with an air of superiority, a fake smile on his face.

Lucius stood anyway, bowing his head, knowing full well his master didn’t truly mean his words. “My Lord, had I known you were coming, a proper lunch would have been prepared.” Lucius didn’t even chance a glance at Hermione, there was no need for visual confirmation of her fear.

Voldemort waved his hand with false nonchalance. “Nonsense. I do not wish to impose. I merely wish to speak with you for a few moments.” Voldemort was scanning the room, seemingly taking in the portraits. Lucius didn’t miss the subtle greeting between his master and his father. Abraxas’ expression was even haughtier than usual.

Lucius moved away from the table and swiftly approached the madman he secretly despised. He fell to one knee, focusing on the ground between them. “I am at your disposal, my Lord.”

“Well, in that case, perhaps a moment in your study would be nice.” Voldemort did not look at Lucius or acknowledge his subservient gesture.

Lucius stood and motioned towards the door on the far side of the room. “Of course.” Voldemort glided gracefully towards the study room door with Lucius following close behind.

As soon as they were inside, Voldemort closed the door with a flick of his hand. Lucius knew at that moment his Lord and Master was fully aware of Hermione’s ability. The show of wandless magic had been by design, Lucius was sure of it. Closing a door was beneath the Dark Lord, he did not bother with such simple tasks. There were house elves and lowly wizards to perform such things. Lowly wizards, such as himself.

“Draco came to visit me yesterday,” the Dark Lord commented. His voice was casual, as though he were making light conversation, but Lucius knew better.
“Yes, my Lord. He told me you had a task for him that would require his absence for an unspecified amount of time.” He bowed his head deferentially. “I hope he does not disappoint.”

The megalomaniac sat in the chair closest to the fire, as he always did. Lucius noticed he was wearing heavy woolen robes that practically swallowed his frame. He was always cold, and Lucius wondered if his transition to a serpent-like being was still progressing. Voldemort looked from the fire back to Lucius. “No, I don’t suspect he’ll disappoint. Not this time.”

Lucius wondered what that statement meant and tried to disguise his interest. He kept his face a non-expressive mask, allowing the abomination sitting in front of him to lead the conversation.

“Draco told me of the Mudblood’s display on Saturday. Although, Abraxas was actually the first to disclose the story.” Voldemort cut Lucius with a penetrating gaze. “I’m surprised you didn’t find the information worthy of bringing to me.”

Lucius opened his mouth to defend his absence, but Voldemort waved him off dismissively. “It’s no matter. I always find out, as you know.”

Voldemort stood and walked over to the fire, sliding the iron poker off the fireplace accessory stand to adjust the burning logs. Lucius tried to conceal his panic as some embers began to fall and crackle. He swallowed heavily, and his heart began to pound as the Dark Lord continued to hold the weapon in the flames. It was hardly a subtle threat. When the fire roared back to life, Voldemort put the poker back in its rack. Lucius allowed himself a silent breath of relief, knowing it could all turn on a knut.

Voldemort brought his attention back to Lucius. “The girl is to remain safe. This…ability of hers. It makes her…appealing, more…worthy. Only if we can use her to our will, however. You and Draco must secure her unfailing loyalty. Whether you use roses or thorns matters not to me.” Suddenly, Voldemort’s look was piercing, and his voice turned hostile. “Bring her to heel Lucius!”

Lucius internally cringed at the degrading command. It would not have bothered him mere days ago…but now it disturbed him. Oh, what has this girl done to me?

“My Lord, yesterday, the Mudblood…she tried to take her own life…” Lucius hated to admit this, but he knew it would be a grave error to try to keep it hidden.

Before Lucius could continue, Voldemort turned a penetrating and threatening glare on him that caused Lucius to stop speaking instantly. His Master’s tone was soft and quiet, making his threat all the deadlier. “If any permanent harm should befall even one hair on her head, there will be consequences, Lucius. Consequences you have not imagined in that…secretive mind of yours.”

Once again, his master was scolding him for not coming forward with Hermione’s wandless display. Lucius realized he was losing the trust of the Dark Lord, and that was akin to death in the world of a Death Eater. He knew he would have to be more forthcoming in the future.

Lucius remained kneeling as Voldemort glided by and exited the room without another word or glance thrown his way. The door was opened, once again, with a display of wandless magic. When the door closed, Lucius let out a shaky breath. He continued to draw in lungsful of air as the panic slowly ebbed out of him. To say he was relieved to have survived another encounter unscathed would be a gross understatement. This one had been close. His thoughts went to Hermione and his eyes moved to the door when he realized she was alone with the monster.

Hermione was frozen to her chair. She considered leaving for her room or the Lady’s Parlor or the Library, but felt it would be in her and Lucius’ best interest if she stayed put. She could hear the soft mumble of voices, but could not make out any words. The longer she waited the more her panic
began to build. *Are they talking about me?* *Discussing my death?* Yesterday she had been so desperate to end it all, but that was *then.* It was before there was a piano and a library…and a man who completely confounded her.

After about ten minutes, the door opened. Hermione felt dread when Lucius wasn’t the one approaching her. She swallowed heavily and stared at the plate in front of her, not daring to make eye contact. She may have stood up to this…creature…the last time she saw him, but she had no desire for another trip down Cruciatus lane.

He approached the opposite side of the table and tilted his head, sighing gently as he watched her. “Miss Granger, I have taken a great interest in your well-being. It is why you are living in the plush comforts of this Manor and not in a cell amongst sewage and rats. Please take care of yourself. Your life is far too valuable to be wasted.”

His voice was surprisingly soft and while it seemed he was trying to offer kindness, it was almost laughable. His false sincerity was … disturbing. “You are a smart girl, and – for a Mudblood – you have surprising magical talent. You are not something to be destroyed. Quite the opposite, in fact. You seem to be an enigma, an *exception* to the rule. You are something to be valued.

When he stopped talking, Hermione felt compelled to look up at him. She held her tongue and didn’t respond with the vitriol that was boiling inside her. *I am not a something, I am a witch and a human being. Which is more than I can say for you, you freak.* However, in the interest of her own well-being (and frankly for the safety of her keeper as well), Hermione decided it was best she pretend to play nice in the sandbox. “Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

The smile Voldemort gave her was perhaps the creepiest thing she had ever seen. *Honestly, does this man ever look in a mirror?* After a pause he continued, “Well, I’ll leave you to your afternoon, Miss Granger.” Hermione watched as he left, his robes disappearing through the door that lead to the floo.

When she heard the *whoosh* of the fireplace, Hermione felt her body go boneless as she started to tremble violently, and tears pooled in her eyes without her permission. So lost in her relief that that monster was gone, she didn’t realize Lucius had returned until he settled a warm hand on her shoulder, making her jump slightly.

“Come,” he commanded. Hermione quickly rose and followed him out of the dining room. Once in the hall, he took her in his arms. With a spin and a *crack*, they were in the stables. He didn’t let her go, only pulled her into his chest more tightly. The kindness of the gesture was enough that the tears spilled down her face freely as she drew a shuddering breath.

“Shh,” he said soothingly, his hold on her remaining tight. Because of how they were positioned, Hermione didn’t see the pallor of his face, which was as white as hers. Nor did she see the tight press of his lips or the fear in his eyes.

“Do you know what he wants of me?” she asked brokenly after a few minutes. Grudgingly, now that he’d had time to compose himself, Lucius let her go. She pulled back from him, wrapping her arms around her torso protectively.

“The only thing he has made clear is that you are to be kept alive and brought to see his side of things,” Lucius said softly, not looking at her.

“You know that I will never bow to him, Lucius, right? I would rather die first.” The venom in which she spat the words sent a shiver through Lucius. Her passion was catching, and his eyes snapped to hers to find her fierce determination.
“Then you will pretend,” he said arrogantly. “You will pretend, and you will lie. You’ll have to work on it, though. You’re a terrible liar.”

“Why are you so determined to help me?” The silence was deafening.

“I don’t know,” he answered finally.

“Can you teach me Occlumency?” she requested.

“I can try.” It was a smart question – it could keep them all alive if she could learn to lie and shield her thoughts. “Hermione?” She met and held his gaze. “You will have to submit – or Draco and I are dead right along with you.”

Caramel eyes held grey until she gave a curt nod. “I’ll do it for you – not for Draco.”

Lucius’ heart jumped at her words, and he found it difficult to swallow. “Fair enough, Miss Granger,” he finally responded after a few moments of silence. “Fair enough.”

Chapter End Notes

Inspiration for the rooms of the manor were drawn from the following –

Grand Ballroom:
https://806d2bf04cf5fa54997ae7c5344b3b84ee5da7b51276407b19c.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/responsive/1536/a3a80601ed9c61c5137e7c5344b3b84ee5da7b51276407b19c.r92.cf1.rackcdn.com/responsive/16:9/a3a80601ed9c61c5137e7c5344b3b84ee5da7b51276407b19c.r92.cf1.rackcdn.com/u/hotel-cafe-royal/events/Hotel-Cafe-Royal---Pompadour---Empty.jpg

Intimate Ballroom:
https://shop.kongernessamling.dk/content/uploads/2016/08/Taffelsal-Chr7.jpg

Library:

Pool:
https://blog.klm.com/assets/uploads/2015/09/Four-Seasons_china.png

La Mort du Cygne, Erard – “The Dying Swan” worth $409,000:
https://media.izi.travel/a8a0e958-59de-4a08-b96c-dfe8d01d3b8e/bf4cfa87-866f-4e16-963d-f2ecd68f60e_800x600.jpg
https://artmiens.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/piano.jpg
Chapter Thirteen

A big thanks to all who comment! Thanks to LissaDream for being such a brilliant co-writer and an even better friend! Love you :*

Chapter Thirteen

Tuesday evening, Lucius lay in bed, reflecting over the last couple days. Since Draco left on Sunday, with the exception of the Dark Lord's visit, Lucius had noticed a huge improvement in Hermione's demeanor. Lucius had returned to work today, so he had not been able to watch over her activities as he had the day before. However, Narcissa informed him the girl had spent most of today in the parlor, and because of it, the lady's parlor had never been so popular. Visitors from portraits all over the manor were popping in to hear the Mudblood who could play the piano. He was still waiting for the girl to admit her talent, but she had said nothing. Hermione had not mentioned anything during dinner about her time in the parlor and Lucius didn't want to bring it up, for fear she would think he was having Narcissa spy on her. He decided he might simply ask her to play something for him.

Lucius could feel the bond for the first time. He had not taken her since Sunday morning and the pull was starting to make him feel uneasy. Snape had warned him of this side effect. The need would continue to build and over time he would feel more anxious, and if he waited too long, his heart would start to pound. Apparently, this was a diluted version of what the captives felt on a day to basis, and he didn't like it. It was simply a mild uneasiness that had started around lunch time, but was slowly building. He would not delay much longer. He had wanted her to have a little reprieve while she was recovering from her emotional break down, but he was not keen to torture himself. Besides, he wanted her. He had been courteous and exercised restraint long enough. It was his right after all. She was his captive after all.

"Why do you feel so guilty?"

The pull of the bond woke Lucius in the wee hours of Wednesday morning. He tossed and turned for a bit, wanting to let her sleep for a while and wanting to rest more himself. Laying on his left side, he watched her as he willed sleep to overcome him again. His focus was drawn to her mouth when her soft, full lips parted with a shaky indrawn breath. Her eyes were moving behind her fluttering lashes and Lucius knew she was dreaming. His breathing paused when a faint whispered word fell from her lips, "Please." A second later, more words. "No, Harry, this way." Her words were slurred with sleep, but were becoming slightly louder. Her forehead was furrowed with worry and her breathing was accelerating. "No Harry! Ron, stop him!" Her voice became clearer and her small hand that was curled under her cheek began to twitch. "Harry, Ron…Nooooo!"

Suddenly her eyes shot open, but Lucius could tell she wasn't seeing by her glazed over expression.

He whispered, "It's all right, Hermione. You were dreaming."

He watched as consciousness crept over her face and her eyes began to focus. She moved her head back with a quick jerk and her body flinched when she found him so close and watching her. She quickly relaxed as she remembered where she was.

He watched her, and she watched him. Their eyes were on each other, but neither saying anything.

"Do you have nightmares often?" he murmured.
"I don't know," she replied. Her whisper was anguished, as though she were on the verge of tears.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

She swallowed. "Not really. It's a memory…a memory that I recall daily…multiple times throughout the day."

Lucius froze when Hermione slid closer to him, so that her face was curled into his chest. "Is this ok?" She asked her voice barely above a whisper.

After a stunned pause, he awkwardly patted her back. "It's fine." Within seconds her breathing was even from sleep. It felt so strange, this young woman – his captive – seeking comfort from him. It had been such a long time since he had held someone this way. He couldn't remember the last time anyone had touched him or sought any type of comfort from him. Not since Draco was a child, and that was only when his mother was not around. Narcissa touched him, certainly, but it was never like this. At least not for more years than he could remember. In truth, he had never encouraged it. Even his lovers over the years had been for physical release only. There had never been…tenderness.

He exhaled and closed his eyes, finding he didn't mind her face nestled into his chest. Nor did he mind when her hand curled up under her chin and felt cool against his overheated skin. Exhaustion began to claim him as her steady breathing washed over him.

Hair. Thick, unruly, soft, and fragrant. Across his cheeks, on his shoulders, cascading down his arms, his stomach.

Legs. One…thrown over his right thigh. The second…nestled between his own.

Arms. One…wrapped around his waist, holding him close. The second…resting on his left bicep.

Eyes, closed. Lips, soft and inviting. Cheeks, flushed.

This was what Lucius awoke to. He was completely enveloped by a sound asleep girl. She was draped across him and her leg that was over his thigh twitched slightly, causing a certain part of his anatomy to twitch as well. Her right cheek was nestled into his chest.

Lucius was equally surprised to find his right hand was splayed across her lower back and his other was cradling the back of her head, his fingers buried in her soft locks.

He didn't move, he merely pondered… How? How did we become so completely entwined?

He was warm, hot. He needed to move. As he straightened his leg clad thigh and pulled his hands away from her warmth, a desperate mewl escaped her lips. A warm breath blew across his chest. A soft moan followed as she began to stretch, rubbing up against him. Merlin.

He froze, fighting the impulse to simply take her…but he did not want to force her. He whispered. "Hermione, Princess, wake up."

"Mmm," was the only response he got.

And then a wiggle.

That was it. How much could a man take after all? He would have her.

Then she tensed. He realized his command must have kicked in the bond because she suddenly stilled, her head came up and her sleepy eyes met his.
She looked around and down, comprehending she had become a human blanket. She blushed as she rolled off him, to his right and onto her back. "Sorry," she whispered.

"It's quite alright," he responded, his voice husky with need. He swallowed heavily.

After a moment, she whispered again. "It's ok. I know what you have to do."

And, oh he wanted to. Why did he feel guilty, though? He felt this tug of war in his mind. One side valiant and protective…wanting to simply take care of her. The other side, however, wanted to take her.

Hard.

Now.

Repeatedly.

It was the bond that gave him no choice. "Yes," he whispered. "It's time, but..."

Hermione sensed his hesitation and turned to him, seeing the concern in his eyes. "But?" she asked gently.

He glanced at the portraits and was thankful to find Abraxas gone. The others were sleeping. He swallowed. "I find myself feeling… guilty. I don't wish to cause you more…unrest, but this blasted bond is making me anxious. It will only get worse the longer we wait."

Lucius wasn't looking at her. He kept his eyes on the ceiling letting out short, calming exhalations, willing the pull to let up a bit. The controlled breathing was not helping. On top of that, her beautiful, caramel eyes boring into him with concern and understanding was making him feel sick with self-loathing. Merlin, just take her! What is wrong with you? You are Lucius Malfoy!

Just as he was about to make his move, she spoke. Her voice was soft and sympathetic, and it softened his resolve. "So, the bond, it affects you too?" She let out sigh. Her voice was small and resigned. "That means he'll be back…soon."

Lucius knew who 'he' was. Not wanting to discuss Draco, and frustrated by his lack of control over the situation, he replied with a touch of impatience. "I'm sorry. There just isn't much I can do about that. You are every bit as bound to him as to you are to me."

She couldn't contain the snap of bitterness. "Yes, I am perfectly aware, thank you."

Lucius understood her frustration, but he was currently more concerned with his own. Neither one said anything. As the silence dragged on he felt guiltier. He spoke softly, a pleading edge to his voice that matched his words. "Look, Hermione. I don't like…forcing you. We have been…good together…and I know it was at my command, but…well. We respond well together; do you think that we might find mutual enjoyment in this arrangement?"

Hermione didn't respond, and he thought she was shutting him out, distancing herself from him. He couldn't blame her. It was unfair of him to ask her to enjoy sleeping with someone she didn't really want to be with. It was an absurd request, but then her words surprised him. Her tone was shy and hesitant. "When...when you are gentle, and kind, it's...I can pretend I want it. A couple of times, it was...almost nice."

Lucius noticed her glance around the room, focusing on the portraits and their occupants. He
appreciated her caution when her whispered confession rattled the walls around his heart, once again. "Lucius, I just want to say that, well...I appreciate the kindness you have shown me. It's certainly not required of you and this could all be...so much worse." She paused and when he didn't stop her, she continued, "That first night, I thought you were a monster...I thought..."

Lucius turned to her abruptly, stunned by his own confession and the urgency with which he whispered it. "Hermione, that first night we were being watched. I behaved the way I was expected to act...and frankly, I didn't know you. I didn't...care about you. I was playing a part and doing my job." He looked back at the ceiling. After a short pause he added, "It would be...difficult to behave in such a way towards you now." He looked back at her. "I hope you understand that."

There was a brief pause where neither of them moved or spoke. Hermione tentatively moved her left hand over his right, looking back at the ceiling once again.

Lucius closed his eyes and let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. When her hand touched his, he felt a flood of relief. It was such a simple gesture on her part, yet it was a gesture that changed everything. He rolled onto his side facing her and she followed suit, rolling to face him. He kept his eyes on hers as he lifted her hand to his mouth and pressed a soft kiss to the back of it.

Her expression conveyed she was nervous, but he didn't see fear and he didn't see panic. His heart was starting to beat faster, only this time it wasn't from the bond. "Slip your gown off," he whispered, immediately tacking a "please" on the end as he gave her an apologetic smirk.

Hermione rolled her eyes but had a small smile on her face as she lifted the gown over her head. His eyes ghosted down as her breasts became exposed. Her nipples were hard and her skin inviting. Her body below her waist was still under the covers and he was about to reach for her and pull her close when she moved.

Lucius was stunned when she lifted her hand to his chest. "Perhaps you could undress as well." Her voice was soft and shy, but her eyes were on his and had a twinkle. He couldn't help the small smile that crept over his mouth.

"With pleasure," he responded as he pulled his night shirt off and then slid his pajama bottoms down. He turned back to her. "Do you have any other requests?"

Her eyes breezed down his chest and back up. She grinned, "Well, you could give me a wand and a portkey to Paris."

He returned her smile. "Somehow, I don't think that would help my current predicament."

She shrugged. "Ah well, you asked."

"You are quite stunning when you smile," he said softly. The smile fell from her face as a flush crept over her. Her eyes were on his and her bottom lip was sucked into her mouth. "And you're irresistible when you blush," he added for good measure.

"Hmmmm, you know flattery will get you nowhere you haven't already been."

He chuckled. "You are quite cheeky this morning."

Her smile turned a little sad. "I want to be happy."

His words were sincere. "I want you to be happy, Hermione. As happy as you can be."
"Well, that's the caveat isn't it? There's a limit."

Lucius closed his eyes and opened them. "You aren't the only one who feels that way. But we have to make the best of the situation, don't we?"

Hermione sighed heavily. Her eyes were on his as she announced with quiet conviction, "Yes, and that's why I've decided to find happiness where I can, and to accept what I can't change and to stop fighting battles I can't win."

Lucius paused, torn between what he wanted to say to her and what he wanted to do to her. His eyes trailed down her body and quickly decided action would win this battle. They could talk later about not losing her will to fight.

"How about you let me try to make you happy right now?"

"I believe that's why we are both naked," she replied with a cocked eyebrow.

Lucius chuckled as he reached forward and snaked an arm around her small waist, sliding her towards him easily. "I like this playful side of you." He ghosted his mouth up her neck and planted a soft kiss behind her right ear.

He pulled her closer when he felt her arms tentatively creep around his neck. When she nuzzled into his neck he let out a soft growl as his left hand lightly trailed down her back and over the soft skin of her bottom.

His left hand glossed to her right hip and his right moved to her left. She let out a squeal when he rolled her onto her back and shifted himself over her. "I will endeavor to make no commands, princess. If I forget, tell me."

Her soft brown eyes met his grey and after a moment, he couldn't help himself. He leaned in and kissed her gently. He felt her tense, her lips stiff and unyielding, and was about to pull back when suddenly her mouth relaxed. Lucius felt like purring when her hands lightly moved to the back of his head, threading softly through his locks and tentatively holding him close.

He trailed his tongue along her bottom lip, contemplating deepening the kiss, but instead found himself peppering her with light kisses down her neck, her chest and to her breasts. Her breasts were perfect in every way…soft, with pale rose nipples, and a perfect size. Not too voluminous and not too small. The perfect amount for his hand. His left hand moved to her right breast where he gently massaged the soft globe before lightly pinching her nipple, causing a delightful mewl to escape her mouth, an arching of her back and further hardening of both peaks.

His mouth latched on to her left breast where he kissed her tenderly before lightly moving the tip of his tongue over and around the ridges of her erect nipple. When she wiggled beneath him – clearly aroused – he teased, "Ah, ah, ah…if you move I'll have to give a command."

She let out a sigh and moved her hands to his shoulders. The feel of her hands moving down his arms and around to his back felt exquisite. Her movements were tentative, but he appreciated her initiative in exploring the planes and grooves of his shoulders, back, and arms. It had been a long time since he had been touched like this. Sex with Narcissa had become quite scripted and repetitive over the years. There was little caressing. He had not had a proper mistress in many years and the one-night encounters of his most recent years had been for release only…quickies where he took a more dominant role by taking the women fast and hard. He liked rough sex, but with Hermione, he felt a desire to nurture and take his time.
He moved his mouth to her stomach and then further down to her pubis, pleased to find a small, trimmed strip of curls. He liked women shaved bare, but not when they were only nineteen-years-old. He needed no more reminders she was a girl and barely a woman. His hands continued to massage her breasts as his mouth slid down her core. His tongue gently slid past her outer lips to the inner. Her sweet, musky scent was delicious, and he had to fight the urge to slide back up her body so that he could sink into her and fuck her hard.

He smiled and nibbled when she bucked her hips as he flicked her clit with his tongue. He pinched her nipples and smirked to himself when she quickly arched her back once again. He was already playing her like a well-known instrument.

"Do you like my mouth on you, Princess?" he asked softly with a touch of cockiness. He peeked up to find her eyes heavily lidded as they met his before letting her head fall back. Her mouth was in the shape of a soft 'o' and she let out a moan when he nibbled on her hard bud one more time. "I asked you a question. Don't you think it would be polite to answer?"

Her head was still tossed back, and she lifted it, cocking an eyebrow as she looked down at him. "I'm trying to decide. Keep going and I'll let you know."

He chuckled, enjoying her teasing response. He moved his hands from her breasts to her thighs, spreading her wide open. He moved his tongue with more pressure, this time starting lower, lightly trailing his tongue on her puckered rear entrance. He instantly regretted it when she tensed and tried to pull away, but his grip was too tight on her thighs for her to go anywhere. He pulled back and looked up, she looked panicked. "Please…not there."

"It's okay, princess. This is about pleasure, remember? I won't hurt you." He gave her a couple soft kisses on her inner thighs and was relieved when she slowly relaxed beneath him. Her head fell back on the pillow when he moved his mouth back to her pleasure point. He worked her mercilessly and, after a couple minutes, she was writhing beneath him. He could only assume she was near climax. He slid one and then two fingers into her warm, slick channel and when he curled his long fingers, pressing then into the spongy tissue he knew drove witches wild, he bit down gently on her clit, causing her to squeal spectacularly. Her walls clamped on his fingers and a small amount of liquid gushed around them with her release.

She was panting, heavily, clearly trying to regain her breath. He slowly moved back up her body, kissing his way up her stomach and back to her breasts. He moved further up and kissed her cheek. His cock was so hard that it was painful. When he slid into her it felt like she was made for him. Sex with her had been good, but this morning it was spectacular. Hermione being a willing participant made all the difference in the world. She moaned, and her legs automatically wrapped around his hips. Her hips began to rock with his of their own accord and her hands gripped his biceps fiercely.

He was towering over her and when he looked down at her, her eyes locked with his. "Are you okay?" He asked as he continued to rock his hips against hers.

She nodded and tentatively pressed up and kissed his mouth. He returned her tender gesture and nibbled her lower lip, eliciting softs moans that pushed him over the edge. One, two, three more thrusts and then he tensed letting out a growl as he came.

When he caught his breath, he looked down at her, surprised to find her expression slightly disappointed. "What is it, princess. Did I hurt you?"

"No…no. It's just..."
When she hesitated, he became impatient. "Tell me."

She looked up at him, crossly. "I thought you weren't going to make commands."

"Well, when you don't answer my question, and I need an answer, you leave me no choice."

Unable to resist the bond, the answer spilled out of her lips before he even finished speaking. "I was about to come when you…when you stopped."

What? "You mean just now? While I was…penetrating you?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, while you were…just now."

Lucius was stunned. He didn't say anything and after a minute a huge smile crossed his face. "Hmmm, it seems, my dear, you and I are more compatible than I realized. I've never made a woman orgasm from penetration." He rolled off her, stunned.

Hermione looked at him with confusion. "I don't understand."

Lucius sighed and ran his hands over his face and then through his hair. "What I mean is, I've only ever given an orgasm through clitoral stimulation or with penetration of my fingers. I've never accomplished that feat…during intercourse."

He suddenly felt a tinge of embarrassment. Why did you just admit that?

Hermione cocked an eyebrow once again. "Well, it's not the first time you did this to me. Perhaps the other women were close as well, but it just…"

Lucius turned to her, smiling. "I did this to you before?"

"Yes, and it's rather frustrating if you must know."

Lucius chuckled. "Oh, my little princess, you are simply full of surprises." He leaned over her again, and ran his left hand down her body and between her legs. "Allow me to remedy that deficiency promptly."

Hermione let the hot water run over her. As she stood under the powerful spray, her eyes were closed and she put her hands over them to protect them. It had been a…nice morning. Unexpected. She had meant what she said to Lucius. She really did want to try and make the best of her situation. Truthfully, she was slowly coming around to Lucius Malfoy, but admitting this (even to herself) made her uncomfortable. The man was a long-standing Death Eater. He was not a good man. He was not a noble man. He was a rapist, an opportunist, and likely a murderer, as well. He had crucio'd her mere days earlier.

However, he was also kind, and attentive, and considerate and (it pained her to admit this), she enjoyed sex with him. At least this morning she did.

He simply wasn't panning out to be what she thought he was. The more she got to know him, the more she realized all she had known of him was an outside persona – an act. He certainly wasn't what she would have expected. He had been surprising her since that first night. That first night he had been horrid, but she had noticed (even then) flashes of what seemed like regret or discomfort with what was happening. At the time she had not been able to identify it, but looking back (and after hearing his explanation) she believed what he had told her. He was doing what he had been told to do. Of course, that really didn't make it any better. He didn't have to be a Death Eater, after all. He
didn't have to support the evilest monster that ever lived. He could have said no. He could have let her go. He could have stood up to his master.

Hermione knew Lucius Malfoy would never say no to Lord Voldemort, though. It was his greatest weakness and it was why she knew it wasn't safe to completely trust him. However, she did truly believe the man wanted to help her within the confines of his ability. He was tender, and he didn't want to physically harm her, and he didn't want Draco to harm her either. Lucius was the closest thing she had to a savior in this new world and she would grasp on to that and hang on for dear life.

After her shower, Hermione met Lucius for breakfast in the dining hall. The older Malfoy was absorbed with his morning paper, although she caught him shoot glances at her over his paper occasionally. He handed her the social section and the funnies. She was longing to read the real news, but Lucius simply folded those sections and set them aside, not including them in her allowed reading.

He sipped his tea and put down his cup, studying her for a moment. "You look lovely today, Hermione." He looked at her kindly, his eyes soft and on her own. She noticed that lately he spent less time looking at her body during conversation and more time looking at her face and her eyes. It was an observation that she had not acknowledged until this moment.

"Thank you, sir." Hermione noticed Abraxas was in a different portrait this morning, sitting behind Lucius. She wondered if this was by design and kept her response formal.

A slightly confused look on Lucius' face gave way to understanding when he noticed her gaze move from the portraits behind him to his face and back again.

His tone was more formal. "So, today you will limit your activities to your suite, the library, the lady's parlor, and the pool. You will not swim without Tinny's presence."

Hermione internally rejoiced with visions of the day ahead of her. She kept her face serious and slightly downtrodden as though the restrictions were a disappointment and a burden. "Yes, sir."

He stood abruptly. "You will dress appropriately for guests this evening, Miss Granger. Your former professor and his charge will be joining us to dine."

Hermione felt excitement bubble up inside her and had to fight the squeal that wanted to erupt like champagne out of a just popped bottle. "Yes, sir," she responded, her voice slightly choked.

Lucius slightly cocked an eyebrow, noticing the subtle change in her. "Behave, Miss Granger. I shall return mid-afternoon."

After Lucius left for work, Hermione once again found herself wandering to the lady's parlor. She found it odd that she was preferring the parlor to the library, but she was really enjoying the airiness and lightness that the room provided. It felt like a room from a fairytale. Not to mention it held that piano, which simply called to her.

She stepped into the welcoming room, surprised to find the portraits all full. Some of them even held more than one occupant. She glanced around at the faces that were starting to become familiar, even though she didn't know their names. They were all women and judging by their attire, she could guess some of the portraits dated back many centuries. There was even a portrait in the corner, where the woman wore a crown and a gown that screamed royalty. She made her way to the sofa, lightly caressing the piano lovingly as she passed by.

She sat down, kicking off her shoes and tucking her feet up underneath her as she picked up her
book off the end table.

Hermione heard a scoff of disapproval from one of the portraits. She looked to her side, finding it was the same portrait that always glared at her disdainfully. It was a dark and foreboding portrait, depicting a severe looking, older woman dressed in black.

Hermione was stunned when she heard the voice of Narcissa Malfoy seemingly come to her defense. "Ediva, really. The girl is not in company. She is alone, and her feet are clean. Did you never want to kick off your shoes and curl up with a good book in your day?"

The voice that responded was haughty and sneering in nature. "She is a Mudblood and should have no rights to the lady's parlor! Much less should she be removing her shoes in a public room. She is not in her…quarters. This room has been the receiving room and parlor for centuries of Malfoy matriarchs. It's offensive that she has been given use of this room."

Narcissa's kind voice spoke loudly. "Ignore Ediva, Miss Granger."

Hermione turned around to study the portrait that housed the most recent Lady Malfoy.

"Allow me to properly introduce myself, Miss Granger. I am Narcissa."

Hermione stood and faced the portrait. She didn't mean for her words to sound so sharp. "Yes, we've met. In this house, a few months ago. Your sister crucio'd me as you stood and watched."

"Impudent, ungrateful," Ediva's portrait exclaimed with indignation.

Narcissa's voice was yielding and apologetic. "Yes, I … feel badly about that. I regret my inaction." Neither Hermione nor Narcissa said anything. Narcissa continued after a pause, the other portraits moving their gazes between the two witches with curiosity. "Our lives were in danger, Miss Granger … my husband's and my son's. One day, if you have children, you will understand. There is nothing you won't do for them."

Hermione found it shocking that anyone could love Draco Malfoy, and she couldn't help but wonder what type of woman raises a son who turns out so hateful. As Hermione studied Narcissa's portrait, however, she saw nothing but truth and a touch of sadness in the woman's eyes. Hermione found she believed Narcissa's sincerity. What would be the purpose for Narcissa to lie at this point?

Hermione's stance softened and in turn, Narcissa spoke again. "I am so pleased you are in use of this room, Miss Granger. It is far too lovely not to be enjoyed."

Hermione offered a slight, hesitant smile at the woman's kindness. "Thank you, I find the lightness to be … comforting. The piano is also quite … therapeutic."

"You play beautifully." A different voice spoke softly. The voice came from a kind-faced, blonde witch, dressed in rather contemporary robes.

There were gasps from several portraits as all eyes turned to the witch whom had just spoken for the first time in a decade. Narcissa's jaw fell open and then she smiled, looking from the portrait to Hermione and back. "Willow! How lovely to hear your voice after all these years!"

Hermione looked at Lucius' mother's portrait. The woman was looking at Hermione with such kindness and obvious approval.

"Your lack of internal metronome is your only fault. I will try to help you with that, if you'll let me."
Hermione swallowed heavily, thrilled to have a chance to learn more. She quickly glanced at the whispering portraits around her before looking back at Willow. "I would be honored for your assistance."

Narcissa watched in amazement. Willow Malfoy had barely said anything in the twenty years since her death and she had not spoken at all for the past ten of those years.

Willow’s tone became confident as did her portrait. Hermione noticed her sit up taller as she gazed from Hermione to the piano. "No time like the present, Miss Granger. Do some warm up scales and we will begin."

Lucius arrived home earlier than expected, only an hour after lunch. Hermione was not in her chambers and not in the library. He walked into the lady's parlor, finding the girl curled up in a ball, sleeping on the sofa. There was a book in a heap on the floor, it was apparent she had fallen asleep while reading.

She looked so young and peaceful when she slept.

He stepped further into the room, glancing at the many portraits that all seemed to be napping as well. Looking at Hermione, he thought about how much had changed over the course of her time at the manor. That first night he would not have imagined a time would come where he would have allowed her into this room, much less into his heart. He would have never believed he would grow to care for the girl, in any capacity.

He thought back to that first night and the hope she'd had that he would release her. He remembered the longing in her eyes. She had wanted them to be better wizards than they were, and not rape her. Her pleading words, those expressive eyes bright with courage and the wish that his humanity would render her safe.

It had been, of course, beyond his control. He had played his part well with his crude and lecherous behavior. A lot of his act had been for his audience, but part of it had been for his need to dehumanize her and to distance himself from the task at hand. She was a Muggle, and while that certainly helped him justify his actions, she was also practically a child. Despite her unfortunate heritage, he couldn't help but see her as an innocent. She had been a virgin, no less, which only increased his disgust with the whole situation.

When he had taken her, when he had stolen her innocence, it had made him physically ill. Lucius had not expected to react in such a way, but it was those damned eyes. He had ignored the pleas of many victims in his checkered past, for words really had no effect on his resolve. This had been different, however, and that damn mirror gave him no choice. Not to mention his father's portrait, which had enjoyed the show with leering eyes.

As soon as the act was finished, Lucius had put on a cold mask of indifference and quickly made his way to his bathroom where he could be alone and regain his bearings. A splash of cold water on his face helped. After only a couple minutes, he was able to get his mindset back in the game enough to return to the bedroom and ignore the outrageous display his son was bestowing. Her cries and humiliation were tuned out completely as he set about performing some mindless tasks about his suite – picking up his robes, putting some books away, contemplating a Ministry meeting the next day. That was, until Draco had yelled out Lucius had given Hermione her first orgasm ever. He had never been so horrified by a statement in his life. The girl had never known any sexual attention? Even from her own hand? It was almost unbelievable, and the sick feeling returned, and he struggled to blot out the rest of her humiliation.
His ability to ignore what was going on around him only deteriorated from there. The abuse his son inflicted on the girl had started out simply as a shock – but now? The thought of his son harming the girl was infuriating.

Hermione was correct this morning – Draco would be back, and soon. The bond would give him no choice. Having company tonight would hopefully distract them both from that disturbing inevitability.

Deciding to let her sleep, Lucius crept out of the room and headed for his chambers, not aware of his wife who was watching him with knowing eyes.

Upon entering his suite, Lucius emptied his pockets. Grabbing his book, he planned to head back down to his study until it was time to dress for dinner.

"Lucius, darling."

Lucius' eyes shot up to his wife's portrait. "Narcissa, flower. How are you today?"

"I am quite well, thank you." He smiled at her and made to leave his room, but she spoke again, causing him to pause. "The Muggle-born girl is proving to be a welcome addition to the manor. She provided the ladies with hours of entertainment on the piano today. Despite being Muggle-born, most of them are warming to her and are accepting her presence. I must admit, she has a certain charm and flare about her."

Narcissa contemplated mentioning the astounding verbosity of Willow. Ultimately, it was a concern that it would not continue, however. To save Lucius from subsequent disappointment, if that were the case, Narcissa kept quiet. Willow’s death had been devastating for Lucius. He had lost his mother at a tender young age and a vulnerable time in his life. For all his claims that it was a good thing his mother never spoke, Narcissa knew it tore him up inside that Willow’s portrait was such a shell of her former self. Lucius had even wondered if the charm had not worked properly, rendering her without the ability to speak. She'd spoken some random thoughts over the years, though, which made Lucius believe she was silent by choice.

Narcissa was determined not to treat Draco the same way. She spoke to him daily when he was in the manor, and even though he didn't respond, or even look her, she knew he heard her. The boy was grieving, and he was angry at her for leaving him. One day he would forgive her.

Narcissa's focus moved back to Lucius when he spoke.

Lucius sighed heavily, frustrated that Hermione had not yet opened to him about the piano. "Well, I am pleased she has proved to be … entertaining."

"Lu, what is it? You have not been yourself of late. Is it still the Muggle-born girl? Are you still fighting your physical desire for her? Still feeling guilty about her age?"

Lucius swallowed and looked up at his wife. "I am … adjusting. It is becoming more palatable." That was all he would share for now. There was no need to disclose to his wife he was developing feelings for the girl, even if they were simply feelings of concern for her well-being and a desire to see her happy and safe.

Narcissa watched the wheels spin in her husband's head. She knew him so much better than he gave her credit for. When in the world was he going to admit he was falling for the girl.

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Narcissa had always made a slightly late arrival when they entertained guests, wanting to make a
grand entrance. She had been beautiful, but she had also been vain. She had relished the adoration and attention an entrance delivered just the right way would inspire. The simple truth was, men and women both had found Narcissa captivating and charming, so she had gotten away with it. Lucius had hated it, however, finding it rude and clearly obvious as to what she was doing.

Therefore, when Lucius checked on Hermione approximately twenty minutes before their guests were to arrive, he was pleased to find her dressed and ready. Her gown was beautiful and she looked radiant.

Hermione felt a blush heat her cheeks when Lucius took a long moment to take in her appearance, his eyes raking up and down her body. When Tinny dressed her this evening, she had found herself imagining his reaction. The dress was simple, but elegant and sexy as well. It was a floor length black number that hugged her curves to her hips and had a short train. The special part of it, however, was that it was of a choker collar design that left her shoulders and back bare. The collar portion of the dress was studded in aurora borealis crystals that caught every flicker of candle light. There was an oblong cut out from just under the collar to just between her breasts that gave a hint of cleavage. She felt … well, she felt bloody gorgeous, and Lucius' actual reaction far surpassed her imagination.

After a few moments of heated silence, he cleared his throat. "You look very lovely, Miss Granger," his tone was a bit rough and she felt a smile pull at one corner of her lips.

"Thank you, Mr. Malfoy," she answered demurely, dropping her gaze in her modesty. She grabbed the black lace shrug that Tinny had suggested for extra warmth and slipped it on.

"Come, we need to be downstairs when they arrive." Lucius held his hand out to her and when she softly took it, he felt warmth flush over him. He looked at her, noticing a slight flush to her complexion, and wondered if she had felt it as well.

They had only been in the study for a moment before Bilby announced the arrival of Severus Snape and Ginevra Weasley.

While the first few minutes had been awkward, the four became a bit more comfortable by the time Bilby served the drinks.

This time, Ginny was instructed by Severus to sit on the sofa, next to Hermione, while the men sat in the matching wing-back chairs closer to the mantle. Hermione and Ginny sat quietly as, once again, the conversation between the men turned to Voldemort and politics.

Hermione looked at her friend and whispered, "Ginny, how are you?"

Ginny smiled softly at Hermione. "I'm well...I'm...happy." Her words were hesitant, as though she were ashamed.

Hermione was surprised. Happy with Snape?

Hermione smiled in return, looking curiously and discreetly at her former professor. In truth he looked … good. His color had improved, and he was no longer so pallid. He had a pleasant expression, his constant scowl gone. He laughed at something Lucius had just said, which Hermione had entirely missed.

She looked at Lucius, finding him laughing as well. It was surreal, she bound to Lucius and Ginny to Snape. Looking back at Ginny, Hermione's jaw fell when she saw how Ginny was looking at Snape. Hermione had only ever seen Ginny look at one other wizard with that gleam in her eyes – and that
had been Harry. Ginny was in love with Snape?

Hermione sipped her drink, slightly shaken. How could Ginny feel this way? Towards Snape? The man who was responsible for this disgusting bond. The man who played both sides in the war, simply to save his own skin. He clearly didn’t really care that the light lost.

*Don't be a hypocrite, Hermione.* Her own internal scolding brought her up short.

*No, it's not the same. I'm only trying to make the best of a deplorable situation. I'm not falling for Lucius Malfoy, for Merlin’s sake!*

Hermione suddenly felt tense and uncomfortable. It was the same way lying to herself always made her feel. *Am I lying?* She looked at Lucius, and found his eyes on her, watching her curiously. It was as though he were trying to read her mind. She knew he wasn't, she had been on the receiving end of his Legilimens and she knew what that felt like. Lucius looked away as he said something to Snape that she tuned out, still too lost in her own musings.

She was brought out of those musings when a soft hand draped over her own. She looked at Ginny, who was looking at her with concern. Ginny whispered, "Are you alright? You look pale."

Hermione smiled reassuringly at her friend. "I'm perfectly well, I'm just hungry and this wine is going to my head, that's all."

"Well, how about you? Are things better?" Ginny glanced over Hermione's face, clearly looking for evidence of more of the abuse that had been littered on Hermione's face during the last visit.

"Yes, Ginny. Much better. Please don't worry about me. I'm happy that you're happy."

Ginny's eyes welled slightly. "I miss… I miss…"

Hermione looked at her friend knowingly. "I know you do. I miss them all, as well. Your family, Harry and Ron … our friends."

Ginny nodded, conveying that Hermione said it perfectly.

Hermione sighed. "We have to make the best of what life gives us, Gin."

"What are you lovely ladies talking about over there?" Hermione looked at Lucius, finding his expression to be soft but curious.

Deciding a touch of honesty in this façade of a get-together was necessary, Hermione responded. "We were discussing how we missed our family and friends and how we find that we are lucky to be alive and safe and together." Okay, so maybe she embellished their conversation a tad, but it was what she was feeling and it needed to be said. She and Ginny were captives, but they were alive, and they were safe … at least for now.

Snape grinned and lifted his glass to her. "Spoken like a true Hufflepuff."

Hermione lifted her brow. "Or, perhaps we were discussing the locations of your wands, and the proximity of the door or the floo."

Snape laughed. "Ah, that's more like the Gryffindor spirit."

Hermione cut him a deviant glance. "And then, determining there was risk to ourselves and a chance of failure or death, we ceased all our scheming." After a brief pause, she added, "Wouldn't want to
leave Slytherin out of the mix, now would we?"

Lucius let out a bark of a laugh. "Now, now, princess, there's no need to goad a viper. Use your head."

Hermione looked at Lucius. "Hmm, a touch of Ravenclaw from one of the greenest snakes I've ever met."

Ginny was staring at Hermione with a shocked expression, wonder in her eyes and her jaw practically in her lap.

"How doo you put up with her?" Snape asked Lucius with amusement.

Lucius grinned and looked back at Hermione, wondering if another witty response would fall from her lips.

Hermione looked from Snape to Ginny. "So, Ginny, is it true our dear former professor…"

Lucius wasn't sure if he was disappointed or relieved when Billy popped into the room. "Dinner is served," the elf announced, bowing so low his nose practically touched the ground.

A moment's pause had Snape and Hermione watching each other before he smiled as he stood. He held his arm out. "Allow me, Miss Granger." Hermione smiled and accepted his olive branch.

Lucius stood, offering his arm to Ginny and the four of them entered the dining room.

Hermione had to admit, the Malfoys knew how to entertain. The table was set beautifully. A white linen tablecloth draped the table to the floor. A statement arrangement of all white flowers drew the eyes to the center of the table. White roses, lily's, orchids, gladiolus, and tulips – as well as others Hermione didn't recognize – filled a large crystal bowl. The crystal bowl was larger than a punch bowl with several white beta fish swimming amongst the visible green stems. Black candles in a variety of heights littered the table. Their flames, when added to the dimly lit wall sconces, created dancing shadows throughout the room. A bright moon was visible through the windows, and added to the dramatic look. Hermione caught her own reflection in the mirror and found the sparkling crystals on the collar of her dress as well as the flowing, black material blended with the evening's table design beautifully. She secretly wondered if this was something Tinny had done on purpose. Perhaps this was something Narcissa had required of the elf.

The table had been downsized so it was merely huge and not gargantuan. The men held out the chairs for their companions so that they sat across from each other and then the men followed suit.

An appetizer of chilled oysters on the shell was followed by an entrée of chicken and scallops in champagne butter with delicious roasted carrots and asparagus.

Lucius watched Hermione's eyes light when she noticed the scallops and her obvious enjoyment of her dinner was a delight. Snape seemed to be of the same mindset where the Weasley girl was concerned. The gentlemen allowed the girls to talk freely during dinner. It should not have surprised Lucius when Hermione inquired how the Hogwart's house elves were faring. She took a particular interest in an elf named Kreacher. Lucius vaguely remembered Draco had spoken years ago of her obsession with freeing house elves.

She had just put the last bite of a scallop in her smiling mouth – after responding to a teasing Ginny – when Draco stormed into the room, obviously furious for God only knew why. "Sorry to interrupt your little party," he sneered.
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Chapter Fourteen

Chapter by Snowblind12

A huge hug and shout out to the amazingly talented LissaDream. She deserves all the praise for this chapter as she is the one who wrote it! She and I discussed what we wanted to happen in this chapter and she brilliantly stroked it to paper...or computer screen.. ;) Please give her lots of much deserved praise! Love you, Lissa!

The next update won't be for a few weeks. Lissa and I are going to try to focus on The Affair for a bit. It's been shamefully neglected due to Master Mine and World Not Fit taking all our time. We also have all that surrounds Christmas and New Years upon us as well as jobs, school and children.

Thanks to all who comment :)

Chapter Fourteen

She had just put the last bite of a scallop in her smiling mouth after responding to a teasing Ginny when Draco stormed into the room, obviously furious for God only knew why. "Sorry to interrupt your little party," he sneered.

Lucius watched with saddened eyes as her beautiful smile froze on her face and the laughter stuck in her throat. His heart ached as her eyes clouded with fear. She looked to him briefly, and he saw the understanding on her face. She knew he could do nothing. How he wished he could do something.

She quickly took a sip of her water to wash down her food.

"Up, Mudblood," Draco commanded. "Let's have a repeat of Sunday, yes?" His voice was laced with venom.

Ginny looked like she was about to say something, and Hermione raised her hand. "Ginny, it's okay," Hermione said firmly as the bond forced her up from her chair.

"Damned right it's okay." Draco seemed a bit surprised when Hermione walked towards him without being commanded.

"Let's go to your room, Draco," she suggested softly. There was the briefest of hesitations as Draco processed her words, and then his hand was in her hair, roughly twisting it and jerking her head back. She let out a whimper, her hands raising to try and hold her head steady as her eyes flew to take in Snape and Ginny's dumbfounded expressions. "Please, Draco. Let's go elsewhere," she pleaded.

"What's the matter, Mudblood? Don't feel like putting on a show today? You seemed just fine with it on Sunday...or is it just my father you like to perform for?" He sneered at her while yanking her lace shawl off her shoulders.

Hermione felt panic rise in her. She had told herself this would happen. She had known he was coming – it had been over three days at this point. Why hadn't she considered other people being involved, though? She turned pleading eyes on Lucius when Draco pushed her up to the table and forced her to bend over it.
"Draco," Lucius drawled, taking a sip of his wine. "Take her out, I have guests."

"Father…" Draco began to protest, but Lucius raised his voice and cut across him.

"I said out, Draco. Anywhere but this room." His tone was dismissive, but Hermione knew he was doing his best to help her. The evil, malicious eyes of Abraxas Malfoy were watching their every move.

Draco mumbled some expletives as he hauled her back into an upright position. She wasn't able to stop the pained whimper that left her throat, he was quite literally ripping hair out of her head.

"Go to the study." Draco shoved Hermione and Lucius watched with guarded eyes as she stumbled before she was able to catch herself. Once she had, she squared her shoulders and raised her chin. Overwhelming pride and protectiveness filled him along with the sorrow he felt because he couldn't put an end to what was about to happen.

"Put a silencing charm on the study, Draco," Lucius commanded as Hermione quietly moved through the door. Draco threw a glare at Lucius over his shoulder before slamming the door hard behind him.

Lucius couldn't help but flinch. Inside, his stomach roiled. After what he and Hermione had shared that morning, this was unbearable. His sense of her anguish was heightened. She had enjoyed his touch, had returned his kisses and affection. For the first time he had felt she was actively participating. That perhaps she was coming to care for him the way he cared for her.

He realized he had been quiet for too long, and took a moment to take in the dinner table. They had almost finished the main course. Dessert was next, and he had learned over the last few days just how much Hermione enjoyed her sweets. He would wait to see if she would return.

"Coffee or tea? We'll have dessert when Miss Granger can join us again." His tone was calm and cool, and he wanted to defend himself when Ginny threw him a venomous glare.

Suddenly, there was a crash from the study accompanied by a shriek of alarm that tapered into a groan of obvious pain. Lucius' eyes slid shut as his heart clenched. Of course, his worthless son hadn't put up the silencing charm as Lucius had demanded.

Ginny jerked in her chair and Lucius observed in fascination as Snape settled a gentle, but warning hand on her wrist.

"Draco, please!" They could hear Hermione beg, her voice quavering with unshed tears. "Let's go to your room, there's no need to ruin everyone's dinner. They don't want to hear –"

The obvious sound of flesh meeting flesh in a heavy-handed blow reverberated through the closed door and was followed by a choked feminine sob along with his son's voice spewing indistinguishable insults. Lucius sighed heavily − embarrassed and angry and fearful for the girl that was starting to mean so much to him. Even though it nearly killed him, he stood from his seat and pulled out his wand. Pointing it at the door of his study, he whispered. "Silencio." Hermione would be even more mortified if they heard the entire interlude.

When Lucius returned to his seat, he was surprised to see Snape tenderly wiping tears from Ginny's face as he murmured in her ear. Lucius averted his gaze, feeling as though he were intruding on a very private moment. Like a witness to a terrible accident, however, he couldn't help but glance back just as the Potions Master pressed an affectionate kiss to the girl's forehead. Was Snape in love with her? Those were dangerous waters to be treading − Lucius did not envy his friend if he was. He
quickly glanced around the portraits, confirming the coast was clear. He would need to warn Snape.

On the other side of the door, Hermione cradled a stinging cheek and tried to stop the swell of tears from slipping down her face. "Please just tell me what you want from me, I will comply," she said in a voice shaky with tears. "You don't have to be so rough."

Draco snorted cruelly. "You think I'm going to buy that shit, Mudblood? I'm gone three days and my father has suddenly taught you your place? I don't think so, you're playing at something." He was suspicious of her new behavior, and she supposed she couldn't blame him. "Strip!" he snapped.

Even without the bond, Hermione would have complied immediately. She didn't understand why he was so angry – surely this fury should have waned by now? It's not like she was still a novelty to him. She slipped out of her heels and undid the snaps at the back of the collar on her dress before slipping it down over her body and stepping out of it. She draped it across the nearest chair, so it wasn't in a puddle on the floor.

She was not wearing knickers because she was still under the command that she wasn't allowed. The dress was backless, so she also did not have a bra on. She stood in nude colored thigh-high stockings and a cream lace garter belt with straps. The bracelet and earrings Tinny had picked out sparkled in the dim light of the fire that crackled in the hearth.

Hermione raised her chin when Draco simply stood and stared at her for a moment. She would not let him intimidate her into hiding or cowering in front of him. It was the only saving grace she had with him – he was physically attracted to her. If she was careful, she might be able to use that to her advantage. She knew what was coming, what he had to do to maintain the bond, but she would be the one to push this scene forward, to get it over with.

"Where do you want me?" she asked in a clear, strong voice. His eyes met hers in surprise before they clouded with anger and his lips curled up in a malicious smile.

"Since you're so eager, my little Mudblood whore, how about you do the work tonight?"

He stalked across the room while undoing his belt and slid his pants down his hips before sitting in the chair nearest the fire. His erection was hard and jutted straight out of his lap and he crooked a finger at her. "Come climb up and show me what my father has taught you the last few days."

Hermione felt bile rise in the back of her throat as the bond kicked in and forced her to move across the room. After this morning with Lucius, after feeling wanted and pleasured, this was unbearable. She didn't want this, but had no choice. Using the back of the chair, she climbed into her nemesis' naked lap.

"Take my cock in your hand and line it up with your little cunt," he sneered, and her body automatically moved to comply. She was not ready, not even a little moisture would ease his passage into her. He seemed to realize this when she pressed the tip of his erection to her small entrance. He sighed heavily and pushed her away. "Touch yourself, get yourself wet. Stop when you're ready" His expression was bored, and Hermione's cheeks flamed with embarrassment and disgust as her fingers automatically slid down to play with her clit.

She'd had enough experiences at this point to know what felt good and what didn't. Lucius felt good – made her feel good – and his ministrations had helped her discover her own body. Draco was not good to her, everything he did ended with her in pain. After a few minutes of fondling herself so she was wet, she stopped. Hermione cringed when he dipped his fingers roughly into her core to check for himself – it was so different from the tender touches of the morning. He grunted his approval and
grasped her hips, positioning her again. "Sit on my cock, Mudblood," he sneered at her. She was infuriated that he was making her – in essence – rape herself. She felt a tear slide down her cheek and seethed internally at her weakness. She needed to stop crying in front of him. It gave him a power over her she didn't want him to have.

"Fuck," he groaned quietly when he was buried to her hilt. "Ride me," he commanded, and Hermione's traitorous body complied. She rolled her hips, gagging when he groaned with pleasure. His mouth latched on to one of her bare breasts while a hand came up to grab and brutalize the other. It hurt, and she whimpered with the pain. He answered her non-verbal protest by biting her – hard. She jerked, trying to pull away and he flattened a hand on her mid-back to hold her close as he laughed and bit her again. Another tear streaked down her face. She turned away from him, refusing to watch and refusing to let him see her anguish. Instead, she found herself face to face with the leering, creepy portrait of Abraxas Malfoy. She was so startled for a moment that she lost rhythm and Draco's had cracked down on her ass.

"Faster, you little bitch," he ordered. "Grab the back of the chair with both hands and slam your hips down." Hermione couldn't help the sob that escaped at she complied unwillingly. Forcing her eyes away from the voyeuristic painting, she focused on the dancing flames of the fire instead. Draco continued to roughly palm and bite the tender flesh of her breasts. Her gasps were of pain, his were of pleasure. "That's it. My, my, Granger, you have gotten good at this." His breath was uneven, and he bucked his hips slightly to meet her tempo. "It's good you know your place, slut," he sneered. "Holes to fuck, pleasure to give," he snarled. "Did you think if you were a good girl, I'd be easier on you?" He grabbed her face in one hand and dragged it around to look at him. He held her stare while her body continued to unwilling pleasure his, daring her to fight with him. She wouldn't. She wasn't going to put herself in unnecessary danger anymore. "Please don't do anything to force my hand," Lucius had begged her. She would do as he asked.

"Answer me!" he commanded.

"Yes," she stated flatly, dropping her eyes even though he held her chin still.

He gave her a vile smile before letting her go. "Think again. Harder!"

Another broken cry left her as her body complied. It hurt, every thrust crashed against her cervix in an uncomfortable sensation. It hadn't hurt with Lucius except for the very first time, and even then, it had been only for a moment. She squeezed her eyes shut, panting with her efforts – when had her view of Lucius Malfoy become so positive? Draco's breathing grew increasingly ragged and she prayed his climax would take him soon. Her thighs were starting to burn, and she was fighting against a cramp in her calf.

"Faster, slut! Don't stop moving until I come." His hand cracked down on her ass again, making her let out a choked gasp as her body was forced to moved even more quickly. She was bitterly grateful when he grasped her hips and reared up into her. A strangled sound left his throat and she knew he had come. Her body responded by slowing gradually and finally stilling above him. It took effort not to collapse onto him – she was absolutely spent, gasping for breath while her muscles shook with fatigue.

"Get off," he growled at her, once his breathing had calmed. She scrambled to comply, happy to be rid of the feeling of him inside her. She winced as she lifted herself off him and cringed as she felt the rush of fluids down her inner thighs.

"Tell my father I said I'll see him in three days." She didn't look at him as he fixed his clothes and used the other exit of the study to leave.
Hermione gave herself ten minutes to calm before she redressed. She knew she was probably an utter mess, but had no way to fix her appearance. Her hair had come loose, and the roots were sweaty. She had most likely smeared her makeup with her tears. The only problem was, Lucius hadn't told her whether she could be excused, so she would have to go back to the dining room.

Doing her best to conceal her mortification, she slowly pushed open the door. Three sets of eyes, all concerned, looked up when she entered. It took a hard swallow not to burst into tears of shame. Suddenly, a blur of red hair was barreling at her and she was forcibly pulled into a bone crushing hug from Ginny Weasley. It was her undoing – she buried her face in her friend's neck and returned the embrace as she started to sob. The men at the table looked at each other for an uncomfortable moment. Lucius was the first to break away from their silent communication, scanning the portraits to see if he needed to put an end to the girls' affection. He was relieved to find his father gone and the only other, insignificant ancestor was dozing in his frame. The rest of the portraits were empty. It looked as though Abraxas had gone to report to the Dark Lord, so Lucius gave Hermione time to seek comfort from her friend.

Lucius returned his attention to his tea, all the while keeping the two girls who were clinging desperately to each other in his peripheral vision. Eventually, it was Snape who called an end to their embrace. Ginny was gently commanded back to the table and Hermione made her way to her seat next to Lucius.

"Let me see you," he directed her softly when she sat. His affection for the girl was threatening to spill out completely, he just wanted to pull her into his arms. She turned her face to his and he forced down the need to swear crudely. Her lip was split, her left cheek was already starting to swell with a bruise, and her hair was a mess. Quickly and kindly, he used his wand to mend her lip before adding a cooling charm to decrease the swelling under her eye.

"We'll get some bruise paste back in your chambers," he said softly, not unaware that Snape and Ginny were watching his every move with surprised fascination. Just as softly, he whispered a charm of Narcissa's that would set her hair right. "Is there anything else I can do?" he inquired, his voice was so quiet he was barely moving his lips.

Hermione leaned in and pressed her mouth against his ear, hiding her face behind his so their guests could not see her. She was embarrassed by her coming entreaty. "A Scourgify, please." Her voice trembled over her request and Lucius felt his eyes slide shut, trying to block out the emotional turmoil he was experiencing. He placed his wand along her thigh and silently cast the charm and was astounded when she rewarded him with a gentle kiss of thanks to his cheek before she pulled away.

Neither Lucius nor Hermione witnessed the silent communication that happened between the other couple as Snape and Ginny watched the interaction between Hermione and the older Malfoy.

"Dessert, Miss Granger?" Lucius raised his voice to normal conversation level as he met Snape's eyes, daring the man to say anything about healing his captive. Snape held his long-time friend's gaze, silently trying to communicate his approval.

"Yes, please, sir," Hermione answered, using her fingers to wipe the lingering moisture of tears off her face. "I apologize for the interruption of dinner," she addressed their guests and Lucius almost scolded her aloud for such a ridiculous proclamation. The fury that filled him was for his son, however. He would not embarrass her further even though she had nothing to apologize for – it was Draco who needed to come apologize.

Ginny's face revealed her own disgusted shock at Hermione's act of contrition, but it was Snape who answered, his voice deep and soothing. "No one here blames you for that interruption, Miss Granger. Lucius seemed to think you would have liked us to wait for you before we had dessert, and we were
happy to oblige."

Hermione gave Lucius a soft, grateful smile. "She likes her sweets," the elder Malfoy announced by way of explanation. He returned her silent thanks with a nod of his head. "Strawberry trifle tonight, Miss Granger," he told her and smirked when her eyes lit.

"Bilby!" he called. The elf appeared. "We are prepared for dessert." The elder elf snapped his fingers and the trifle appeared at each place setting. "Thank you, Bilby. That will be all." Bilby bowed wordlessly and Disapparated.

"Tea?" Lucius asked Hermione. She nodded while bringing a hand up to cover her mouth. She had already taken a bite of the trifle and one corner of her mouth curled with an apology for her eagerness. She was startled when Lucius added the exact amount of sugar and cream without asking her how she liked it. She glanced at Ginny, whose eyebrows were raised in amazement that, not only was Lord Malfoy serving his captive, but knew how she liked her tea. She felt heat rise to her cheeks. Lucius was being too kind, and Ginny and Snape were noticing. Hermione glanced around the room at the portraits and relaxed slightly when she found all but one empty, and that one occupant was sleeping.

"Draco told me to tell you he'll be back in three days," Hermione said softly, starting to feel the pull of the bond, and realizing she had forgotten to relay the message.

"Did he say anything else?" Lucius asked nonchalantly.

"No, sir."

Lucius asked after the satisfaction of the dessert to his guests. He was saddened that the night had taken such an uncomfortable turn – Hermione had been happy. They had been enjoying themselves immensely. It had felt...well, it had felt bloody good to feel normal. He noticed when Hermione finished her dessert.

"Would you like to be excused, Miss Granger?" he questioned. He was starting to know her too well; her body language was screaming her need to escape.

Large, grateful eyes met his and he was disheartened to see tears sparkling in them. "Yes, please, sir. I am sorry, I'm just so tired," she excused herself.

"Of course, you may go." Lucius responded understandingly. Snape and Ginny murmured their goodbyes as they all stood to see her out, and Lucius turned a blind eye when Ginny pulled the girl into one more, fierce hug. Hermione threw a last, grateful look to Lucius before exiting the room.

"Ginerva," Snape said after a moment of silence. "I would like to speak with Mr. Malfoy alone," he told the redhead. "Please wait by the floo in the entrance hall."

"Yes, sir," Ginny answered. "Thank you for the lovely meal, Mr. Malfoy. Your hospitality is appreciated." She dipped a slight curtsey.

"Good-evening, Miss Weasley," Lucius returned with a polite nod to see the young lady off.

"Has he been like that with her from the beginning?" Snape started their conversation with a quiet question. Lucius knew who they were discussing immediately.

"You saw that first night?" Lucius couldn't meet his friend's eyes and he absentmindedly played with his teacup.
"Yes…many of the inner circle were there," Snape said slowly. Lucius looked up into Snape's guarded features.

"I believe that's the kindest he's been to her." His tone was flat, and Snape looked momentarily disgusted before his features schooled again.

"She seems to trust you." It was a statement that could have just as easily been a question.

"We have an … understanding," Lucius said cautiously. "She submits, I take care of her injuries from my son."

Snape made a soft grunting noise and Lucius looked away to scan the portraits.

"I must tell you something," Lucius started. "This is not a threat, I do not want you to take it as such. You seem…protective…of Miss Weasley. She seems to have a little more independence with you than I would have thought."

Snape's tone had hardened when he replied. "What of it?"

"It is none of my business if you've come to care for the girl," Lucius was whispering, hoping beyond hope that he was radiating sincerity. "But I beseech you to be very careful when you are here. We are being constantly watched and reports are taken to the Dark Lord daily."

Snape's eyes widened infinitesimally, and, after a beat of silence, he gave a small nod. Lucius watched the Headmaster carefully; it looked as if he was trying to figure out how to say something. When he finally spoke, Lucius had to focus on controlling his features.

"And what about you, Lucius? Have you come to care for your … pet?" The dark man's silky tone was as reassuring as always, but Lucius' blood ran cold. He wasn't sure how far he could trust Severus Snape.

"That would be very stupid of me," Lucius responded carefully. "Wouldn't it?"

"Indeed."

Hermione made it up the stairs and out of the ear shot of those in the dining room before allowing herself to cry. By the time she made it to Lucius' suite, she was weeping uncontrollably. Humiliation was the biggest culprit to her emotions, but the second and third things causing her breakdown had been Lucius' kindness in front of someone he wasn't sure he could trust and Ginny's saddened affection. She stripped, throwing the gown she had been so enamored with into a heap. Its appeal had been utterly ruined for her in light of having to take it off to please Draco.

When she had been dressed in the gown this evening, she loved it. Lucius' reaction to it had made her favor it even more. It had felt very powerful to entice such a response from such a man. You're insane, you know? Feeling this way about him? He could never return your affections. He might care enough to treat you as a human being, he might desire you as a woman, but he will never see you as an equal. You're setting yourself up for disappointment.

Hermione stumbled to the bathroom, not even caring that Lucius might not want her to use his shower. She made the water as scalding hot as she could handle and scrubbed herself fiercely, trying to rid her body of Draco's touch. Her breasts ached from his sadistic torture of them and were riddled with bite marks. He had even broken skin in a couple of places. She was embarrassed to realize she would need to ask Lucius to heal them. After drying her body, she wrapped her dripping hair into a turban with a towel. She missed being able to use a wand to dry her hair. Hermione knew she could
call for Tinny, but she just didn't want to be fussed over – and the elf was good at fussing.

She forewent a nightgown in favor of her robe. It would be less awkward to ask Lucius to heal her breasts if she didn't have to remove a nightdress first. She could dress once he was done. Too tired to retrieve the bruise paste from her suite, she climbed onto what had become her side of the bed and curled into a ball with the Potions book she had taken from the Malfoy library (she had finished the Mayan runes book the day before).

This is how Lucius found her. Snuggled in bed, face still blotchy with the remnants of her tears, hair up in a towel, wrapped in her robe, and reading. His heart ached – he had so wanted her to have a good evening. He could kick himself for not factoring Draco into the equation.

He glanced around the room. When he only found Narcissa dozing in a frame, he approached her slowly. "Hermione?" he asked. Luminous brown eyes met his and he let go a deep, soul-weary sigh. "I'm so sorry." Neither noticed Narcissa's portrait jerk awake, her eyes going wide with her husband's apology.

"It's not your fault, Lucius," Hermione returned. "I knew it was coming – as did you. I told you I would weather his advances, and I will."

"I dislike how he treats you," Lucius admitted. He glanced around the room again to make sure they were still alone. "It is not how he was raised."

"I know you do, and I'm beginning to be aware that he wasn't raised this way," she whispered. "I'm grateful that I know it bothers you, it makes it easier to handle. I will be all right." There was silence for a moment and Lucius started to undress so he could get ready for bed.

"I used your shower," she said hesitantly. "I couldn't get there fast enough. I apologize if that was not okay."

"It's fine," he answered. "I don't mind." Another scan of the room confirmed Narcissa was still sleeping –only Narcissa knew she was pretending.

"Lucius?" Hermione yawned, and Lucius smirked as he glanced to her. He was down to just his trousers and was going to move to the bathroom to complete his routine.

"Yes, princess?" Narcissa's eyes flew wide and her eyebrows raised in shock at the endearment before she settled into her pretense again.

"I have some marks that I was hoping you could heal for me." The statement was hesitant and embarrassed, and Lucius felt his stomach knot.

"Where?" He moved to the bed and pulled himself onto it so he could sit next to her. She set her book down on the tall nightstand and sighed. She undid the sash on the robe and pushed it off her shoulders, baring her breasts to him.

A whoosh of angry breath blew through his nose as he took in the marred skin of her chest. He said nothing, not wishing to discomfit her further. Silently, he healed the marks with his wand before pointing it over his shoulder at the hidden door to the mistress suite. "Accio bruise paste," he called. A moment later, the jar slapped into his outstretched hand. He rubbed a dollop of it onto her bruising cheek and gestured for her to do the same to her chest.

She was quiet as she did so, and he cursed himself for his rising libido as he watched her smooth the cream over her breasts.
"Hermione, are you okay?" Lucius knew it was a ridiculous question, how could she be okay? He shifted himself on the bed until he was sitting next to her when she started to sniffle, and pulled her into his arms. He dragged the towel from her head when she willingly snuggled into his side and stroked her damp hair, trying to help her calm.

"I showered the moment I got back," she admitted. "I just…I just had to get him off me, you know? To wash him away. It doesn't seem to have made a difference, though. I just feel so…dirty. Used." A sob left her then, and Lucius' stomach clenched at the sound of her misery. He slipped his fingers under her chin and raised her face to look at her.

"You're not, Hermione," he said softly. "I know this is awful for you…I hate it, too. You were very brave tonight. I was…I was impressed with you. You're handling everything exceptionally well these last few days."

"You do realize that it's because of you, right? You're the reason I'm coping." The wet sound of his tongue unsticking from the roof of his mouth gave away his surprise. Hermione's gaze dropped to his lips before moving back to his eyes.

Did she want him to kiss her again? Oh, he wanted to. Maybe…maybe he could erase the effects of his son? He brought a hand up to cup her face and gave a small sigh when she nuzzled into it. He was unable to stop himself, and covered her lovely lips with his, his pride rising when she gave little whimper and returned the kiss with enthusiasm.

Gods, he loved kissing her. She was incredibly responsive. As he deepened the kiss, he realized it was the first time his tongue was tangling with hers. It was an extraordinary experience that heightened with the tentative touch of her own tongue seeking his. Lucius' fingers moved to knot themselves in her hair and he let out a low growl of approval when her hands tentatively slid over his naked chest. Slowly, but deliberately, he eased himself down onto his back, pulling her with him so she lay partially on top of him. He laced both hands into her long tresses, holding her to him while he kissed her deeply, encouraging her to explore as well.

When one, small, trembling hand curved around his jaw, tentatively seeking out his hair, he groaned against her lips. This only seemed to give her courage and she raked her nails into his hair, against his scalp. He released her face and slipped one arm down and around her waist, rolling her to her back so he now covered her. His mouth left Hermione's, and Lucius pressed open mouthed kisses to the swell of her breasts. Her breath caught, and he looked up at her. She was watching him with heavy-lidded eyes, and her lips were slightly parted.

Hermione's cheeks were flushed pink and her mind started to work in overdrive. Why do you want him so? What will it change? So, Lucius is no longer forcing himself on you. So you enjoy his touch. Okay…but you were still raped this evening. You think more sex will change that? Make it better?

A different voice chimed in, giving her pause and making her eyes sting with tears. His touch can erase Draco's. His gentleness can take away the torture of Draco's roughness. Draco fucks to hurt you, Lucius is careful and kind and does his best to please you.

She found her voice. "You," she whispered. "I just want you."
His eyes turned liquid, smoldering like molten mercury and he reared over her, capturing her mouth again, his tongue delving deep. She couldn't stop herself, she moaned into his kiss while lifting her head off the bed to try and get closer to him. Hermione trailed her hands down the hard planes of his back until they met the waist band of his pants. Curling them into claws, she lightly scratched her fingernails up his spine. A low growl escaped him, and he ripped his mouth away to look at her properly. Hermione watched him back boldly, telling him with her eyes that she wanted him. Slowly, he divested her of her robe. Pulling the tie, he slipped the soft raiment off her shoulders while allowing her to pull her arms free. The, he reached for his belt, but was startled when small, cool hands covered his.

Hermione sat up, her heart pounding hard when she covered his hands, indicating she wished to undress him. If he was surprised by her gesture, he didn't show it. He sat up on his knees as she slid the leather through the buckle and then tugged to pull it out of the loops. Dropping the belt to the floor, she reached to undo the buttons of his fly. He helped her pull the fabric over his hips and raised his legs, so they could remove the garment completely. She shimmied up to her knees as her hands tentatively explored the hardness of his stomach, skimming over the trail of golden hair that disappeared under the waist band of his undergarment. She then slid them back up to smooth over his chest and shoulders.

Lucius locked his jaw and squeezed his eyes tight, allowing her to explore. Realizing she had never had the chance before, it only seemed right to give it to her now. When her fingers trailed up the column of his neck before caressing his jaw, he opened his eyes to see her watching him carefully.

"Does that hurt?" she asked, confused by his pained expression. He sniggered incredulously, knowing his boxers were tented and secretly enjoying her tentative glances down before returning her eyes to his.

"No." His voice was gruff. "It feels very nice," he reached and snagged one of her hands with his, placing it flat on his chest before guiding it down to dip into the waistband of his underwear. "It would feel better if you continued down here," he raised an eyebrow suggestively and relished the crimson color that rose to stain her cheeks.

Emboldened by his answer and guidance, Hermione dropped her other hand to assist in the removal of his boxers, watching wide-eyed as his cock sprang free. Her mouth popped open audibly and she felt a deeper heat rise to her face. It was the first time she was getting a close look at him intimately. It was bigger than she had thought, and slightly larger than Draco, but otherwise looked much the same as Draco. She didn't know how she felt about that, so she swatted the thought out of her brain.

She lightly skimmed her nails down its length and felt powerful when the touch drew a hissing gasp from him. "Please use your hand to encircle it," he requested. Because it wasn't a command, she was able to move at her own pace, lightly taking his length in her palm and giving it a tentative squeeze, he groaned again. Hermione used the fingers of her other hand to touch the mushroom shaped tip of his erection, smearing the creamy drop of liquid that appeared at its tip.

"For the love of Merlin, Hermione." Lucius' voice was ragged, and she looked up at him with wide eyes. He read her look without her saying a word. "No, it doesn't hurt," he assured her. "Feels too bloody good." He reached and gripped her chin, pulling her face back to his in another searing kiss. She hummed against his mouth in appreciation as his hands skimmed down her stomach and into her sex, parting her folds and finding her excited. "Fuck," he said against her lips before crowding into her space and pushing her back to the bed.

Once she was supine, he knelt between her legs. "Did you like it when I put my mouth on you this morning?" he asked huskily.
She only paused a moment before she breathed out, "Yes."

"Good," he smoothed his palms up her inner thighs, gently guiding her legs apart to open her sex to him. His mouth watered to taste her again, and he didn't hesitate, just dropped his lips to her belly and laved his tongue down her pubis into her slick folds. Her gasp shot straight to his prick and he watched with increasing pleasure as her fingers twisted into the sheets next to her hips. He delved lower, fucking her with his tongue, making her squirm and pant.

"Ooh, Gods," she whimpered and then she seemed to lose her inhibition. Her hands tangled into his hair, pulling him closer. Lucius growled and slid his hand up her thigh to slip two fingers into her pussy as he moved his mouth to her clit. Little moans were snarling in her throat and her legs trembled as her fingernails dug into his scalp – and he loved it. Her response was just so…free.

Lucius readjusted her, helping her slide her legs around his shoulders as he worked his tongue faster. Hermione's breaths came in wilder, more frantic pants and she arched, her thighs clamping around his head.

Bloody, fucking, hell! She was losing herself and it was making Lucius' libido roar. He curled his fingers, knowing this was a fail-safe way of make her come – and she did, wonderfully. "Uungghh!" she cried out, her hands leaving his hair to slam down onto the mattress as her torso rolled and jerked under his unforgiving ministrations. He continued to work her clit until she was gasping with the overwhelming pleasure and attempting to pull away from him.

"Oh, fuck, ah, ah!" she exclaimed, shocked. Her voice was deep and throaty with desire. He let her clit go with a loud pop before releasing a soft chuckle and nipping his way up her slender body. Pausing at her breasts, he gently and lovingly gave them some affection after their ruthless mauling earlier in the evening. She mewled and writhed and reached for him, pulling on his biceps. She only calmed when his mouth settled over hers.

Passion. His mind screamed. She's passionate – have you ever been with someone this passionate? He knew the answer, it was no. No, he had never been with someone so passionate. Everything she did, she did with fire – including sex.

Lucius lifted Hermione's hips and lined himself up with her entrance, all the while kissing her. He pulled his face back, though, when he began to push into her. He wanted to see her expression, and it did not disappoint. Her eyes were on is, blazing cinnamon alight with heat and desire. Her eyes widened and rolled up, and her bottom lip caught in her teeth as he claimed her for his own. It was exquisite.

He slid his hands under her back and pulled her up as he sat back on his haunches, changed their position dramatically as he sunk even more deeply inside of her, nudging her cervix.

Her arms came up and encircled his shoulders and her gasp of surprise turned into a guttural moan as her fingernails bit into his deltoids. "Fucking hell, princess," he groaned, letting his hands slide down her back to encircle her small waist. He let her find purchase with her knees on the outside of his thighs before rolling his pelvis into hers, swearing when her muscle tightened around his cock.

"You're a goddess," he breathed into her ear before helping her find a rhythm to satisfy them both. Then he dropped his mouth to her shoulder, nipping at the sensitive flesh, making her head fall to the side as she whimpered.

Hermione's body felt electrified with sensation. Everything that had hurt before positively sang in delight with this man. He guided her hips and his length slid against that spot inside of her that was pure heaven. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and daringly brought her mouth to the
underside of his jaw, suckling the skin there the same way he was working his magic over her shoulder and collar bone.

He crushed her more tightly to his chest with an audible grunt at her tender attention, and her nipples rubbed against his chest hair deliciously. She was going to come again. She told him this time.

"I'm so close, please don't stop," she begged. Tears pricked her eyes for entirely different reasons when, instead of answering her, he pulled her mouth to his and kissed her desperately. His hands splayed flat across her upper back and he held their upper bodies still for their oral exploration as their lower bodies desperately mated, seeking release.

She ripped her mouth away from him, needing to breathe as her second climax rolled through her like thunder. "Oh, Lucius!" she sobbed, shocked with the sensations she was feeling. Her whole body trembled almost violently, and she was so distracted by the whole experience, she almost missed the fact that he came with her, grunting as he buried his face in her neck.

Lucius was undone by this witch. What had started out as a way to comfort had turned into something completely unexpected and overwhelming. He hid his emotion and unrest by swallowing his cries of passion and burying his face in the girl's hair as he thrust through their combined orgasms, feeling her muscles grip him at the same time her nails dug into his back and his name fell from her lips.

Desperate to keep himself hidden from her, he slid his hands from her upper back by moving one down around her waist and one up into her hair, pulling her into a tight embrace. He held her while they caught their breath and he took her weight gladly as she melted into him, her cheek resting against his shoulder.

When Lucius calmed, he had every intention of moving Hermione away from him and making an excuse to hide in the bathroom until he could collect his shattered thoughts. Then she surprised him again by pulling away first. She looked at him for the briefest of moments before reaching up and settling her mouth over his.

The kiss was sweet and backed with emotions that were in as much uproar as his own. It helped him relax, and his arms slowly loosened around her. She slipped off of his lap, undoing their joining, and he allowed her to guide them back to laying on the bed. Lucius broke their kiss as he settled onto his back and welcomed her when she curled into him. He didn't even remember falling asleep.

Hermione's body was singing with the afterglow of their lovemaking, and while Lucius dropped to sleep quickly with her held in his naked embrace, she couldn't seem to calm her mind. She needed to play the piano, ached for it. She had become very attached to the emotional output playing the instrument was giving her.

After carefully extracting herself from his embrace, she moved to pull on a floor length nightgown before wrapping herself in her robe for warmth. Fifteen minutes later, she was seated at the Erard, warming up with scales and trying to decide what she'd like to play. She was even toying with the idea of some modern pop music, but started with the classical that she knew the portraits had come to enjoy. Beethoven being one of her favorite artists, she started the gentle tones of his Sonate Pathetique. The tender mood was set with the double baseline, she loved the constant movement of the right hand in this piece. She found herself humming along with the melody when the piece moved into treble clef and her body started moving along when the steady sixteenth note rhythm took over. Everything calmed again when the piece slid back into double bass. She was truly lost, and even the whispers of the portraits looking for Narcissa to go retrieve Lucius were not heard as the intensity of the piece picked up.
Lucius was only slightly startled to be woken from his heavy, sated sleep by Narcissa calling for him lightly. He rolled, yawning, to find his young bedmate gone. "She's playing?" he asked quietly of his dead wife.

"She is." Narcissa's voice sounded a bit smug and he looked at her questioningly, but could hardly make her out in the darkness of the room. Less than five minutes later, he entered the foyer to silence. Figuring she must be between pieces, he silently conjured a chair and sat in it to await her next decision.

It floored him when she started it, as he recognized it instantly as an insanely difficult piece of music to play – Chopin's *Fantasie Impromptu*. The opening baseline was quickly joined with an allegro treble line that was made up entirely of sixteenth notes. So impressive was the opening display he could hear the portraits talking excitedly from the hallway. How he wished he could watch her play this…he could just imagine the sway and rhythm of her lithe body. Especially as the piece moved into the moderato cantabile section of the piece, slowing and pulling out the melody.

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. The young woman took his breath sometimes, and this was one of them. The rolling twelve note baseline was flawless and moved fluidly from note to note as the top was played with deep feeling and contentment. He was almost startled when it moved back into the fast and poignant sixteen-note melody that monopolized the upper registers of the keys. The song flowed chromatically through the notes until the decrescendo and ritard pulled one into a lull as the melody was played through the bass hand to the heavy, trilled chord at the very end.

His breathing was short at the beauty of it, even though his body felt relaxed and peaceful. He found himself eagerly awaiting her next piece, but never expected what she was about to give him.

He did not recognize the slow flow through an arpeggiated introduction. But it was when a clear, cool, and pretty voice met his ears, he almost fell out of his seat. There was an audible intake of breath from the portraits, who were obviously as stunned by this turn of events as he was.

*When your day is long, and the night*
*The night is yours alone.*
*When sure you've had enough…*  
*Of this life…*  
*Hang on…*

Her voice was lovely. Not stage-performance worthy, but nice. A voice that would be easy to be proud of when entertaining guests – clear, on key, and emotive. He found himself wondering if there was anything this girl *couldn't* do. Once he was able to get over the fact that she was singing, he began to listen to her song choice.

*Sometimes everything is wrong.*  
*Now it's time to sing along*  

*When your day is night alone*  
*If you feel like letting go*  
*If you think you've had too much*  
*Of this life…*  
*Hang on…*

He swallowed hard, realizing she was attempting to comfort herself. *When you think you've had too much of this life…hang on.* Was he giving her enough to hang on to?

He silently cursed Draco again, wishing there was something…anything he could do to convince his
son to stop treating her the way he was.

'Cause everybody hurts,
Take comfort in your friends.
Everybody hurts...sometimes.

Sometimes...

When she finished singing, the piano playing paused again. He heard Hermione laughing a bit with the portraits, who were probably complimenting her. He wished again that she would share this with him, he wanted to watch her while she played…while she sang. Lucius sighed when she started another familiar piece of classical music. He had more to think about, her choice of song gave him some things to consider. He was tired, he would leave her in peace to play. Tomorrow was a new day.

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Beethoven’s Sonate Pathetique

https://youtu.be/iCL5sHzlDOI

Chopin’s Fantasie Impromptu

https://youtu.be/75x6DncZDgI

Inspiration for R.E.M.’s Everybody Hurts:

Cover by Jasmine Thompson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWGL3SbhLDQ
Hermione shifted in her chair uneasily. She anticipated another visit from Draco at any time and to say she was on edge was a gross understatement. It had been six days since he had so ruthlessly taken her in the presence of Snape and Ginny at dinner the prior Wednesday. Then he had showed up again Saturday afternoon, but unlike other times, he had barely spoken a word to her. He simply stormed into the library and pulled her out of the window seat she was nestled in before flipping her around and lifting her skirt. He was finished and out the door in minutes. Compared to how he had brutalized and humiliated her all the other times, this time had been almost pleasant. It completely surprised her and left her confused. Better the devil you know than the devil you don't.

If there was one thing predictable about the young bastard it was that he was always sadistic, brutal, and hateful. While she had been relieved and thankful after he left her, now she was left wondering when he would show up and if he would be particularly nasty since he had been so easy on her on Saturday.

"What's the matter, Hermione?" Lucius asked as he peered over the corner of the morning paper. "You've barely touched your breakfast. Aren't you hungry?"

Hermione met his gaze and simply shrugged. "I imagine Draco will be arriving today. It has me nervous."

Lucius tossed the paper down while he watched her contemplatively. "I've been thinking about that. I'm going to have the wards alert you whenever he enters the grounds or the house. This way you at least have some warning."

Hermione was surprised. "You can do that? I don't have a wand."

Lucius sipped his tea and put down his cup. "It's not complicated and you don't need a wand. I already have the wards set to notify me when he arrives, or anyone else for that matter."

Hermione pushed her eggs around her plate. "Could you…I mean… would you mind setting the wards to let me know when you arrive as well?" Her voice was quiet and almost shy. She didn't sound like herself. She chanced a glance at him and found his expression one of surprise. Not wanting there to be any misunderstanding, she clarified. "It's…it's because I feel safer when you're around. I just like knowing you are here."

Hermione didn't notice his heavy swallow and she had no way of knowing the impact of her words on her older captor. Guilt, frustration, and no small sprinkling of pleasure washed over him as he leaned back in his chair watching her.
Guilt for being her keeper, guilt for what he was required to do to her on a regular basis, and huge
guilt for enjoying it.

Frustration that there was truly nothing he could do without putting himself or Draco in danger.

Pleasure that, despite everything, she wanted him around. How was that even possible? Sure, he
didn't beat her and brutalize her and, yes, they had enjoyed some pleasurable moments…in and out
of bed…but regardless, she should hate him. She certainly shouldn't like knowing he was around.

He watched as her caramel eyes darted quick peeks in his direction. Her bottom lip was sucked into
the caresses of her sweet mouth. He noticed a slight flush creep deliciously up her neck and over her
face, leaving her cheeks with a rosy glow. Almost like she was embarrassed. Could she be growing
to care for me? No, it was ridiculous. He was old enough to be her father. She was merely doing as
she had said; she was making the best of her situation and not fighting what she couldn't change.
That included him.

He cleared his throat gently, finally answering the lingering request. "Yes, I can arrange that for you
as well."

Her lip was promptly relieved from its confinement as she quickly turned to him and smiled – and it
was genuine. He knew it was. Sure, he had seen her smile and even laugh a few times, but it was a
rare thing. Many times, it didn't reach her eyes. This time, however, was one of those disarming
smiles… it caused his breath to hitch. When it started to fade as her attention moved back to her plate
and she picked up her fork, another idea came to him.

After a quick glance about the room, he said lightly, "I will promise you this as well. If I'm away
from the manor when he arrives, I'll come back promptly and check to be sure you are alright. Run
interference if he gets too – "

She looked back at him, her relief and surprise rendering her unable to stop herself from interrupting
him, "You will?"

He let out a heavy sigh before leaning back with a nod. His words were contemplative. "I regret he
does not listen to me as he used to, and my words seem to have little to no impact on him lately." He
swallowed. "You see, there is a hereditary…" He stopped himself. No, he wouldn't tell her. She
might say something to Draco and nothing good could come of that. "Never mind."

Before she could stop herself, she reached out and took his hand which was resting on the table.
"Thank you, Lucius."

The touch of affection startled him, and his eyes shot to her small and delicate hand.

Realizing her touch had been impertinent and probably not wanted, Hermione quickly pulled her
fingers away and grabbed her juice for a distraction and to hide her small flash of embarrassment.
Desperate to get past the awkward moment, she asked a question which had been puzzling her.
"Lucius, why was Draco not in school these past weeks? It's July first today, right? Shouldn't he
have just graduated?"

Still reeling from her touch and despite its brevity, pondering the loss, Lucius sipped his coffee to
reground himself. After a brief pause, he answered, "The Dark Lord instructed Severus to allow
Draco to skip school. He has barely attended since the battle in May. Instead, he took his NEWTs
early and has been focusing on tasks for the Dark Lord." Hermione didn't miss the disappointment in
his voice.
"Oh," she whispered, unable to contain her overwhelming frustration and jealousy. Draco was allowed to take his NEWTs, whereas she had spent her seventh year on the run. Now she was a bonded slave and would likely never graduate from school, much less take her exams. She felt ridiculous for caring at this point, but she did.

Lucius could see it on her face. He didn't need to be in her mind to know exactly what she was thinking. He hated to add insult to injury, but it was best her told her now. "Actually, there will be a graduation party here at the manor in a couple weeks. It will also be the next Death Eater induction ceremony. Several of Draco's friends will be here and will be sworn into the Dark Lord's service."

Her chocolate eyes flew to his grey. "Please tell me I won't have to attend! I couldn't bear it. Watching Draco and his friends strut around, feeling oh so important and self-righteous in their ridiculous servitude. Not to mention, freshly graduated and with their entire happy lives before them."

Hermione cringed at the spite and jealousy of her words. She should have kept that to herself. She looked down at her lap and took a deep breath before adding, barely above a whisper, "Sorry, that was…petty." After a second she peeked up at him again before looking back down at her napkin, mindlessly picking at a loose thread as she clarified, "It's just…nothing, save my friends and family, meant more to me than my education. I worked so hard to stay at the top of my year. To know that...to know that someone like Pansy Parkinson, who merely scraped by in her classes, will be a graduate and I won't." She made a disgusted sound. "It's just so unfair."

Lucius watched her thoughtfully as she took an angry sip from her juice after her outburst. His words were slow and cautious. "Perhaps...perhaps there is a way. I will have to talk to Severus...and the Dark Lord, of course." He took a quick look around, finding only his mother present amongst the portraits this morning. He kept his voice low, all the same. "Perhaps Severus could tutor you on what you missed your final year."

Hermione had perked up instantly with his words and where he was obviously headed with his thought process. She interrupted excitedly. "I've actually read all the seventh-year course material. I think...if I could merely have a little time to review..."

He held his hand up, causing her to stop talking. "I don't wish to give you false hope, Hermione, but perhaps if I went to the Dark Lord and told him you were becoming more...compliant and suggestable and that you had finally understood that it was best to accept the new ways of the world rather than fight it... Perhaps if I told him that what would push you over the edge to compliance would be permission to take your NEWTs... Well, he might allow it."

He added quickly, "However, we will have to work on your acting skills. He needs to believe you are coming around...and I shall have to start your Occlumency training."

She was practically bouncing in her seat. "Oh, Lucius! Would you? Oh, Merlin. Do you think it's possible?"

He could see the wheels of her mind spinning and had to resist the chortle that was threatening to erupt.

Her eyes were alight with a new sparkle he had not witnessed before when with complete earnest she added, "I'll work really hard on Occlumency – starting today. I'm sure your library has books on it. I'll start studying...after breakfast."

He smiled indulgently at her. "Yes, that would be a very good way to spend your time." He thought he heard what sounded like a disappointed sigh from behind him but, when he turned, all he saw was his mother's portrait. He shook it off. His mother hadn't spoken in over ten years, surely it hadn't
been her. He looked around once again, confirming their conversation hadn't been overheard by anyone faithful to the Dark Lord.

"Oh, I can't wait! I can't eat anymore. May I be excused to start my research?"

This time he did laugh. "Of course. You know where you are going?"

"Yes, thank you. Thank you, Lucius!" He was stunned stiff when she leapt out of her chair and flung her arms around him, giving him a quick peck on the cheek. Before he could snap out of it and react, she was flouncing out of the dining room with a huge smile on her face.

Lucius shifted uncomfortably as he made his way into Lestrange Villa, nodding his greetings to two lower-ranking Death Eaters who were guarding the entrance. It had been over a month since Voldemort had called a meeting of his inner circle – which he only belonged to because of his monetary value at this point. It had surprised Lucius when his Mark burned just as he had arrived at Malfoy Enterprises, a Tuesday afternoon summons was very much an oddity.

He entered the vast dining room and couldn't stop from glancing up at the cobwebbed chandeliers lit with stubby candles. The Villa hadn't been used in over two decades as Bellatrix had preferred their London Townhouse or Malfoy Manor to meet her comforts. Now that Narcissa was gone, and Lucius out of favor with the Dark Lord, Bellatrix had voiced her unwillingness to stay at Malfoy Manor (much to Lucius' delight) and had offered her husband's ancestral home to the tyrant. It appeared that it was taking longer than she had thought for the house elves to get the place in order. He wondered off-handedly if there were any house elves in the house who did not have scarred ears from frequent ironing.

Letting his gaze drift away from the dust and debris, Lucius took in the people who were sitting at the ancient, dark wood table. Voldemort was not yet present, but Snape, Bellatrix, and both Lestrange brothers took the four seats immediately to the left and right of the head of the table. Snape being on their Master's left and Bella on his right. Both were places of high honor and Lucius had sat there once upon a time. It was a title he had claimed with pride – now he found himself almost grateful to be just less than halfway down the table. He garnered much less attention in his new seat.

"Malfoy," Snape greeted upon seeing him and Lucius nodded politely in return. He took his place between Shafiq senior and Nott junior, acknowledging MacNair and Rowle across from him with a slight tip of his head.

Lucius couldn't help the growing curiosity of his son's mission when the seat next to him remained vacant past the allotted time of arrival. So deep in thought was he, that he didn't pay attention to or join any of the murmured conversations around him. He was startled out of his musings when his brothers and sisters stood at Voldemort's entrance, automatically standing himself.

Once the Dark Lord took his seat, Lucius followed suit with the rest of his brethren. He listened with half an ear as Voldemort discussed the puppets at the Ministry with the Death Eaters responsible for its control. Unwillingly, he found his thoughts turning towards a certain curly-haired brunette who was continuing to turn his world upside down.

An undetermined amount of time later, Lucius was startled when Dolohov was called to the head of the table.

"As you all know, my loyal subjects, is that Antonin is a fine spell creator. After the war was won and that insolent Potter boy put down, I set him to a task. This task was to create a spell to measure the magical ability of a witch or wizard. He has successfully completed his assignment. His job now
will be to test all Muggle-born captives and blood traitors. Only those who score high enough on the Magical Potency Scale will be allowed life. Those who score below the average witch or wizard will be terminated. Those who score above the average witch or wizard will have a much more… meaningful…life task to serve me."

Here the man paused, and Lucius had to suppress a shudder as his red gaze slid over those in his service. "Antonin, you may briefly explain."

Dolohov took a sure step forward and raised a small glass sphere. "This is a crystalized Elvin sphere. When the charm I created is aimed at it, the magical qualities of the Elvin glass collects and compresses the magic which then leaves a Potency Signature. It is a color scale, ranging from purple to pure white. My Lord has decided to call it the Magical Potency Scale, or MPS." The Russian man immediately took a step back, bowing to Voldemort.

"I will demonstrate," Voldemort purred, a wicked gleam in his eye. Dolohov nodded curtly and placed the sphere in his hand before his Lord on the table. Lucius watched with narrowed eyes as Voldemort made a double figure eight with his wand before hissing the incantation, "Magica Potentia!"

Many people at the table jumped, startled as a blast of crackly blue light shattered the room when the Charm hit the Elvin glass. The blaze dissipated quickly and left in the sphere was a rolling wave of dirtiest white with red at the edges. "Explain the scale," Voldemort demanded, his expression gleeful.

Dolohov quickly explained the MPS, which was a rainbow scale that started at cool colors and ended with brightest white. The darker the color, the more potent the witch or wizard on that aspect of the color scale. The most potent person tested thus far was the Dark Lord, himself, blazing red around a dirty white. Lucius' face darted over those of his brother's and sister's. Snape looked exceptionally intrigued and Lucius knew that Snape, like himself, would likely test his own Magical Potency at his soonest convenience just out of pure curiosity. It was a remarkable Charm.

"Antonin will begin testing all captives soon, as our holding cells are full to bursting and we need to clear the riff-raff that has no usefulness in our society," Voldemort said with a lazy wave of dismissiveness over the poor conditions of the Muggleborns. "Those of you who have captives that are still functioning will take a sphere and a copy of the Scale in order to test your captives. Make sure they use their own wand, which you should have in your possession unless they were damaged beyond repair. If this is the case, let Antonin know. A compatible wand is imperative to test true magical ability. You will label the sphere with their name and send it to Antonin here at Lestrange Villa."

There was a murmur of understanding. "Luciusss," he hissed unexpectedly. Lucius was able to keep his face smooth, even as his heartrate accelerated.

"Yes, My Lord," he answered with a regal tip to his head.

"You will stay."

"Yes, My Lord."

"Severusss, you will also stay."

"My Lord." The dark-haired man's agreement was clear in his statement.

"The rest are dismissed." Voldemort once again flippantly waved his hand with an air of boredom.

It took longer than normal for the room to clear as many had to stop with Antonin at the sideboard to
be given a sphere and a piece of parchment. Lucius joined the queue with Snape to collect the
supplies he would need to test Hermione. Once everyone had left, Snape returned to his chair and
Voldemort motioned for Lucius to take the now vacant seat to his right.

"How is Potter's Mudblood?"

"She is … as well as can be expected, My Lord," Lucius stated carefully. He briefly made eye
contact with Snape and found that, as always, his friend's face was stoic and devoid of all emotion.

"Explain your meaning," Voldemort demanded.

"She seems to be … opening … to me. I have allowed her use of the library and a few of the
recreational rooms. She has not made another attempt to take her own life, although that could be
because I used the bond to force her compliance."

For the first time ever, Lucius saw Snape lose his composure in front of Voldemort. "Granger
attempted suicide?" It was a flat statement, but the surprise…and perhaps a bit of panic?... was
evident in his black eyes very briefly before his mask of indifference slipped back into place.

Voldemort had been watching Lucius while Lucius had been watching Snape and he had missed the
slight emotional slip from the younger of the two men. Lucius was legitimately curious. "That
surprises you, Severus? A girl – a virgin girl, nonetheless – has been raped repeatedly and tortured
by two of the men she has most reviled. Don't you think she would prefer to die?"

Severus let a nonchalant shrug roll off his shoulders. "She never did seem the type before – I would
have pegged her as stronger."

"Interesting…" Voldemort trailed off momentarily before turning his scrutiny back to Lucius. "Why
do you think she did it? Severus knows the girl fairly well. He's had ample time to learn her
character. Her attempt to take her own life was…obviously…out of said character."

Lucius took a brief moment to collect his thoughts before answering carefully. "I believe the loss of
everyone she cares about is at the core of her depression, Master. However, it is my son's treatment
of her that torments her so. Perhaps, my Lord, if you suggested Draco be…for lack of a better
word…kinder to her…" He trailed off at the look of incredulity on Voldemort's face and hastened to
explain himself. "My roses are working better then Draco's … numerous … thorns. However, the
boy is strong willed and unwilling to treat her with any modicum of … kindness. Honestly, even
complete indifference would be better then what he does to the Mudblood."

He paused to swallow his uncertainty as Voldemort continued to look at him with thinly veiled
disgust at his suggestion. What were you thinking? Stupid, stupid man. "My Lord," he quickly
attempted to finish his explanation. "You did say 'roses or thorns, it matters not'. I am finding the
roses are much more to her liking. The thorns cause her anger – and wandless magic outbreaks – and
increased depression and thoughts of self-harm. My treatment has allowed me to gain a bit of her
trust." Just to be sure his ruse was believed, he offered a small and malicious smile as he added, "I
might have given the chit reason to suspect I actually care for her well-being. She in turn has latched
onto me like Devils Snare."

Across the table, Snape narrowed his eyes appraisingly at him, but Voldemort's expression had
smoothed by the end of his clarification. The next words had Lucius shoulders relaxing marginally
with relief.

"Allow Draco his fun, Lucius," Voldemort said somewhat dismissively. "He's been providing hours
of stimulation for the recruits, you know. He is quite the performer." Lucius saw a muscle near one
of Snape's eye twitch at the mention of "the recruits" being entertained and he knew Voldemort's words must be true. Snape was called to their Master's side much more frequently than he was – he was bound to know what was going on at Headquarters.

Lucius felt sick pooling in his throat. Hermione would be horrified to know that Draco's memories of her rape, torture, degradation, and humiliation were being used in such a fashion. He resigned himself to not telling her – it would be better for her state of mind. He pushed the thought away and moved to his next delicate topic.

"I have come across a way to, perhaps, gain more of her confidence, My Lord," Lucius started cautiously. Voldemort nodded for him to continue. "She recently mentioned how...sad," here he smirked, pretending he didn't care the least about her feelings, "she is not to have been able to take her NEWT examinations this spring. Perhaps this is something we could arrange? A show of good faith for her cooperation?"

Lucius half expected Voldemort to torture him on the spot for even suggesting letting a Mudblood earn Wizarding credentials, but the man just gave him another of his terrible smiles. "You are getting ahead of my plans, my dear Lucius. Tell the girl I will think on it. Now tell me...has Potter's Mudblood displayed anymore wandless magic since the last?"

At this, Snape's eyebrows rose in intrigue and he interjected. "You were serious about the wandless magic then, Lucius?" he drawled in his deep baritone. "How...interesting. I wouldn't have thought she would have it in her."

Voldemort turned another terrible smile on his favorite Death Eater. "Nor would I, Severus. However, it seems she is quite the anomaly. Lucius – your answer?"

"No, My Lord," Lucius answered. "She is under strict orders not to use it."

"That will change very soon." Lucius was hard pressed to suppress a shudder of revulsion at the excited gleam in the despot's red eyes.

"My Lord?" He didn't understand the implications.

"Did you know that Severus is very well versed in wandless magic?" Voldemort had extracted his own bone-white wand, twirling it in his fingers menacingly.

"I was aware, My Lord." Lucius tried his best to keep his stare off the weapon and at a point just to the left of Voldemort's face. He exchanged another quick glance with Snape.

"You will train the Mudblood, Severus," he commanded. "Lure her. Seduce her to the dark arts and all the powers and delights it can bestow. Her thirst for knowledge and desire to prove herself can be used to our advantage."

"Yes, My Lord," Snape responded automatically.

Lucius was not about to argue, even though he didn't understand why Voldemort would want someone on the opposite side of the war trained with such a weapon – for any reason. The girl would never be turned, of that he had no doubt. Even though he had her agreement on acting the part for the time being, she would never – ever – belong to Voldemort. She would die first, he was sure of it.

"That is all. Leave me," Voldemort dismissed him abruptly and both Severus and Lucius stood, both pocketing his sphere and parchment.
"Good day, My Lord." Lucius bowed low, and Snape mimicked him, but Voldemort did not acknowledge either of them any further. They escaped the room quickly.

Hermione was in the library, nose deep in 'Mindful Magic', when she felt the warm flush start from her toes and brush all the way to the top of her head. It was an odd feeling, one that Lucius told her she would get used to. The wards had just notified her Lucius was home and there was no denying the relief she felt. Hopefully, Draco would stay away another evening. She looked at the antique Grandfather clock to check the time. It felt like she had just started reading, yet it was just after five-o'clock. Where had the time gone? Looking to her left, she spotted the books she still had not opened. There simply weren't enough hours in the day.

"I thought I'd find you in here," Lucius said with a small smirk as he walked towards the table where she had all her books spread out before her. "Have you found anything of use?"

Hermione offered him a small smile in return. "Nothing so far. Lots of books about famous Legilimens and Occlumense, as well discussions about morality. I found out about a possession spell that works much like Polyjuice. I'd never heard of it. It's certainly not mentioned in any of the Hogwarts books."

Lucius looked around the room. "This library is not confined only to books suitable for children, Hermione. Hogwarts has a wonderful library, but it's very limited in what it provides."

Hermione scoffed. "The only thing not suitable for young minds is Dark Magic. Imagine what a better world we would live in if Dark Magic didn't exist."

"That, my dear, is a discussion for another day." He looked her up and down. "Did you eat lunch today?"

Hermione shrugged. "I wasn't hungry."

Lucius looked down his aristocratic nose and said simply, "You will eat everything on your plate tonight."

Hermione immediately coiled to react with the words to remind him of his promise to not order her around on the tips of her lips before he added, "You will need your strength for a test you will perform after dinner."

She froze. "A test?"

He sighed. "A test to determine how magically powerful you are."

Hermione stared at him. "There is no such test."

Lucius started to walk away. "There is now."

Hermione stared dumbfounded at the retreating wizard's back as he left the library. How could he drop something like that on her lap and just walk away! A test? A TEST?! her inner mind shrieked. She fell back into her chair. "Well, fuck."

After a moment to regain her senses, Hermione placed the books she was finished with on the table Lucius had told her would magically re-shelve everything. The rest of the books she set aside for her later perusal. Right now, she needed to find that insufferable man and have him explain.
Lucius left the library quickly and made his way to his study before slamming and warding the door. He knew she had questions, the problem was he just didn't have the answers. He didn't know what to think. He wanted her to test well, well enough to be deemed worthy to live, certainly, but what would it mean for everyone if she tested better than that? What did the Dark Lord have planned? Would she be taken away from him?

He immediately walked to his side bar and poured a whisky. He downed it quickly and poured another. He couldn't tell her that her very life could depend on the result of one test. Did the test even work? Dolohov was very creative at spell and curse development, but this was…this was unheard of!

He sat behind his desk, the beginnings of a massive headache taking hold. Common sense would dictate the test would not only be limited to captives. How long until the Death Eaters were tested? The general population? His stomach clenched with anxiety. Draco, How would Draco test? The madness… Lucius was certain the boy was going mad. How would that impact his magic?

His musings were interrupted by a light tap on his door. He looked up, determined to ignore her. Hermione stared at the door to his study. She knocked a second time. "Oh, you awful man! Why won't you answer?"

She cleared her throat. "Lucius? Please open the door! I know you are in there! Bilby told me!"

She pressed her ear to the door, listening for movement.

Silence.

She felt herself begin to panic. "Lucius, please."

Lucius' eyes shot up to the door at that last plea. She sounded on the verge of tears. "Fuck.

Swallowing down the rest of his whisky, he waved his wand at the door, causing it to open.

Their eyes met; his from behind his desk, hers from just outside the door. He sighed heavily. "Come in, Hermione, and I'll tell you what I know."

Hermione entered guardedly. She could tell by Lucius' behavior the man was concerned. Question was, was he concerned on her behalf? His own? Or was his trepidation not related to what he had told her?

Lucius stood and moved around his desk, gesturing towards one of the wingback chairs before the hearth. Hermione sat and watched him as he walked to the side bar and poured something from one of the decanters into a port glass. He then approached her, handing her the glass. "It's elven berry wine. It's delicious."

When she looked back up at him, he decided the best way was to just tell her the facts. "I met with the Dark Lord today and he has determined that all captives will have their magical ability tested utilizing a spell to be cast upon a charmed item." Before she could interrupt him, he spoke louder, heading her off at the pass. "It is a new Charm, we learned of it only today. It was developed by one of his more…creative…Death Eaters. I believe you're familiar with Antonin Dolohov?"

Hermione immediately reached up to her chest as she gave a curt nod. The scar that wizard had cursed her with was almost completely gone now. If it had not been for a special healer Madam
Pomfrey had consulted from Russia, it would still be red and irritated. Madam Pomfrey. Was she still alive?

She was pulled back from the errant thought when Lucius continued talking. He went on to tell her everything the despot had said. About the magical test as well as Severus teaching her how to make use of her wandless magic.

She was stunned. "He wants me to strengthen and learn to use my wandless magic?" Lucius didn't answer her, he simply stared. "Why?"

Lucius stood and headed back to the side bar to pour himself another whisky. He made it a small one. After swallowing it down, he turned back to her. "I don't know. I can only…guess."

"Guess, then"

Lucius glanced about the room and, after determining neither his father or any other untrustworthy subjects were present in their portraits, he continued. "I told him I was making headway with you. That my roses were getting through to you better than Draco's thorns."

Hermione cringed. Is that what Lucius was doing? Simply being kind to her to sway her? No. She didn't believe that.

"I also told him that if you were allowed to take your NEWTs you would likely be even more agreeable."

Hermione swallowed heavily. "What did he say?"

"He said I was getting ahead of what he had planned. I can only assume he is not opposed to the idea." After a brief pause, the blond continued, "I don't know why he trusts you with such an ability, Hermione. He wouldn't allow it if he didn't think he could control you. I have a feeling that how you test tonight will likely play into everything."

"Give me the worst-case scenario."

"You test abysmally, and he determines you aren't worth the air you the breath. You'll likely be locked up with Penelope Clearwater in the Hogwarts dungeons where you will stay until the start of term." Hermione winced at his flat tone and Lucius swallowed heavily. He had not meant for that to come out quite so harshly.

His hand moved to his face and his index finger stroked his bottom lip. He held another concern – it was a long shot, but a concern all the same. What if she tested off the charts? What if she tested so high that Voldemort feared he and Draco couldn't control her once she was trained? Where would he send her? Whom would he bond her to? She had asked for the worst-case scenario and Lucius cringed inwardly as it came unbidden to his thoughts. He had to swallow the bile as it crept up his throat. No, surely not! he thought, but the visual of the Dark Lord pistoning between her thighs wouldn't be erased from his mind.

That was a possibility he would not share with her.

"Can I practice?"

"No. It's a one and done test." He could see the panic washing over her. "Hermione, it is exceedingly unlikely you will test poorly. You and I both know you are a strong witch."

"But what if I mess up? What if something goes wrong? What if I fail miserably?"
"Then we'll cross that bridge when it happens."

Hermione stilled. That was a reasonable answer. She needed to get herself under control and not panic.

Lucius stood and held his hand out to her to assist her to her feet as well. "Come. Let's eat in my suite tonight."

Lucius had told Hermione to dress comfortably for dinner and that she could wear whatever would make her feel the most like herself. Ignoring the formal midnight blue dress Tinny had laid out for her earlier, she pulled jeans out of the dresser and dug around for a light sweater. It was July, but the Manor was rather drafty and cool, especially at night. She found a Weird Sisters t-shirt and slipped it on before grabbing a simple, black, cable knit cardigan out of her closet. Shuffling through what must have been fifty pairs of shoes and boots, she found some trainers and put them on.

She looked in the mirror and was happy that see her old self looking back. See? You're still you, despite everything.

She walked with a touch of trepidation towards the secret entrance that separated her suite from the Master. She couldn't help the fear that whatever Voldemort had planned for her was directly tied to how she performed on this damned test. It had to mean something. Why else would they bother with testing her? Was tonight the beginning of a new hell? Adding to her concern was the fact that Draco hadn't made an appearance yet. It would be soon, probably tonight.

As she approached the hidden entrance, it once again opened automatically for her. Lucius stepped inside from his balcony when she arrived. "I'm glad you wore a sweater. It's so beautiful tonight, I thought we could eat on my balcony."

Hermione nodded her ascent and followed him back outside. She was stunned still at the vision before her. It was just getting dark and the sky was a sapphire blue, the table was set for two but formally. There were candles and a white table cloth. An arrangement of freshly bloomed assorted roses from the one of the Malfoy gardens adorned as a centerpiece. It was awfully… romantic. She felt herself stiffen slightly. A flush of confusion washed over her. She knew she should be repulsed, he was her captor – her rapist – not her lover. But he was also…her friend? Her protector? And he had kissed her! In fact, they had shared many kisses over the last handful of days. Oh, what does this mean?

The sound of Lucius clearing his throat pulled her focus from the table setting and her befuddlement to the wizard standing next to her. "The elves, they are setting the table the way Narcissa had instructed them whenever we dined out here. I haven't dined out here since she..."


Lucius held her chair out for her. "I enjoy summer evenings. It's nice to be outside when the weather permits. We can cast a warming charm if it becomes too cool."

Hermione offered him a small smile as a way of response, noticing he was once again wearing jeans as well. As he pulled out her chair and she peeked up at him to offer thanks, she noticed his navy pullover sweater caused his normally hard, steel grey eyes to change to a smoldering gunmetal blue. After they were seated, she almost couldn't look away when the moon peeked out from behind a cloud and those same orbs changed to an arctic icy blue. He really was a beautiful man. She swallowed and quickly flicked her gaze to over his shoulder when his eyes danced to hers, clearly
sensing her obvious staring.

Tinny and Bilby appeared with their covered plates as well as a decanter of wine and warm bread with butter. When everything was on the table, Lucius softly commanded, "Bilby, you may leave. Tinny, please stay for a moment."

Bilby left with a quick pop of Apparition, leaving Tinny behind. "Yes, Master Lucius, sir?" Tinny bowed reverently but even Hermione could sense the tingle of concern in the elf's voice.

"Tinny, the reason I asked you to stay is because I wish to inform you that you are no longer restricted in regard to conversation with Miss Granger. You are allowed to be her friend if that is what you would like. Furthermore, Draco was very wrong in how he treated you. You are an exceptional house elf, Tinny. You do your job impeccably well and are an asset to the House of Malfoy. If Draco ever, in any way, attempts to physically punish you or harm you, I demand you Apparate away immediately and find me. If you ever feel that Miss Granger is in serious danger from either Draco or any other force or being, come to me straight away. These orders supersede any that you receive from anyone else. Lastly, I wish to apologize for what happened that day at Draco's hand. What he did to you was unconscionable and will not be tolerated." He paused and then added, "Do you have any questions?"

Tinny's eyes were wide and her ears were twitching. "No sirs, Master sir. Tinny is proud and honored to serve. Tinny will watch over good witch and comes get Master if Miss is in dangers of being hurts."

"Thank you, Tinny, that will be all for now."

After Tinny Apparated away with her signature pop, Lucius spread his napkin across his lap as he peeked at Hermione. There it was again. That smile. That smile that left him breathless. How easy it was to make this witch happy. Education, books...allowing conversation with a house elf. So simple. No diamonds, no grand trips or new wardrobes from the finest fashion houses in Paris and Milan. No. Just books and friendship.

Her voice trembled slightly. "Thank you, Lucius."

The lids to their platters disappeared when Bilby popped back in and lit the candles. It was now dark. The skies were clear, the stars were bright, and Hermione felt a moment of peace. When she looked down and saw a plate full of perfectly seared scallops over a bed of asparagus drizzled with a lemon creme sauce, she couldn't hold back. In a flash she was out of her chair, and for the second time that day, threw her arms around the Malfoy patriarch, kissing his cheek and whispering words of thanks.

Hermione looked at the parchment Lucius had handed her with her heart thumping nervously in her chest. The incantation and wand movement were very simple, almost basic. Part of her felt like – What's the catch? The other part of her realized that it needed to be simple if it were going to test the magical potency of everyone: old, young, experienced, inexperienced, masters, scholars, students, etc.

She found the scoring fascinating, if a little hard to fully decipher. She would have preferred a number scale. Numbers were no-nonsense. Instead she reread the color scale.

**Magical Potency Scale**

**Purple** – Very Poor Potency (VPP)

**Blue** – Poor Potency (PP)

**Green** – Low Potency (LP)
Yellow – Average Potency (AP)
Orange – Above Average Potency (AAP)
Red – High Potency (HP)
White – Fierce Potency (FP)

*Shades on each level range from pastel to jewel tones.
*Witches and wizards who exceed one level, but do not fully fall into the next will have a ring of the jewel tone of the lower level around a pastel of the next level.
*Wand movements – double figure eight.
*Incantation – "Magica Potentia"

Lucius had told her that Voldemort's rating had been the deepest of reds around a greyish center. Making his scoring between HP and FP. She sighed before turning to watch Lucius. He was standing at the balcony with his arms crossed behind his back as he stared at the horizon. The sun was just visible over the Earth, in minutes it would be gone.

"What did you score?" she asked. She knew her voice had been loud enough, even though he didn't react. It was a few seconds before he answered.

"I haven't been tested yet."

"Why not?" She tilted her head with her question, still staring at the parchment while absentmindedly practicing the wand movement with a butter knife.

"We weren't told to." He turned to face her with his simple answer and she found the light smirk on his face very pleasant.

"Aren't you curious?" It didn't matter how apprehensive she was, she was still insanely excited to see where she fell on the scale. Lucius had said that Dolohov had explained to those picking up the crystals that most wizards and witches who had been tested fell into the bright yellow to bright orange categories – or the average potency levels.

"Very curious," he answered seriously. "But, alas. There is only one crystal, and you are to be tested tonight."

"Duplicate it," she suggested and was amused when he froze in surprise at the prompt.

"I don't know if it will work," he stated finally.

"Won't hurt anything to try," she replied with a shrug. Then she paused before asking hesitantly, "Will I be using your wand?" Truthfully, this made her more nervous than anything. She didn't know how she could test to her full potential without a compatible wand. Merlin only knew where her vine wand had disappeared to.

"No," The word was said flatly, and she flinched slightly at the implication she was not good enough to be trusted with his wand. Whether or not he had meant it that way, she did not ask, and she turned her eyes from his cool features to the parchment once again.

"You will be using this wand." She looked up and gasped when he drew her intricately carved wand out of his sleeve and handed it out to her. Her wand...hers. The one that had chosen her at Ollivanders. It took a substantial amount of energy not to burst into tears at the sight of it. As it was, she held out one trembling hand. A deep-seated feeling of disappointment washed over her when he moved it back out of her reach. She looked up to him, eyes full of questions and guarded longing.
"I know we have come to an agreement, Hermione," he said gently. "I want you to know that I trust you – I trust you to honor the verbal promise we made to each other." His own expression was wary, and she realized that Lucius Malfoy found her a worthy adversary and was nervous about returning her wand…weapon…to her.

"I understand what you are saying, Lucius," she answered calmly. "I thank you for your trust, it is not misplaced."

She could see he was at war with himself. Would he trust her? Give her the wand with no commands? Or would he command her to complete the test and hand it back to him instantly? What did she want him to do? Did she mean it when she said she would honor their agreement? Or would she take the wand from him and try to escape?

Even as he hesitantly handed the little wooden stick over to her, Hermione did not have an answer to any of her questions. However, the moment she enclosed her fingers over the handle of her wand, she knew she would not flee. For to flee would be to see him hurt – tortured – maybe even killed. She knew she would never forgive herself if this mercurial and contrary man ended up dead because of her.

The warmth of magic that spread through her fingers and up her arm made her lids flutter shut with elation. For the first time in over two months, she felt whole. When she opened her eyes again, Lucius was staring at her with his own eyes full of understanding. She remembered that he, too, had been without a wand for many months at the end of the war. He must know exactly how she was feeling.

"May I please practice a few spells before I complete this…test?" she requested formally. He nodded, his gaze flicking between her own and the pretty stick of wood in her hand.

Lucius watched her conjure water to wet the few plants that sat on his balcony before she flicked her wrist to transfigure the pots from grey to red. Another swish of her wand and birds exploded from the end of it. They twittered happily around her head before flying off into the now deep indigo sky. Hermione looked utterly elated to be holding her wand again – and he didn't blame her.

Slowly, he watched her walk back to the table where the small, crystal sphere sat looking at normal as any paperweight. "Shall we duplicate it, so you can do this, too?"

Lucius thought for a moment before giving a nod. "Try it," he agreed. A couple small wand movements later and an identical sphere sat next to the original.

"You go first?" she whispered, and he could hear her nervousness laced through the three simple words.

"I will," he agreed. He took the duplicated sphere and moved it to the other end of the table, wanting to make sure the spell would not hit the crystal that they absolutely needed for her. He wasn't a hundred percent sure that all the charms of the Elvin glass would transfer with a duplication spell. He didn't hesitate, he moved his wand quickly in the two figure eight motions and growled the incantation. "Magica Potentia!"

He heard her startled squeak as the sphere collected his power, the white light and blue crackling lightening exploded on the balcony, causing them both to shield their eyes. When it dissipated, they were both left staring at a deep, blood red ball. Pride surged through him fiercely, and he couldn't help the smug grin as their eyes clashed. His glowing with smugness and hers wide with wonder.

"Now you, princess." The endearment slipped out without his permission, and he had to hold back a
smirk as it caused a pretty blush to flush her cheeks.

"Right," she answered, giving a determined little nod. This time when the spell was cast, Lucius shut his eyes immediately, not wanting to be blinded by the white light again. When he opened them a few short moments later, he had to hold back a curse of surprise.

Hermione's eyes were wide, as if she didn't believe what the sphere was telling her. After a split second more, Lucius couldn't help the slow grin that crossed his face. He wasn't sure why he had been surprised. He already knew she was more powerful than him – she could do wandless magic while he could not.

He stepped around the table and picked up the Elvin glass, turning it this way and that to admire the deepest red color – darker than his; as dark as Voldemort's – surrounding a marble sized ball of pure white light.
Lucius could hear Hermione in his shower while he stood at his desk staring at the two Elvin crystals from the night before. He knew he had to send her crystal off today, or he would be summoned and punished for his lack of obedience. However, he didn’t want to. He didn’t want to send the little ball of glass that would tell the Dark Lord that the Mudblood in his care was possibly more powerful than Lord Voldemort himself.

He was unsure how exactly to interpret her results. The ball of white light was much, much smaller than the Dark Lord’s ring of dirty white light had been. The sphere itself was the size of an orange, and Voldemort’s ring of grey had been the size of a Snitch inside it, while Hermione’s pure white light was only the size of a marble. He could guess what the size differences meant – but was unsure of how to interpret the color differences.

Why was Hermione’s light brilliant white, while the Dark Lord’s was greyer? Did that mean Hermione was more powerful than his Master? Or was Voldemort more powerful because his whitish light was larger?

Most importantly, however, what would the Dark Lord require of Hermione – a Muggle-born with such immense power? It made him uncomfortable to realize he feared for the girl. The vision of her being taken from him was torturing him. He closed his eyes and dragged in deep, even breaths to try and calm the racing of his heart. He heard the water turn off and instantly knew what he needed to do.

Picking up the duplicate sphere, the one that held his results, Lucius etched Hermione Granger into the bottom of it with his wand before dropping it in the small box and tapping it with his wand to seal. Setting the parcel in his “Out” tray, he watched from the corner of his eye for it to disappear while he glanced around the room at the portraits. Narcissa and his mother were present, not that it mattered. Not one portrait in the house had seen them cast the charms – so none of them knew which sphere belonged to whom.

Lucius picked up Hermione’s crystal and thought briefly for a moment before he moved out through the balcony doors and carefully closed them behind himself. Tossing the sphere over the railing and into the sky, he aimed his wand at the glass and shattered it like a clay duck.

Part of him felt sick about sending the wrong sphere to Dolohov, the other part knew that using his results in place of her own would protect Hermione. It proved she was very strong, but not potentially stronger than Lord Voldemort himself. It was the only way he could think of to keep her as safe as possible with so little time.

Just as he was turning to go inside, Lucius spotted a large black dot cross his wards. It was an owl – and he was relieved. He was expecting a message from Snape. Lucius had told the dark man the day
before that he wished to reinforce his Occlumency skills, that he had been having difficulty maintaining his shields as of late, and asked for a list of book recommendations as it had been years since he had studied the art. Of course, the list of books was for Hermione. Snape also said he would send a schedule for her Wandless magic training.

Lucius held out his arm for the large bird to settle on and used his wand to relieve the animal of its letter. “The owlery is to the west, you may stop there for a rest and a meal if you have the desire,” he told the creature who hooted softly and was off in a flurry of wings.

He watched the animal fly away as he replayed the scene from the night before in his head, praying he had made the right decision.

After Lucius had picked up her glowing sphere, Hermione had fallen back into her seat as if her bones had turned to liquid and stared as if in total awe of her own power. He chuckled quietly at the mental image of her, in disbelief.

“It should not be a surprise.” He had told her. “Not with your wandless magic abilities.”

She had given him a tentative smile and a gentle nod before wordlessly handing her wand out to him, handle end first. A frown pulled at his lips in remembrance. He had been shocked that he hadn’t had to ask for it, stunned that she had offered it up so willingly, and saddened at the look of pure devastation in her eyes as he took it from her grasp.

Twenty minutes later, he and Hermione were eating a simple breakfast in the dining room. “Draco didn’t come yesterday,” she said quietly after they had started tucking into their meal. “Have you heard from him?”

Lucius knew she was nervous for his son’s arrival. It had now been four days since he had last visited for a renewal of the bond. Lucius knew what the affects of the potion felt like after only three days, so he imagined Draco would waltz in at any moment to relieve his discomfort. “I know,” he answered her, as he quickly glanced about the portraits. “My day at Malfoy Enterprises is light, I will pay attention to the wards while I am gone.” He had spotted his father and adjusted his tone. Glancing at his timepiece, he continued, “I am behind this morning, Miss Granger. I will have to leave you now. Here is a list of books I wish for you to take a look at over the next week. They should be in the library.” He lowered his voice, so his father could not hear when he added, “You also need to start meditating and clearing your mind daily, do you understand?”

Her eyes sparkled with understanding and he gave her an approving look when she nodded and murmured, “Yes, sir.” He stood and set the parchment next to her plate.

“Behave today, Miss Granger,” he instructed before giving her a shallow bow and leaving the dining room.

Constantly being under watch by the portraits in the Ladies Parlor was getting very tiresome. Hermione had attempted to get to work reading the occlumency books Lucius had given her, but the persistent whispered words of disappointment were fraying her nerves. They were dissatisfied mutterings from the observers who had begun to depend on her daily piano entertainment. She enjoyed playing the magnificent instrument very much, but not for hours on end every day. She did not want her only true escape to become a chore. The pressure from the portraits to play was becoming tedious. She understood. It was likely a very boring existence for them. There were only Lucius and Draco to watch over, as well as herself. There were no grandchildren and no Malfoy matriarch to guide and converse with. Having someone to entertain them must have been quite
pleasing.

The one whom Hermione truly hated to let down was Willow Malfoy. Lucius’ mother was a delightful piano teacher. She didn’t scold Hermione for mistakes, she merely advised her on how to avoid them next time. Her demeanor was kind and nurturing and Hermione had become very fond of the witch and knew without a doubt that the lovely woman was fond of her as well. Willow had sighed heavily from her portrait the prior morning when Hermione had told Lucius she would study all day. It had clearly been a sigh of regret. And today would be the second day in a row Hermione didn’t play. Part of Hermione’s guilt stemmed from what she had learned of Willow’s history; the woman had had a very sad adulthood and Hermione was pleased to accept some kindness and give something in return.

Narcissa had explained to Hermione about Willow’s ten-year silence and cautioned Hermione against letting Lucius know that Willow was talking to and teaching her. Willow wasn’t talking to the other portraits and Narcissa feared it would hurt Lucius if his mother continued with her silence towards him as well. The heartache Narcissa felt from Draco’s refusal to talk to her was upsetting beyond words and she would not wish that heartbreak on her widower husband. Apparently, Willow had been abused by her husband, Abraxas, and her death had been under suspicious circumstances. Narcissa didn’t go into too much detail, but the woman’s spirit had been broken and her self-worth shattered by the hateful man.

This was Hermione’s education, though. She needed to study, and she needed quiet. It was because of her desire to escape the constant disappointed gaze of a room full of portraits that Hermione fled to the pool room. She had asked Tinny to place a simple impervious charm on the books to keep them from being damaged by the humid and chemical ridden air. She had just gotten herself situated and finished looking over the table of contents of the first book when she felt it. The wards had activated. The pins and needles creeping up her body told her it was Draco and not Lucius. The wards would cause a warm flush if it was Lucius.

Unable to stop it, intense anxiety and dread washed over her. She had known he would come and had been expecting him since the day before. Closing her eyes, she forced herself to remain calm. She wished there was a potion she could take to make her not care what he did to her. Something that would numb her brain and her emotions. She began gathering the books deciding she would head back to her room.

Hermione flinched when the door opened. He had not wasted any time and found her immediately, approaching with his usual hateful gleam.

“Books in the pool room are not allowed, Mudblood. You of all swots should know that. Or are you truly as stupid as I suspect you are?” Draco’s voice was deadly and caused her heart rate to accelerate.

Not wanting to anger him further, she kept what she really wanted to say to herself. She was about to explain that Tinny had placed an impervious charm on the books but stopped herself. She realized that Tinny doing anything kind for her might anger him further, so she found herself unable to explain that the books were protected. It was in this moment she realized Draco would hardly approve of what she was reading, and she prayed he wouldn’t take a closer look.

“I’m sorry, sir. I wasn’t thinking.” She need not have worried, though. Draco’s eyes were only on her and were completely disinterested in the reading material.

His eyebrows shot up at her subservient address and a small, victorious smile crept over his face. “I see you are finally learning your place.” He watched her as she kept her eyes on the ground.
Hermione would do her best to show as little emotion as possible, therefore giving him little to feed off and use against her. Playing a broken and spiritless victim would hopefully bore him and cause him to lose interest in tormenting her.

“Regardless, you’ll have to be punished for abuse of Malfoy property.” When she didn’t flinch or look at him, he paused. He wanted to get a rise out of her. “But first I have needs. Undress, Mudblood.”

Hermione swallowed her hatred and kept her face calm and obedient as she slipped off the sky-blue silk gown and robes, leaving her in nothing but eggshell colored stockings, two-inch, kitten heels and a pale blue bra and garter belt. As usual, she wore no knickers. His eyes raked down her body as he slipped off his robes and began to unbuckle his belt.

As Hermione stood under Draco’s assessing gaze, she felt a flicker of relief when she felt the warm rush of heat creeping up her body that alerted her to Lucius arriving home. Just knowing he was in the manor gave her a sense of protection even though she knew he wouldn’t intervene unless there were extraordinary circumstances.

Expecting a slap or a hit of some sort, or certainly an insult, she waited with bated breath as Draco began to circle her. The feel of his eyes on her skin as he continued his predatory assessment was unsettling. He stopped mere inches in front of her, his face close enough to kiss her yet he hadn’t so much as touched her. Despite her best efforts, her anxiety escalated as she felt his warm breath on her cheek. He whispered with a tone of seduction, as though they were lovers, “I’ve been on a very interesting assignment, Mudblood. An adventure that is coming to a close.” She swallowed her terror when he pressed his lips with the lightest of touches to her left cheek. She began to tremble as goosebumps washed over her arms. She kept her eyes closed, not wanting to see him so close. Any second now he would strike with venomous fangs.

She coached herself. *Stay calm. Stay strong.* She felt the brush of his fingertips over her left breast and tried to remain as still as possible despite her urge to run. His hand moved up to her face where the backs of his fingers lightly brushed first one cheek and then the other. He continued to speak in a caressing tone. “It’s an assignment I think you’ll be very interested in knowing the details of when I return…which won’t be long.” He kissed her temple delicately before taking a step back.

After a second’s pause, he asked in his normal condescending voice, “Wont that be nice? Getting back to our usual routine?” When she didn’t respond he goaded her. “I asked you a question. Answer me truthfully.”

The bond prevented her from lying. “No.”

“No?” He grinned maliciously. “You don’t think that will be nice?”

“No,” she responded with an edge to her voice.

“Well, I see you didn’t learn your place for very long. Brightest witch of your age, indeed. You forgot to call me, sir. I rather liked it when you did that a few minutes ago. You will address me as sir from now on. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Excellent.” He took another small step away from her, yet she could feel his eyes on her face. “Only now you’ve hurt my delicate feelings, so you will not only be punished for the books, but for being rude and uncaring as well. That will come later, however.”
His eyes glazed down her body. “Hmm…decisions, decisions. Arse or cunt. Which shall it be? Both maybe?” He slipped off his outer robes and then continued in a mocking tone. “Ladies choice. Why don’t you choose. See? I can be a gentleman.”

Was this a trick? If she gave an answer would he do the opposite to spite her?

Before she could conjure a response, he impatiently answered for her. “Both, you say? My you are a needy little whore, aren’t you? Take your shoes and bra off,” he ordered as he continued to undress. When she was clad in only stockings and garter belt, he pointed to the floor in front of him. “On your knees. Suck me.”

Hermione gingerly kneeled before him and took his hardening length into her mouth. “Eyes up here,” he commanded. His hands gripped her hair and he leered at her when her brown eyes met his grey. She began moving her mouth back and forth, taking as much of him as she could. Not moving her gaze, she watched as his head fell back and his jaw fell open. He had begun thrusting his hips lightly and she prayed he wouldn’t gag her. Her prayers were answered when he flicked his wand and whispered a transfiguration charm, turning a chaise into a bed with a simple mattress. Then he pointed his wand at her pelvis and whispered another charm and she felt an odd sensation inside of her. It immediately dawned on her it was the same charm as that first night. The one that had emptied her before he buggered her.

“On the bed and on your back, now!”

She scrambled to her feet and onto the bed as quickly as possible, trying to keep her panic at bay.

His tone was conversational as he climbed on top of her and said, “Did you know that when a woman is crucio’d her body tenses up and seizes? Rodolphus says it’s exquisite to have your cock buried in a witch when that happens.”

Oh God!

He continued sliding up until he was straddling her chest. He stroked his cock and then slipped it into her mouth. Leaning forward onto his palms, he began to thrust into the warm, hot cavity. “If your teeth touch me, I’ll remove them one by one.”

Her eyes began to water as he continued pumping himself into her mouth. She gagged and strained to get air through her nose as he pressed his length into her throat. She covered her teeth with her lips as best she could to keep them from touching him and felt them go numb. Her jaw was tense and sore as he continued his oral assault. Just when she thought she might pass out from lack of air and was drenched in drool on her chin and cheeks, he abruptly pulled out. He quickly slid down her body, hooking her legs in the crook of his arms before slamming himself into her. She couldn’t help the shriek that escaped her vocal chords. It felt like her vagina had been ripped open. Don’t cry, Hermione. But it was no use. He was brutal with quick thrusts that jabbed her cervix and caused jarring pain.

“I kind of like it when you cry,” he said simply, as he watched the first tear fall. She turned her head away, her right hand slipping up and brushing away the traitorous drop of water. She tried not to let another one fall when she heard his chuckle. He shifted positions and fell back onto his knees, pulling her hips with him and spreading her legs wider. Her shoulders remained on the mattress, her back arching off his lap. He began breathing heavier as he watched himself slide in and out of her.

After a minute, he fell forward to tower over her once again, his eyes focused between them, on her chest. His breathing was heavy, and his thrusts were becoming more erratic which were two tells he was getting close to completion. He grabbed her wrists and held them over her head. His words were
strained and breathless. “Your cunt feels so damn good, but it’s time to make it feel even better.” Then he did it. Clasping both her wrists in one hand, he grabbed his wand with the other and whispered, “Crucio.”

She arched and screamed as blinding pain consumed her. Every muscle tensed as each nerve ending in her body caught fire. She wanted to die, anything to make it stop. And then it was over. Her body went limp as she slowly became aware. She could hear him panting and feel his body still. She peeked up at him to discover a glazed look in his eyes. He was no longer inside her, but she could feel his ejaculate running out of her. He was still breathing heavy as he rolled off and onto his back.

“Wow. That was… that was.” He turned to her and flashed a broad smile. “Was it as good for you as it was for me?”

She recoiled at the brightness of his smile and wondered if he was stark raving mad as tears streamed down her cheeks and her body seized with an after tremor.

He pushed himself up and sat on the side of the bed before looking back at her and dismissively saying, “Yeah, those suck. But you were only cursed for a few seconds, they’ll pass in a minute or so.” He let out a heavy breath and then stood, whistling as he started to dress.

Hermione had known he was a monster, but what he had just done shocked her. There was no limit to his depravity. She rolled to her side, pulling her knees to her chest while trying to stymie her tears. After what felt like a couple moments, the tremors had stopped, and she was feeling alright. The pain was already a memory.

When she began to move, as though to get dressed, he gave her a stern look. “Stay! I’m not finished with you. It’s been a while since I provided the Dark Lord with a memory. Let’s give him a good one, shall we?” He began threading his belt through his trouser loops. “He has so many visitors these days. Especially now that school is out… young recruits standing by to do his bidding.” Draco stopped dressing and looked at her before continuing. “He often times shares the pensieve memories gifted to him…as a reward to his faithful followers and recruits.”

She knew he was watching her, just waiting for a reaction. She would do her best not to give him one.

“Many enjoyed watching us, not only through the mirror that first night, but re-watching it through a pensieve as well. I understand Wormtail watches it obsessively, so does Cormac McLaggen. You remember him, don’t you? He’s been hanging around hoping to be made a Death Eater.”

Hermione knew he was trying to get a rise out of her. He’s lying, Hermione. You have no way of knowing he isn’t simply trying to goad you. For all you know, that was nothing but a regular mirror that night.

“So, let’s make a new one… now. It’s always nice to provide quality wank material for the men.” He smiled broadly. “Not that what we just did won’t give them a good visual, mind you. It’s just…well, you are Hermione Granger, and you’ve proven rather popular in the porn pensieve.”

She felt sick as she thought back on all he had done to her, on the way’s he had taken her. Oh God. Her head had started to pound.

Draco gestured to the head of the bed. “Why don’t you lay back and spread your legs nice and wide. Get comfortable.”

Hermione swallowed heavily as a vicious heat of dread crept over her. No! No more! When she
didn’t move, he startled her by snapping abruptly, “Now, Mudblood!” Unable to stop herself, she quickly did as he instructed.

Draco’s gaze was between her legs. “You really do have a pretty cunt. It’s only fair I let the others get a good look at it, don’t you think? I mean, since father won’t let me allow any of them to fuck you, we can certainly let them look at you!”

She couldn’t help the tear that escaped her bottom left lash, quickly followed by another.

“Have you learned how to get yourself off yet?”

Oh fuck!

“Because if not, you’re going to figure it out right now. Either way, you’re going to rub one out for all to see.”

Sheer panic overcame her, and she began to see spots. She felt lightheaded and the room began to sway around her; she didn’t realize she had started hyperventilating. She barely heard Draco snap, “Fucking hell!” before everything went dark.

When she came to, she was sopping wet. Still on the bed, with her legs splayed out awkwardly, she realized she was drenched in pool water and that Draco must have used it to wake her.

“Finally!” Draco snapped. “You passed out on me! Such a pathetic weakling, you are.”

Suddenly, white hot rage overcame her. She was in motion before she even knew what she was doing. “You sadistic arsehole!” she screeched as she bolted out of bed and leapt on him. His wand clattered to the floor and he fell backwards when her weight hit him. She heard a satisfying crunch as her fist hit his nose. Before she could land another hit, he grabbed her wrists and flung her off him. He was on her instantly and a blinding punch landed on her left cheek.

When she came to the second time, Draco was standing over her with his wand pointed at her face and his left hand cradling his bleeding nose. “Get up!” he demanded.

The room was spinning, and her head was pounding now. Somehow, she managed to stand. Her left eye was swelling shut. Knowing it was wrong, but suddenly not caring what he did to her, she spit in his face. She claimed a small victory when the blood-mottled spittle landed on his cheek.

When he wiped it away and saw the red, his face paled. Hermione could see it in his eyes – he was actually afraid of her blood! When she spat a second time, he punched her so hard she stumbled into the pool.

She breached the surface coughing and feeling as though she would pass out from the pain of his assault. The pool was deep, and she couldn’t stand, so she swam to the edge only to have him crouch before her, grab a fistful of her hair, and push her under the surface. She clutched his fingers trying to pry them out of her curls. Draco yanked her above the surface but the second she opened her mouth to take a breath, he pushed her back under causing her to breath in a combination of air and water.

When her body’s natural reflexes kicked in and she attempted to cough out the water, she merely drew more into her mouth and lungs and it was in that moment she knew she was going to die. Instantly, several thoughts flashed through her consciousness at once.

There was a part of her that wanted to go with it, to allow it to end. It was the part of her that had stood on the wrong side of the balcony and welcomed death. It welcomed oblivion. There would be no more pain, no more torture, no more assaults; she could be with Ron and Harry.
Then there was the piece of her that knew how powerful she was, and she felt obligated to continue to fight this impossible fight. If this was ever going to end, if she were to ever be free again, she had to live. She had to live in order to have even a chance to make Harry proud. She owed it to her best friend to prevail and to at least try and be happy.

Not only that … but there was the part of her that was beginning to care about Lucius Malfoy and the kindness he had shown her. This portion of her wanted to sway him to her side, to conspire with him, to bring him into the Light. It also wanted to experience the pleasure that he could bring her again and again.

Without warning, it dawned on her that if she gave up and let Draco kill her now, that Lucius would be punished for it. He had been ordered to keep her alive. She panicked, and the will to fight filled her again.

Hermione kicked her legs fiercely and continued to claw at the hands that were holding her under the surface of the water. Bubbles rose around her as she screamed her frustration, only to suck in more chlorinated liquid. Desperation mounting, she twisted and screamed a second time.

Suddenly, there was a stabbing pain in her scalp before her body felt light and Draco was no longer pushing her under the water’s surface. She grasped the edge of the pool in attempts to pull herself up as she tried to draw in a mouthful of air unsuccessfully. Her diaphragm spasmed and caused liquid to gush out of her mouth, burning her throat and nose as it made its way up and out of her chest.

When she became aware of her surroundings, she was laying by the pool and Draco was towering over her. “Next time I will kill you!” he spat.

“That’s enough, Draco! Leave!”

The second voice was a welcome one and came from behind her. She watched with exhausted eyes as Draco scowled before turning and stalking away as she lay on her side. She gasped lungfuls of air and coughed horrifically as her body seized with the effort to re-oxygenate itself. She was freezing and began to shiver violently, and her teeth were chattering. The left side of her face was on fire with pain and she realized she was entirely unable to see through her left eye. With no strength to move, she closed her eyes. Suddenly she was no longer wet and was being lifted into familiar, strong arms.

He had only been home for a few minutes at the most and he was already worried. He had taken off his cloak and boots and slipped his house shoes on before he attempted to do some paperwork but a split second later, knowing that she was with his sadistic son, he started to pace. A feeling kept clawing at the edges of his mind that he batted away over and over. A feeling that told him how he didn’t want to share her. How he wanted to keep her away from Draco. How he wanted to end the abuse his son was causing the girl in his care.

He hadn’t been able to help it when a vision of his mother came unbidden to his mind. She sat in her suite, her legs tucked under her while Tinny dabbed at her face with a cloth. Lucius, a young boy – not even ten-years-old, had entered looking for her. He had panicked at the sight of blood on the cloth the elf was using, and his mother had jumped when he cried out for the elf to stop hurting her.

It had startled him badly when he was jarred back to the present by Tinny coming to him in a panic. “Young Master is drownings the Good Witch ins the pools, Master Lucius!”

He hadn’t thought twice, he had just spun on the spot and Apparated outside the poolroom and flung the doors open with a bang. He had been just in time to witness Draco holding Hermione under the surface of the water before his son had cried out in surprise and had been magically pushed away.
from the edge of the pool. Lucius saw chunks of long, chestnut colored hair in both his fists as Draco flew back through the air, colliding with a pool side settee.

Hermione had heaved herself out of the water wearing only her garter belt and stockings, her mouth gaping and her body shuddering as what looked like gallons of water poured out of her mouth and nose. Her hair was clung to her back and shoulders, around her breasts and over her face. Lucius rushed towards her as she convulsed again and again as water was expelled from her lungs. He was aware his son had risen from where the girl had thrown him with wandless magic in order to save herself. He couldn’t help the small swell of pride at her magical strength. That’s my girl! He internally scolded himself. Your girl? Maybe you are the mad one, not Draco!

She collapsed, and Lucius had sagged with relief when he heard her drag in a rattling breath before starting to cough again. It took effort not to spell his son clear across the universe when Draco had used his foot to roll her over before he growled, “Next time I will kill you!” in Hermione’s face.

“That is enough, Draco! Leave!” He hadn’t meant to say the words, but he found himself desperate to get the boy away from her. Draco glared at him for a split second before spinning on his heel and stalking out of the other entrance to the poolroom, letting the door slam behind him.

Hermione’s face was a mess. Utterly destroyed. The bones around her left eye socket had been fractured and her eye was swollen shut. It was mottled with black and purple bruises that spread across her temple and into her hairline, over her nose, and down her cheek. The skin was broken in a few places but there was no blood because the pool had washed it away. It made Lucius feel completely sick that his son had caused this damage.

Instead of calling for the healer this time, he had asked Tinny to apparate to the school and request Snape come through. He knew the man had extensive experience with healing magic, and Healer Jacobs was becoming too suspicious of the activities happening inside the Manor. Not that the man would report anything – he knew who was running the country these days.

For some reason, however, Lucius’ gut was telling him that he needed to see Snape’s reaction to Hermione’s condition. There was something up with his friend, and he wanted to pinpoint what it was.

He had cast a mild sedative charm on Hermione and had taken her to the Mistress Suite. It wouldn’t do for Snape to ask why the girl was in Lucius’ own bed. Tinny had magicked the girl into a soft robe and spelled her hair dry before Lucius took vigil at her bedside, waiting for Snape to arrive.
Severus Snape sat behind the Headmaster's desk at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, thinking back on the previous evening with his … slave. His lips twitched in a half smile as his heart rate accelerated slightly.

Ginny Weasley had proved herself to be more of a surprise than Snape would have ever guessed. He had been the first to choose from the "spoils of war", as the Dark Lord had called it at the time. In that moment, Snape had had to Occlude heavily to avoid showing his absolute disgust when he had been presented with a gaggle of former … students.

Voldemort knew Snape's taste in women had never, ever strayed to the young witches in his care at Hogwarts, so Snape got the message. It was a reward laced with a hint of suspicion and punishment. Voldemort had not fully trusted his spy, and it had been a test. His only choice had been to play along.

He had walked up and down the line of young women – girls, really – and cringed internally at the thought of copulating with any of them. He hadn't realized it at the time, but he had been looking for Hermione Granger. It would have been awful, she would have driven him crazy, but having her as an eventual ally would have been very useful. When he had realized that she wasn't in the lineup, he had sighed, straightened his shoulders, and went through the line a second time. He made it appear as though he were giving careful perusal of each witch's … attributes.

Then his eyes had rested on her face. Pale skin with freckles, a slightly upturned nose, liquid brown eyes, and deep auburn colored locks. He had grabbed her arm roughly and spun her to face Voldemort before he had thoroughly thought through his decision.

He had been allowed to take her privately – unlike the horrific debacle that had been the debasement of Hermione Granger. His slave's degradation was about the potion – Voldemort had wanted it tested and the results recorded before he made any further decisions about prisoners. Granger's degradation had been about putting the resistance in his place; about having one of the Light's most glorified people and destroying her publicly.

Ginny Weasley had not been a virgin, much to his relief. Part of him hoped the bond would not take, and he felt sick when it had worked immediately and well. The girl had fought him tooth and nail with more spirit then he had given her credit for. In the end, he had had to restrain her in order to fuck her.

Rape her. You raped her, he reminded himself. Snape had to remind himself of this from time to time – it was necessary because these days he almost felt as if he were living in some sort of twisted fairy tale where he was the knight in black armor.

The first week of his and Ginny's … relations … had been awful. He knew that had this been a
public transgression, he would have been expected to take her multiple times daily. Because he was allowed to test the potion in private, however, he waited until the bond pulled at him before he'd touch her.

The girl's fire and spirit burned hot, and while Snape was very much turned on by the aspect of non-consensual sex, it was the first time in his life that he had participated in a true rape. Oh, he had played *games* with witches. Games where the goal was to *pretend* she didn't want him, and he was to force her. In his world – where he was Master; where he was Dominant – it was just par for the course.

It was different with Ginny, though. He wanted her, he adored her spitfire personality, but he hated – *hated* – that it wasn't part of a game for her. That she truly reviled him. That she cried real tears when he took her against her will. Even making sure she reached her own pleasure time and time again had not helped him feel any better.

He had desperately tried to show her through his actions that he wasn't enjoying himself, that he didn't want to do this to her. He had been kind to her and made sure she had plenty of food, rest, and access to the bathroom and clean clothes. He had spoken softly to her, praised her bravery, and offered her hankies when she cried. At first, she didn't seem to notice these things.

Snape had explained how the potion worked and had commanded things of her when she had consumed it to make sure it worked. She followed the simple orders – orders such as put your hands on your head, dust the sitting room, don't touch these books. It was the orders that had given him away. Well, not just the orders. Snape hadn't actually been very subtle that he was protecting her when, during week two, Amycus Carrow had tried to have a go with the redhead. Snape had put his actual fist in the man's mouth proclaiming that he didn't share and forbidding Carrow to ever lay a hand on her again.

That night the force of the bond had grown to a terrible agitation. He had wanted to give her until the next day to somewhat recover from Carrow's attack, but he'd been unable to wait. It was the fourth time he had been forced to take her without consent, and she was fighting him just as violently as all the others, just as violently as she had fought Carrow earlier that afternoon.

Unexpectedly, she had frozen, her eyes flying wide with shock at her discovery. Her stillness had caused him to pause as well, and he looked down into her liquid chocolate colored eyes. "You don't want to do this, either." It had been a statement.

His hard expression had softened at her words. Minutely, he shook his head.

"Is that why you never order me to comply with you when you… Well…when you…you know…"

He didn't answer her, he had not spoken much to her at all the entire time she had been his. Tears had trickled down her temples into her hair. Her cheeks were flushed from their struggle for dominance and he held her hands above her head as he stretched out on top of her. His cock (which he'd had to take a potion in order to use properly) had laid heavy along her thigh. They were both breathing raggedly.

"Professor," she murmured. "Are you on our side? Are you still playing spy?"

He had closed his eyes in relief; she had been the first one to learn the truth. It had changed everything – *everything*. "Yes!" he had hissed and then he kissed her for the first time – and she had returned the affection.

It had been near eight weeks since the Defeat of Hogwarts, and his whole life had changed.
Somehow, the change had been for the better even though the despot he called Master had prevailed. He had an ally for the first time, and Ginny had thrown herself into her role.

After the second week was over, he had told her about his sexual proclivities and that it would be expected of him to demonstrate the bond. Because his brethren knew of his inclinations for the world of BDSM and the Dominant/submissive relationship, they would be required to play the part. Much to her chagrin – and his utter delight – she responded more than favorably to the role of submissive.

That's when everything had turned from surviving to living.

Every moment of the day that he wasn't with her, he wanted to be. She was bright and witty, she laughed at his dry humor and was the first person he had known on the side of the Light that looked at him with eyes full of trust. He had been teaching her about the Dominant/submissive lifestyle and it was a pure pleasure to watch her blossom under his tutelage. Six weeks into their relationship, a month after she uncovered his ruse, she admitted to him that she didn't think she'd ever be able to return to the world of vanilla sex. Being a submissive had become a part of her as quickly and as desperately as she was becoming a part of him.

As the days continued, the trust turned to affection, then desire…and now. Snape swallowed heavily.

She had told him last night that she loved him.

Granted, it had been in the throes of passion. She had been wildly out of her mind with lust and desire. He had suspended her, flogged her, and edged her mercilessly. When he had entered her and allowed her to climax, she had screamed it along with his name and some choice expletives.

All day he had replayed the scene in his mind. Her body convulsing around his engorged cock, only the whites of her eyes showing as she shuddered beneath him screaming. "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck, Master. Oh, Severus. Oh Gods, fuck, I love you! I love you! I love you!" It would not leave his thoughts, but it was the first time anyone had said those three words to him. He had lived thirty-eight years never hearing them – and the way they had been said to him had been beyond perfect. The young woman who had screamed them was beyond exquisite.

Heaven and the gods help him, but he loved her as well.

Snape's attention returned to the parchment in front of him that was awaiting his signature. He muttered darkly under his breath when he realized the quill that he had suspended over the line had dripped. Wandlessly, he vanished the drops with a murmured incantation and scrawled his name. It was enough for the morning, he longed to return to his witch. They could have lunch together and talk.

With a sigh, he picked up his wand and warded the office door before turning and walking through the archway that hid the stairwell that would return him to his rooms. He almost smiled when he found Ginny sprawled asleep on the davenport with a book open on her chest.

Snape was about to kneel beside her and wake her when a loud CRACK! shattered the silence in the room. Ginny bolted upright with a shriek while Snape pointed his wand at the little elf that appeared.

"Tinny is most grievously sorry, she is, Headmaster Snape!" the ugly thing tittered. "Master Lucius Malfoy has sented me, sir. He's is needing help with Missy Granger, he is. She is very hurted. Master Draco was terribly … ohs! I's be not saying that, I's having to punish myself."

The poor little thing burst into tears and Snape couldn't help it when his thumb and forefinger came up to pinch the bridge of his nose in frustration. He calmed immediately when he felt Ginny's
presence at his side and her small, warm hand sliding around his wrist to lace her fingers with his. He dropped his other hand. "I am needed at Malfoy Manor?" he asked the elf.

"Yessir!" Tinny bobbed her head anxiously. "As quicklies as possible, Headmaster."

Snape turned to Ginny as the elf's crack of Disapparition filled the space. He was about to tell her that he would be back as quickly as he could, when he froze at the look of determination in her eyes. "I want to come with."

"We've talked about this, Ginny," he said quietly, smoothing a lock of hair behind one of her ears. "Lucius Malfoy is a dangerous man, and Draco has become completely unhinged."

"Please, Severus." Ginny grasped his wrist in one small hand and turned her face into his palm to bury a kiss on the sensitive skin. "She's my family; I want to be there," she pleaded, her voice was soft, but she couldn't hide the tremor of impending tears.

"Trust me on this, love," Snape implored her. "Draco is in the Manor, Lucius is asking for my assistance. You are safer here, I will make arrangements for you to see her soon."

She pressed her lips firmly together. It was obvious she was biting back her protests. He held her eyes calmly, knowing she would see his reasoning. Finally, she looked down and nodded obediently. "Alright," agreed. "Please come home soon."

"I will," he promised. Tilting her chin up, he settled his lips against her own. Heat coursed through him when she returned the gesture and he had to stifle a groan as she threaded her hands through is hair. Begrudgingly, he ended their connection. "Have some lunch while I am gone and continue studying your Occlumency."

"Yes sir," she gave him a small smile and he chuckled before pressing one last kiss to her forehead.

Snape went through the Malfoy's entrance floo minutes after Tinny had left him to find the elf waiting impatiently for him. Without ceremony, the little thing grasped his robes and Apparated them directly into a bedroom suite. The sight that greeted him was a shock in many regards.

Lucius sprung to his feet, a slight look of desperation marring his features momentarily before his expression smoothed. "Severus, thank you for coming in such a timely manner."

"Of course," Snape responded as his eyes shifted to the small young woman in the too large bed. He swallowed hard, feeling sick at the sight of her. Merlin's bloody bollocks – she looked awful. He had to Occlude heavily to maintain his composure. He abhorred men who felt beating women to put or keep them in their place was necessary. The thought of laying a hand on a member of the fairer sex like this made him physically ill.

He could tell from where he stood that she had sustained fractures to her orbital socket; those would be very delicate to mend. Snape moved closer to the bed. "What happened?"

"I only caught the end of their altercation," Lucius answered quietly. "Draco was holding her under the water in the pool, Miss Granger employed wandless magic – even though she had been ordered not to use it – to throw him off her. She coughed up an obscene amount of water before passing out. Tinny assisted me in getting her cleaned up and back to her room, but as you can see, the healing she needs is beyond my abilities."

"Why not call a Healer?" It was a valid question, but Snape was sure he knew the answer. Both he and Lucius were dancing around each other in attempts to figure out exactly where the other stood. Neither were ready to come out and share their thoughts, and Lucius was a good enough Occlumens
to keep him out of his stubborn blond head. Snape was almost positive that Lucius would deflect if
given the right information – if he had the right motivation. He suspected that Lucius had called him
here not only to have him heal Granger, but to see his reaction to her injuries and witness his
interaction with the girl.

If Snape was reading the older aristocrat like he thought he was, there was a chance that Granger
could be the catalyst that swayed Lucius Malfoy to the Light. He knew the time would need to be
just…right.

"He's been called here far too many times in the past few weeks," Lucius answered stiffly.

"I see."

"Can you…?" Snape watched as Lucius attempted to control his facial features while his sentence
trailed off. He found himself very intrigued with the way his friend was watching the girl with guilt-
ridden eyes. Lucius Malfoy's composure was crumbling…that was interesting. Very…very…

interesting.

He pretended not to notice.

"Yes, I can fix her face," he said abruptly. "Send for your elf."

"Miss Granger," Lucius murmured softly as he gently pushed a curl out of her eyes. It was late-
evening and Snape had left a few hours prior with instructions to let her sleep and to get a light
dinner in her before having her sleep some more.

After Snape had returned to Hogwarts, Lucius instructed Tinny to stay with Hermione and call him if
there were any problems. He had searched the Manor for Draco, only to find him gone. In all
actuality, he was relieved his son had left – he wasn't sure what might have happened if he had found
the boy. The state of mind he had been in had been deadly.

He had calmed some while he quilled a letter to Voldemort, not wanting the man to hear what had
happened from anyone but he, himself. It would not do for Voldemort to think that Lucius was
hiding information…it might make the tyrant more apt to look into his life more closely than he
already was.

He had spent the afternoon catching up on some correspondence for ME and scanning some of the
books Snape had recommended on Occlumency to figure out the best way to teach the girl. He
needed her to learn to shut her thoughts off as quickly as she could. Her mind already held too many
secrets for him to be comfortable. If she was called in front of Voldemort any time soon – they both
might wind up dead.

"Hermione," he breathed while letting his fingers trace her brow line. The bones in her face were
fixed, and the bruising was better but still awful. It was a mottled green and yellow fading into the
normal peaches and cream complexion her skin held when it was unmarred.

Not only had Draco shattered her eye socket, he had detached her retina, ripped the left nostril of her
nose and caused three molars to become loose in her jaw. Snape's diagnostics also had shown a mild
case of whiplash from the force of her head snapping back with the hit…and a labial tear from his
sexual assault. It had taken extreme effort for Lucius not to swear up a storm when Snape had
explained calmly why he was lifting his charges robes.

Snape had been… captivating to observe. Lucius felt his guesses were correct, though he wasn't sure
exactly what to do with the information he was gathering. He was sure Snape thought he had
controlled his reaction to seeing Hermione battered and bruised as she was, but Lucius had seen a
flash of disgust and fury in his eyes. When he had cast the diagnostic charms, the Headmaster had
muttered darkly under his breath.

These actions, and the discussion they’d had following their last dinner together, had shown Lucius
that Snape…for lack of a better term…cared for the girl. Or at least cared what was happening to her.
Lucius knew that his own affection for Hermione Granger had slipped through his careful mask as
well. Once upon a time, he and Snape had told each other many things about their lives and had
shared many secrets. He considered the man his best friend – he was Draco's Godfather for Merlin's
sake! He would just have to continue to be observant and to bide his time.

Heaving a deep, discontented sigh of indecision, Lucius picked up the jar of bruise paste from the
bedside stand and applied another application carefully to the left side of Hermione's face. Her eyes
fluttered, and a small smile curved her lips as his thumb smoothed the cream over her cheek bone.

"Hi," she whispered hoarsely and reached up to brush his face gently with her fingers.

"What is the matter with you?" he hissed at himself when his nose prickled as though he were going to
cry. Instead he cleared his throat with a fake cough and responded, "Hello, Miss Granger." He felt
like he had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar when her eyes met his. "It is time for dinner,"
he forced himself to say. "I had the kitchen elves prepare something light. You do not have to dress,
we will eat in my rooms."

"Alright," she said, and winced as she attempted to push herself into a seated position.

"Be careful," he admonished, feeling like a ridiculous mother hen. "Here, I'll help you." He placed
an arm around her shoulders and guided her upright before he pulled the blankets off her legs and
helped her to the edge of the bed.

Lucius gave up assisting her about halfway across the room because her legs were wobbly, and she
was leaning heavily into him. She assured him she was just fatigued and that she could make it, but
he took matters into his own hands and swept her up against his chest.

His heart raced erratically when she wrapped her arms around his shoulders and buried her face in
his neck, murmuring her thanks. She weighed next to nothing and his arms tightened protectively.

They entered his room seconds later and he immediately moved his gaze to the portraits. The
landscapes were all empty for once, and he intended to keep them that way for the next couple of
hours. He settled Hermione on the plush cabriole davenport before he pulled his wand out of his
pocket and aimed it at each portrait in turn.

"What are you doing?" Her voice was cautious, but curious, and raspy from breathing in the pool
water.

"Making it so the portraits cannot be entered by anyone other than those who are supposed to be in
the frames," he answered while avoiding her gaze. "As I have no human portraits in this suite, we
will be undisturbed this evening."

"Is that wise?"

He gave a low, mirthless laugh. "No, it probably isn't. I can't find it in myself to care this evening,
however. It's not something we can do repeatedly, it will cause too much suspicion."

"I see."
Lucius chanced a brief glance at the girl. She was looking at her lap and was holding the edges of the lavender robe in clenched fingers and trembling slightly. Her face was pale under the lingering bruises. She looked older…and very, very tired.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

She met his gaze. "A bit," she responded. He hated how raw her voice sounded.

He pulled a soft throw off the back of a chair and gently placed it over her lap before stoking the fireplace in front of her.

"Aren't we going to eat?" She was confused. Lucius was too, for that matter. His affection for her through the afternoon had only continued to intensify. Her comfort was at the forefront of his mind.

"Yes," he answered. "Take this first." He fished a vile of potion out of his coat pocket and handed it to her. "It's a preventative, so you don't get pneumonia." He watched for a brief moment as she tipped the contents into her mouth before he turned his wand on the low coffee table and raised it to a height where it would be comfortable to eat from while sitting at the couch. Then he flicked the stick of elm at the dishes on the small dining table and levitated them in front of her before vanishing the silver covers.

There were two large crocks of chicken soup and a loaf of hot, crusty bread next to a dish of flower-shaped butter pads. Fruit, olives, and a variety of cheeses filled another platter. There were two goblets of iced water, two empty teacups, a steaming teapot, and a tray laden with tea fixings. It was a perfectly acceptable light meal.

He wasn't sure who was more surprised when he settled himself next to her, thigh to thigh, and started preparing her tea. She thanked him when he handed her the cup of hot Earl Grey and took a sip that was followed by a deep, contented sigh before she leaned very slightly into his side.

Neither said anything as he buttered a chunk of bread for her before he fixed his own tea and started in on the soup. It was a thick, creamy chicken with shredded carrots and had a nice flavor. He watched Hermione as she carefully spread her napkin in her lap and picked up her slice of bread. Her hands were shaking just slightly.

They ate quietly, snuggled up on the couch by the fire. Lucius had never done this before and was not sure why it had crossed his mind to have her stay put and bring the meal to her. He found himself loving it, however. The relaxed nature of the meal, the intimacy, and the warmth was comfortable, and he felt at ease.

He finished first and moved his arm, so it rested across the back of the couch behind Hermione. It caused her to shift and press herself more firmly to his side. He noticed her hands were shaking more now and that she was finished with her bread and had eaten some fruit and grapes but had barely touched her soup.

"Is the soup not to your liking?" he asked softly. Absentmindedly, the hand settled on the couch behind her sought her curls, tunneling through them to stroke the back of her head. She winced slightly, and he realized she might be sore. In his mind's eye, he could see the strands of hair Draco had ripped out of her head when her magic had pushed him away. He moved his fingers to a new spot, and she made a tick of pleasure in the back of her throat and leaned into him heavily.

"It's very good," she answered with a small huff of frustration, "but my hands are shaking, probably from fatigue. They won't stop. I'm afraid I'll get it all over."
Hermione tilted her head up to see his expression. He was looking down at her, and the expression in his eyes was thoughtful. Slowly, hesitantly, he answered her. "I will assist you, then." He couldn't believe he had said that out loud... he had never cared for someone like this before. He had never even fed Draco as a baby. Well... there was no backing out now.

Hermione watched him through wary eyes as he picked up the crock of soup in both hands before filling the spoon and raising it to her mouth. Her lips parted just slightly in completely surprise before she opened properly and allowed him to slip the spoonful into her mouth. The careful way he fed her the soup caused liquid heat to pool through her body. He watched her intensely, his eyes darkening with every mouthful, seemingly when her lips dragged back across the utensil to rid it of its contents. It was the most intimate thing she had ever done – no one outside of her parents had ever fed her like this before. Even then, it had been years upon years since they had spoon fed her.

His breath had changed and was just slightly heavier by the time the last bite was scraped from the bowl. Even with all she had been through earlier that day, she wasn't able to tamp down her attraction for him, or how it made her feel when he looked at her that way. She closed her eyes as he set the crock down and called for Bilby to clear the meal, just waiting for him to get up and leave her.

It shocked her when he settled back against the couch before he picked up his wand to summon his book from the nightstand. "Would you like me to summon yours, as well?"

"No, thank you," she murmured. "I'm content to just sit. Maybe I'll rest my eyes."

He didn't answer, just nodded, opened his book, and settled it on the arm rest next to him as he began to read. After a few minutes, she carefully rearranged the blanket over her lap, taking care to spread it over his knees as well as her own. Just before she sank into the back of the couch, Lucius put his arm around her and pulled her into his side. He buried his hand in her curls again and gently began rubbing her scalp, all the while never taking his eyes off his book. After another moment of surprise, she relaxed into him completely and rested her face in the indentation just below his shoulder.

She must have dozed, because the next thing she knew she was carefully being disrobed and laid out gently on the mattress. She watched him through her eyelashes as he stripped down to his boxers and made his way around to his side of the bed. She let out a slow, controlled sigh as he sat on the edge of the bed and flicked his wand. He appeared to be removing the charm from the portraits. Then he set an alarm to the tempus charm and doused the lights in the room before he placed the piece of wood on the nightstand.

He was arranging himself to fall asleep when the whispered words left her mouth without her permission. She just... needed him... needed his closeness and warmth. Needed to feel human presence. "Lucius?" she murmured.

He let out a low grunt, obviously surprised she was awake. "What, princess?"

"Will you... hold me?"

Their eyes locked in the dark, and for a moment she swore he was going to tell her no. To roll over and go to sleep, but he picked up the blanket and beckoned her closer to him. She moved, never taking her eyes off him. He settled on his back and allowed her to place her head in the crook of his shoulder and an arm around his waist.

The arm that she was laying on wrapped around her and his hand splayed over her hip, while the other moved and tilted her face up to his. "This was one of the nicest evenings I've had since this whole bloody war started." The honesty of his words left her breathless and she felt tears prickle her eyes.
"Me too," she answered truthfully. Her eyes closed when his lips descended on hers in a gentle, chaste kiss.

"Sleep, Hermione." He told her when he pulled away.

She did.
Hermione pulled on her beloved jeans and sweater. Lucius had conceded to her wearing denim only on Saturdays and when doing any physical activity. Today qualified for both. She was heading to her first wandless magic lesson with her former professor. A large piece of her never wanted to see him again. It was the part of her that hated him for his betrayal and loathed him and wished he would die one thousand deaths for inventing the blasted bonding potion. Only a truly horrid person would create such a thing.

Yet, despite all that, there was a small part of her that still had a smidgen of faith in the dark wizard. A sliver of her that believed, despite all signs to the contrary, he was still on her side. Ginny was happy and well cared for by the man and there was no denying he was a brilliant wizard. He had also agreed to tutor her for her NEWTs if Voldemort allowed it. It would be in her best interest not to provoke him.

Upon entering Lucius' study, Hermione shrieked when a bolt of purple light blasted her right shoulder and knocked her back into the door frame. What the fuck! Rubbing her now aching arm she cautiously righted herself, staring in disbelief at her supposed teacher, whose wand was still pointed at her. When another bolt of light from its tip came towards her, she ducked her head and darted behind a chair. The curse just missed her and blasted a lamp to pieces. What the hell was he playing at? Was he simply planning to curse her? To kill her?

She stayed hidden behind the chair until she heard him start to walk towards her. She dashed back towards the door and just missed a flash of white that whizzed towards her. She grabbed the door handle, only to find it wouldn't open. Panicked, Hermione peeked back over her shoulder to find the dark wizard less than six feet away. Her eyes darted to his wand when at least ten huge snakes, king cobras by the look of them, slithered out of its tip. She watched in horror as they began slithering towards her, some not taking a direct route, so as to block her from running. She squealed and hopped on her feet as the snakes slowly drew closer. Instinct had her off the floor and standing on the closest chair. She then jumped onto the coffee table and onto another chair, only to find three snakes closing in on her.

Hermione barely registered a flash of red light from the wizard and realized that, if she moved, she would land on a snake. Having no other choice, she simply crouched and threw her hands over her head. So, when she heard the sound of the curse rebounding and looked up, she was stunned to find herself unharmed. She could just make out the glimmer of a Protego shield surrounding her. What? She watched in amazement as the snakes circled the shield, unable to penetrate it.

Her eyes flew to her teacher's, who was now standing a few feet away and looking at her without expression. "Interesting," he said simply. With a flick of his wrist, the snakes vanished into wisps of vapor.
"Wha…"

Cutting her off, Snape asked, "Tell me Miss Granger, how does it feel to have failed. Failed to save Potter, failed to graduate, failed to actually...accomplish anything?"

Her jaw fell open as she stared at him in stunned silence. She wanted to yell at him, defend herself. But what could she say? He was right. She was an utter failure at everything.

"Well, with the exception of...your carnal talents," his eyes raked up and down her form. "I've seen several pensieve projections of your...abilities." He started to pace around her. "You play the innocent victim very well. However, in truth, everyone knows why Potter and Weasley kept you around. Perhaps if you had spent less time rutting the two boys, the three of you could have actually prepared for and defeated the Dark Lord."

The shock of his accusation caused a rush of fire to seep through her veins. "What?! That never happened! I – "

His gaze was piercing, his words snarled with venom and disgust. "As a student, we coddled you. You know that, don't you? Dumbledore insisted the teachers treat you like you were..." he looked down at her disdainfully, "...special and give you high marks on everything. He claimed it was important to the cause to have a Muggle-born be the top of the class."

The obvious loathing in his coal black stare caused her to shrink away from him as her mind spun with the implication of his words.

When Snape saw the flash of surprise and self-doubt caress her features, he sneered as he went in for the kill. "You were simply chosen because you were friends with Potter." He looked at her with contempt. "You were never special, never particularly talented at anything. Yet you strutted around, high and mighty with your supposed achievements, making ridiculous study guides for your friends. You thought they ignored them because they were lazy, but in truth they ignored them because they were worthless!"

Her mouth opened, her retaliatory retort on the tip of her tongue, but she couldn't stop the hurt his cruel words inflicted and her voice left her. It wasn't true. It wasn't.

He smiled mockingly. "Tell me, is the rumor true that instead of studying in the library, you were giving out sexual favors to Ravenclaws who did your homework for you?"

"That is a lie!" She shrieked. Little puffs of magical energy sparked from her hair and her fingers as Hermione began to rage. Rapid words flew out of her mouth with conviction. "I never touched Harry or Ron or any other Hogwarts boy for that matter. My marks were earned and were my own! Dumbledore would never instruct his teachers to give out unearned grades. I worked hard and studied constantly and every..." She suddenly stopped when she noticed he had what looked like tar over his mouth, rendering him unable to speak.

Severus tipped his head lightly and whispered an incantation that caused the tar to disappear. His expression immediately changed to one of polite interest. "It's quite impressive, Miss Granger. Particularly the non-verbal part in addition to being wandless. It's very rare."

"What?" she asked, hearing the obvious exasperation, surprise, and exhaustion in her own voice.

"Come, there is no time to lose. We must harness and fine tune the untamed magic in your core. I
must teach you to control it and teach you to summon it consciously when you are in a calm state of mind." He gestured towards the tray on the sideboard table. "Tea?"

After a couple seconds Hermione finally found her voice. '"**Tea?**"

His right eyebrow cocked up at her in response.

"You just tried to kill me, and you are now offering me tea?"

He looked at her innocently. "Well, it is four o'clock is it not?" he asked as though it was a perfectly reasonable thing to cease a wand fight to break for tea time. Hermione could see a slight twitch to his right upper lip. The realization that Severus Snape was making a joke was almost as shocking as the fact he had tried to bodily maim her.

"Splash of milk, one sugar," she responded as she crossed her arms and met his mirthful gaze with a steely one.

Hermione watched in surprise as the man in black – Severus Snape – prepared her a cup of tea. She had not expected him to actually do it and she didn't say anything when he handed it to her. Instead she watched him closely as he prepared his own.

When he passed her the tea, she felt on guard and cautious. Would he suddenly turn on her and throw another hex? What was he playing at? Was his intention to train her or to torment her? She remembered the hell Harry had gone through trying to learn Occlumency under this wizard's tutelage. She suddenly felt she should have been a little more understanding of Harry's plight. Thinking of her dead best friend caused her knees to go weak. She quickly sat on the sofa as her trembling hands set her tea and its saucer on the coffee table before her.

When her mercurial professor sat across from her in one of the wingback chairs and took a sip from his cup, he caught her eyes with his. She began to feel a slight sense of unease when his onyx orbs held her chocolate ones intensely. When she felt a gentle nudge, she realized he was in her mind. A bolt of panic shot through her at the thought of him seeing what was private.

Seeing her abuse.

Seeing her weakness.

Seeing her with Lucius.

"No! You bastard!" she snapped as she quickly looked away. "Stay out of my mind!"

When Severus' only reaction was to simply keep watching her, she became extremely irritated. "Look, I don't know what you are playing at but…"

Severus interrupted without the slightest concern as he gently placed his cup on the coffee table between them. "Did you realize, Miss Granger, that you are also a natural Occlumens?"

"Well, how would I know that?! It's not every day that some jerk comes along and sticks his huge…" Her gaze shot up to his and her eyes grew wide. "What did you say?"

"Your talents are most surprising. Wandless casting, non-verbal spells, and now Occlumency? Is there anything else you are hiding? Are you also a Seer? The Dark Lord is quite interested in locating a reliable one," he added conversationally.

"I'm sure he and Trelawney would make a wonderful pair. Tell him I highly recommend her," she
deadpanned in response.

When she saw not only the right side but the left side of his mouth twitch in mirth, she couldn't help her own small smile from emerging before almost instantly feeling more than a touch overwhelmed. She ran her hands through her hair before rubbing her forehead. "So...this has all been a test? The hexes and those awful things you said to me?"

"Miss Granger, I'm not going to coddle you and I'm not going to mislead you. You have natural and instinctual defensive non-verbal and wandless abilities. You also have the ability to throw an accomplished Legilimens out of your head, but only after you felt threatened by my presence. These are useful abilities and have probably saved your life more times than you realize. However, without the skill to consciously control them, without the mental focus to use the gifts in a more discreet and subtle way, they are hardly going to come to any real use for you."

"This can't be right. Lucius...I mean – that is to say, Mr. Malfoy – he saw into my mind when Draco was hurt. And then there was the time Dolohov cursed me, I almost died. Where was my magic then?"

"I can only speculate, Miss Granger, but when I looked into your mind just now, I was able to peek around a bit before you caught me. It wasn't until you became panicked about what I might find that you ejected me. Tell me. When Lucius cast the Legilimens, did you object? Did you want him out?"

Hermione stared at the man across from her without actually seeing him. She was trying to remember. No. She did not want him out. It had been twice. The first time she had wanted him to see what Draco had done. What had caused her to react. But he had not looked back far enough. The second time she actually asked him to do it.

After a moment, Severus continued, "As far as the rest of it... Tell me, before that first night – before you were able to unlock the door and run out – had you ever manifested wandless magic before?"

Hermione focused on him and considered. "No. That was the first time."

"And how many times has it happened since then?"

She swallowed. "Just now was the third since that first night; for a total of four."

"Hmm. It will likely continue to happen as time progresses. Particularly if you are provoked. However, I imagine it will come easier and easier and with less provocation needed as you become more acquainted with your newly tapped ability. That is just a theory, though, I can't be sure."

He studied her for a moment before continuing. "As far as the Ministry is concerned, perhaps you weren't magically strong enough at that time. That was over two years ago, after all. You've matured a great deal since then; physically, psychologically, and – most assuredly – magically. There is also the chance that your magic did save you that day. After all, as far as I know, you are the only living recipient of Dolohov's signature curse."

Hermione didn't respond, she just watched the man. This was all too much.

Severus cleared his throat lightly. "The Dark Lord wishes for you to gain control of your wandless abilities, Miss Granger, and that is what we shall work on. The Occlumency is not likely a talent he will wish for you to become proficient in. Therefore, it is something...I...cannot help you learn to wield."

Hermione did not miss the inflection in his voice. She looked up. "No, I imagine that Occlumency is a skill he wouldn't want anyone under his control to utilize."
He didn't respond to her observation, just merely watched her with that frustrating gaze that gave nothing away.

She wanted to hope.

She wanted to have faith.

Could he still be on her side? She had to know, but how?

"Professor, why does he want me to learn this? What exactly does he want me to do for him?"

Severus didn't answer right away. For the first time she thought she saw a flicker of concern on the man's face. It was fleeting, however, and she might have imagined it.

"I have learned never to make assumptions or predictions when it comes to the Dark Lord. Consider yourself fortunate to be alive, Miss Granger. You are the only Muggle-born he has ever spared a thought for. As for his desire to harness your ability… Well, only he knows. But whatever it is, Miss Granger, rest assured, it won't be for your benefit."

Snape shifted in his chair and his voice fell to just above a whisper, his words spoken slowly. "Regardless, I anticipate a girl such as yourself – young … emotional … confused… and with the fear of death coursing through her veins on a daily basis – would have a very hard time harnessing and controlling such an ability." He took on a slightly arrogant air, peering down his nose as he continued, "After your erratic and emotional behavior today, as well as your obvious disdain for my person, I am even more convinced that this will be a very long, drawn out process indeed."

Hermione stared at the wizard, a rush of anger and a swell of confusion overcoming her. Erratic and emotional? Disdain for his person? What was he talking about? She could certainly show him erratic and emotional, because she had been anything but in her opinion. Just as she was about to snap in retaliation, it hit her.

Her heart began to race. Excitement thrummed through her.

He wasn't taunting her, he was advising her.

She gave him a very slight nod. "Well you could hardly blame my disdain, Professor. You lied to us. You made us all believe you were on our side! Harry hated you, but Dumbledore…he believed in you and therefore I believed in you. I scolded Harry and Ron for their disrespect of you. I stood up for you!" She felt her voice start to quiver. It was easy to become emotional as all the pent-up frustration and disappointment she held for this man came bursting through her lips.

She stood and began to pace. "And this bonding potion!" She turned a steely gaze on him, the venom in her voice unmistakable. "How could you create such a disgusting thing. And to have it tied to sexual acts is just…despicable. No honorable person would create such an elixir!" As the words that spilled held more truth, she found her fury became sincerer. "You were our teacher! You were supposed to protect us, guide us. Instead Ginny, I, and countless others have been raped and forced into sexual servitude." Tears began to spill.

"Because of you, Draco beats me and rapes me…repeatedly and for show!" She closed her eyes with dread. "And the pensieve memories, the ones you confess to having seen yourself… Tell me, do you feel proud when you get your jollies watching me and who knows how many others being raped? Proud of the entertainment your invention provides?" She had stopped her pacing and was staring down at him, wanting a truthful answer.
He swallowed, and his eyes darted away from hers. Standing abruptly, he let out a breath. "The plights of Mudbloods and Blood-traitors are hardly my concern. I provide instruction and guidance to students whom are of Pureblood and whom are deemed worthy by our Lord and Master." He shook out his sleeves and straightened first one cuff and then the other as he continued, "And you are mistaken, Miss Granger. Draco's behavior is not because of my invention. If you think his hatred and violence would be different towards you were you not bonded to him, you are very much mistaken." He paused before adding, "I do as I am instructed, Miss Granger. What you think of me hardly matters."

Hermione suddenly felt a rush of guilt. He wasn't looking at her – he couldn't face her. It was the most telling display of the day. He was ashamed. If he was truly on her side, as she so wanted to believe, then she knew he had not created the potion willingly. If he was the man she hoped him to be, he was still putting on a show. He was still someone she could believe in. Someone she could put a little faith in. And right now, that meant he was possibly her only true ally. For even though she believed Lucius cared for her well-being, Lucius believed in blood purity. He would never turn against Voldemort. Not for himself and certainly not for her.

When Severus finally looked back at her, his sharp gaze and all tells of guilt gone, she offered him the barest of smiles. An expression only he would be able to discern, for the portraits were too far away. She saw him deflate ever so slightly.

It was then that Lucius entered the study. He looked from the reserved and expressionless face of his friend to the contemplative face of his charge. "Everything alright in here?"

Hermione rubbed her palms along her jeans. "Yes, it's been quite a lesson."

Lucius eyes glanced appraisingly down her form and back up. "It's almost five and we dine at six. Perhaps you would like to bathe and dress for dinner?"

Hermione internally rolled her eyes at his haughty tone, knowing he was playing the part for Snape's benefit. At least he didn't order her outright.

"Yes, that is a good idea," she conceded. She stood, looking at Snape, nodding in farewell. "Professor."

Severus met her eye but didn't say anything, He merely tipped his head in acknowledgment. Just as she turned to walk out, she peeked back at him. "Oh, umm. How is…Ginny?"

"Miss Weasley is quite well, Miss Granger. I shall let her know you enquired after her."

She nodded lightly, her voice just above a whisper. "Thank you, sir."

Lucius watched her leave before approaching the sideboard, his thoughts wandering to the young ginger girl as he poured them each a whisky. He walked back towards his friend, who was now sitting in the wingback chair again, and handed him his glass. He was quite certain Severus cared for his charge, he just didn't know how much.

"And how did Miss Weasley test on her MPS?" he asked in a conversational manner.

Severus took a small swallow. "A respectable small, light red center with a large, bright orange ring."

Lucius nodded. "Hmm. Above average with a bit of high potency as well." He sat in the wingback chair across from his friend. "That is impressive…for a Weasley. I never took them to be anything above average in their magical prowess."
Severus' gaze was penetrating. "On the contrary, my dear Lucius. While the youngest boy never exhibited anything above mediocre ability, four of the other five boys demonstrated much more. The twins were… creative and successful with their inventions. The oldest was a curse breaker with Gringotts, the second oldest – a dragon tamer. All of them worked in competitive and stressful occupations."

Lucius watched his friend with an assessing eye. "Pity they are all dead."

"Yes…pity."

Lucius could feel the measuring gaze of his closest friend as he swirled his glass tumbler, watching the amber liquid coat the cubes of ice. Finally, the silence was broken. "Miss Granger is…powerful."

Lucius' attention immediately shot from the ice in his glass to the onyx eyes of his closest friend. After a flicker of thought, he responded, "Yes, she is."

Silence.

"Are you aware she is able to cast her wandless talents non-verbally?"

*Of course, I know!* He had seen it first hand in the pool. His son hadn't stood a chance. She had cast the spell forcing Draco away while underwater, no less! Lucius contemplated his response, taking a page out of his friend's tome and not displaying any tells of emotion or concern. "Really? I hadn't realized."

"How did she test?"

Lucius felt a flush of panic. Did Severus already know? Had he peeked in her mind? Probably. It's what he would have done if the tables had been turned. *Damn it!* He should have foreseen this possibility and prepared for it. Still, he couldn't tell the truth. He couldn't admit his deceit to their Master. "She tested very strong. A solid red sphere. I sent it off to Dolohov first thing the morning after testing her."

Severus didn't respond. He simply stared at his lying friend. *How interesting.* Severus had done just as Lucius suspected. He had peeked in the girl's mind. He had been quite surprised by her display and his curiosity would not be denied. Before she had caught his intrusion and ejected him, he had seen it. A bright white marble surrounded by a ring of red. *Very strong, indeed.* Severus continued to ponder his friend's motive.

*Why would Lucius lie?*

*Why does anyone lie?*

To hide the truth.

*Why would Lucius hide the truth?*

Because he is afraid.

*And what would make Lucius afraid?*

"Does her MPS concern you? A solid red sphere is very powerful. Possibly more powerful than yourself, and most assuredly, Draco."

Lucius stared at him but didn't answer. This was a slippery slope. "Why should I be concerned?"
Severus smiled lightly. "Come, come Lucius. Don't play dumb. If the girl bests you and somehow gets away…our Lord's wrath might know no limits."

Lucius internally scoffed. If that was his only fear, he would consider himself lucky.

Severus watched his friend for a reaction. "Of course, our Lord might also decide she needs to be…watched more closely. Especially as her training continues. He might…for instance…take her on himself."

Ahhhh. There it was. The flash of fire in Lucius' eyes, the slight shift in his chair. Severus had his answer. Lucius didn't want to lose his prize. Which could only mean he cared for her. His suspicions were confirmed.

"What matter is that to me?" Lucius snapped as he sipped his drink. "I have commanded her not to leave. She can not escape. Her bond to myself and Draco is very strong. She was a virgin at the time of her bonding you might remember."

Severus swallowed. He did remember. It had been horrifying to watch the strong and brave young woman that was Hermione Granger be treated and abused as Draco had done. Had he not been surrounded by other members of the Dark Lords inner circle he would have turned away and not watched. But he had a role to play. An act to put on. An act very much like the blond in front of him was portraying right now.

"Well, you know best, I'm sure," Severus conceded. It didn't matter what Lucius had said; the gig was up. His friend cared for Hermione. The question was – how much?

"Enough to lie to the strongest, most powerful wizard and Legilimens the world has ever known. Severus would dare to venture that Lucius was in love with the girl."

Lucius swallowed the last of his drink. Severus knew. He was certain his friend knew he had lied. However, he also knew Severus cared or at least held concern for Hermione. Not to mention his suspicions that Severus held affection for his own charge. Lucius could only hope that his friend would not betray him and inform the Dark Lord of his deceit, just as he would return the favor and keep quiet about Severus' feelings for Miss Weasley.

He internally sighed with exhaustion. How much easier it would be if he could simply talk openly with his friend, but those conversations were long gone. A thing of the past. For knowledge was power and power was something no Death Eater handed over easily to another. Not even his best friend.

"Did you realize Miss Granger is also a natural Occlumens?"

Lucius tried not to react as his heart began to pound. How could that be? He had seen in her mind. "I think you are mistaken, my friend. I have been in her head and met no resistance."

"How peculiar. Miss Granger told me as such. However, when I took a peek, I was able to only take a quick look into the past few days before she sensed my presence and evicted me."

There it was. Severus was admitting he had seen. He was admitting he knew her true MP. Lucius would think on that later. Right now, he had to wonder - could she be an Occlumens? Was Severus correct?

"I hypothesized with Miss Granger that perhaps you were able to accomplish what I could not simply because she welcomed your presence. Whereas I…was most assuredly not welcome."

Could that be it? He had been in her mind twice. The first time he was rough and harsh, quickly
trying to see what had happened to Draco. But he had not looked back far enough and the second
time she had asked him to peek into her mind. He had rendered her unable to speak from his abuse of
her in the dungeon. Two rounds of crucio. He swallowed his self-hate and disgust. *How could you
have done that to her!* In her desperation to make him understand, she had invited him to look.

Lucius took a sip of some of the melted ice in his glass. "Well, there is a simple way to find out."

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Dinner was a more formal affair as they were back in the main dining room for tonight's meal.
Tender steak medallions and roasted Brussel sprouts were served alongside a creamy parmesan
crusted risotto. Despite being hungry and the food appearing most appetizing, she found her nerves
rendered her unable to take a bite.

The possibility that Snape was still fighting for the Light…the thought that he was trying to guide
her…it was a hope she had not dared to feel in many weeks. But it was also a possibility he was very
much Voldemort's wizard and was merely testing her. Perhaps Voldemort wanted to know if she
was truly resigned and broken. Perhaps Snape had been sent as a test and she had failed miserably.

It was all just so confusing. The truth was she was exhausted. What she would give to not have to
question the motives of every person around her. Ironically, Draco was the only one she was in
consistent contact with whom she felt she could trust in what he presented. He was sadistic and cruel
and hated her. She had no reason to question it. But Lucius? She had to conceive it was entirely
possible he was playing her. Even though she doubted it and prayed it was not true, she would be a
fool to not recognize the possibility.

When she glanced at him, she was surprised to see that his meal was untouched as well. This was a
first, Lucius held a robust appetite. She watched as he caught her eyes on him and then looked about
the room. She followed his gaze to see Abraxas sleeping in a portrait across the room, out of ear shot
if they spoke quietly.

"How did your lesson go?" Lucius asked as he took a swallow from his wine goblet.

"He's impossible and contrary. He hexed me! Or at least he tried to. He spouted incendiary
comments which he knew would upset me just to torment me. I don't see how I can learn from him."
She sipped her wine. "It won't be easy. That's for certain," she added with a huff.

Lucius smiled with a touch too much condescension for her liking. "My dear, this is Severus Snape
you are talking about. Did you honestly expect any different?"

She spoke loudly so that Abraxas would hear if listening. "While I concede to have lost this war and
admit I have no desire to fight against it, it would be really nice to simply be left alone. I can only
imagine the Dark Lord has a task in mind for me and I dread to ponder what it might be. I wish I
didn't haven't this…ability. Maybe then I would hold no interest to him. Maybe then I wouldn't be
bonded to men who…” She met his concerned gaze and flicked a look at Abraxas before continuing,
"…men who take such joy in their use of me."

Lucius felt a sting of pain at her words, but then he saw it. He saw her attention on his father and
then back to him. She was acting a part. This was not something she had done so enthusiastically
before. Why the change?

He delicately kept his eyes on hers as he internally whispered, "Legilimens." He tried to be as subtle
as possible, not wanting to alert her to his presence. He would like to see for himself what had
transpired in their lesson that day. He was disappointed and thrilled at the same time when her irises
flashed with anger and he was shut out of her thoughts, a door slamming in his face.
What was he doing? She felt it! She felt him poke in her head. Why? Was he testing her? Had Severus told him of her Occlumency? Regardless, she didn't like it. Was invading her body not enough? Must these men invade her mind as well?

She watched in undeniable curiosity as Lucius visibly relaxed in front of her. He picked up his fork, scooping up some risotto and then slicing into one of his medallions. When his fork was laden with the harmonizing flavors, he took his first bite and then a quick second. It seemed his appetite had returned. He offered her a small smile as he lifted his wine glass. "Eat some of your dinner, Hermione. We are heading to the stables after dessert."

*What?* He was pleased. It was obvious. Pleased she had Occluded him. And then it hit her. Severus was right. She was an Occlumens. She had done it again. She had controlled it as well. This meant she could keep secrets. And Lucius was pleased?

Dessert could not come fast enough. Hermione was desperate to know what he had to say.

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Hermione watched with a smile as Lucius was once again greeted by the large, white dog, Jupiter. She laughed as Lucius fell to the ground, despite still wearing his formal dinner robes, and allowed the dog to pounce on top of him, kissing the wizard's face with big, sloppy, wet kisses. "Yes, yes. I've missed you as well. I won't wait so long to come see you again. Perhaps tomorrow would be a good day for a ride?"

Lucius pushed himself up and brushed off his trousers with a huge, warm smile on his face. "Do you ride Miss Granger? Horseback?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, I never have. I did ride on the back of a thestral once. He was invisible to me at the time."

He shrugged. "Not quite the same, but a start. Would you like to learn? The grounds are beautiful. There are trails along the lake and into the woods. That part of the property ends at a small river about ten miles from the house. It's a very enjoyable and scenic ride."

"Well, yes, of course. But Lucius…please tell me. Is there a reason you have brought me out here tonight? Has something happened?"

His smile was radiant, and she felt her knees go weak at the beauty of it.

"I'll say." He replied, his smile unwavering. "You, my darling, brilliant, and exquisite little witch, are an Occlumens. Which means you can keep the Dark Lord out of your head. Which means I am much better able to protect you from him. There can be less…secrets between us."

Hermione smiled in return, unable to not respond to his enthusiasm. She still did not grasp why this made him so very happy. What did he wish to tell her that she did not know?

Holding his hand out to her, he led her into an empty stall and sat on a bale of hay, gesturing for her to join him. She smoothed out the back of her dress and smiled lightly. When she sat, he let out a small exhale of air. "I did something very foolish, Hermione. It was a gamble that could have cost us both our lives."

She stilled completely, a bit of horror creeping over her. "What did you do?" she whispered.

"The night of your magic testing, after you fell asleep, I sent my results to Dolohov and labeled them as yours."
Hermione's jaw fell in stunned surprise. "Why? Why would you do such a thing?"

"Because, Hermione. You tested on par with the Dark Lord! The coloring is slightly different, but there is no question your results are very similar."

"That's not…that can't be! How is that possible?" She paused. "I mean, I knew my results were strong, but you didn't tell me they were that strong!"

Lucius' expression had become tense, the look of concern in his eyes indisputable. "I didn't know what to think. I… don't know what he would do if he knew you were so powerful. I wasn't willing to find out. He might…he might have wanted to bond with you… mate with you… sire a son with you… or maybe… simply Avada you."

She watched his Adam's apple bobble as his focus moved from the tackle hanging on the wall to her face. "I couldn't risk…that. I couldn't – " He broke himself off to seemingly collect his thoughts. "So, I sent my results and labeled them as yours. I was afraid to tell you because if he looked into your mind, he would see my betrayal and I would be dead." He stood and began to pace. "I didn't take Severus into consideration, however. I… I think he knows. I think he saw it in your mind before you tossed him out." He thought for a moment. "I don't think he'll betray me. I don't believe he'll tell our Lord. But I can't be sure."

Hermione's mind was spinning. If she held any doubt that Lucius genuinely cared for her, it was obliterated in this moment. Standing slowly, she walked towards him. He paused as she approached and when she wrapped her arms around him, he only hesitated a second before returning her embrace.

After a minute Hermione spoke, having hesitated because she wasn't sure. "Lucius, I think… I think Severus is trying to protect me." She pulled back from him and looked up into his stormy grey eyes. "I want you to look in my mind and see the conversation he and I had today. See for yourself. You know him so much better than I. It's not that I think he is betraying you or… your psychopathic Lord," Lucius chuckled, "but I think he might actually hold some concern for me."

"Alright, show me."

Hermione kept her irises on his as he gently probed. This time, because she had something to show him, she was able to see it as well. He stopped watching when he saw himself enter into the memory at the end of the lesson. His arms slid up to hers, rubbing up and down. "I think you are correct, Hermione. I think he was advising you a course of action and your little explosion at the end there will give him something to show our Lord. He'll see your rage and distrust of Severus and will understand if your training… takes time."

"Would he send someone else to teach me?"

"No, I don't think so. Severus is very powerful, and his wandless magic is almost as strong as the Dark Lord's. It's not a common ability and most are erratic in their skill to wield it. Severus is really the best option to teach you. Unless he decides to teach you himself."

Hermione cringed at the thought. When Lucius felt her shiver, he pulled her closer. "Are you cold? We should probably head back."

Hermione tilted her head back from his chest and met his gaze once again; he froze when she pressed onto her toes and peppered two soft kisses onto his mouth. It was like a match was thrown into an oil well. One hand grabbed the back of her head and the other splayed across her back, pushing her closer as his mouth claimed hers dominantly. Their tongues wrestled as their hands groped, prodded,
and stroked.

His voice was breathless, and his pupils dilated with desire. "I want you, but only if you want me. It's not for the bond. It's for me…it's for you. I want you, Hermione."

"Yes, Lucius. Yes!"

Hands worked fast as clothing was quickly off and tossed aside.

"Well, well, well. What have we here?"

Both Hermione and Lucius froze at the sound of Draco's taunting voice. Hermione closed her eyes in foreboding. She felt Lucius' hands slide down to her naked bum, where he gave her a quick slap. "What do you want, Draco. Can't you see I'm busy?" He then grabbed Hermione's hair and forced her to her knees. It didn't hurt her, he wasn't being rough. He looked down at her. "You know what to do." His face was marred with a sneer, but the look in his eyes was apologetic. "Do it."

Hermione knew he was doing this for Draco's benefit. Draco couldn't know that Lucius cared for her. Lucius needed her to help him convince Draco that this was just him using her. She swallowed as she looked at his thick cock before her. She had never done this with Lucius before – only Draco. When she saw his length softening, she quickly slipped her lips around him and began to work him with the same techniques Draco preferred.

"Father, you've had her for days. It's my turn. The bond is making me jittery. Hurry up already."

Lucius' tone became abrupt and authoritative. "Draco, go to the house. I will deliver Miss Granger to you when we are finished."

Draco sighed with irritation. "Fine. But hurry. After I fuck her, we are going to see the Dark Lord. My mission was successful and little miss cock sucker is in for a mighty big surprise."
Lucius gently loosened his grip on Hermione’s head to stop her ministrations on his rapidly deflating cock the moment Draco had Apparated back to the Manor. He felt extremely discombobulated. Draco’s presence has taken him from hot and wanting to frigid in the matter of seconds. The girl kneeling before him had been a writhing mass of ecstasy in his arms only to freeze in horror when his son’s voice had broken through their lust-fueled haze.

He forewent the use of his wand and made the decision that helping her dress by hand may give her time to calm. As he clothed himself similarly, he watched her as she smoothed her dress before turning to face him. Her face was epically stoic, but her eyes held a wild terror. His stomach dropped to the soles of his feet as he saw the tears fill her eyes when he returned her gaze.

“I’m sorry,” he told her. For the first time, he didn’t question why he apologized to her. He was sorry for all of it. For letting Draco catch them (he would have to reset the wards to include the stables and grounds), for the fact that he was going to hand-deliver her to the unrecognizable man he called his son, for the fact that Draco obviously had something even more awful planned for her after he raped and tortured her again.

“I know.” Her words were strangled, and he couldn’t help his actions. He pulled her tightly into his arms and pressed a wordless kiss to the top of her head.

“I will not be far away, but I will not be able to go with you to the Dark Lord unless I am summoned.”

“He stood with her wrapped in his embrace for what felt like an eternity. Something would not let him be the first to let go – he had to allow her to be the one to pull away. He wanted her to take the strength she needed from him as she was the one who would have to endure the next hours…he would just be a useless bystander.

“Let’s get this over with,” she said finally as she disentangled herself from him.

Lucius held out his arm and within moments they were standing outside of Draco’s bedroom door. When she started to tremble uncontrollably, he almost scooped her up and Apparated them away. How could he keep allowing this to happen to her? How could he not? If they ran, they’d be hunted. He had the mark; he could be traced.

He heard her words again – was that really only days ago? “You could give me a wand and a portkey to Paris.” Could he die for her? He just…he didn’t know. He didn’t know if he could give his life for the girl. Put under the strain of torture… He scoffed internally. He was a coward, and he
feared that he would give her up if tortured.

“When it’s over, I will be here. I will have Tinny pay attention, she will call if things get out of hand again,” he promised in a low, rushed voice.

She gave him a very weak, tremulous smile before shooing him with a hand motion.

Lucius watched in wonder as she steeled herself and pushed the bedroom doors open. She didn’t look back as she disappeared inside.

Hermione was terrified. After what happened with Draco in the pool room, she could finally admit that he scared her out of her mind. She didn’t know what had happened to him, but the weak, sniveling boy she had known at Hogwarts was completely gone. In his place was this sadistic young man. A young man who was much larger and stronger than her physically, and who hated her with a depth she didn’t deserve and would never, ever be able to understand.

Hermione crossed the room and removed her dress, leaving her in a black satin bra with matching stockings. She knelt next to his bed with her hands in her lap and her eyes on the ground. She could hear him in the bathroom and hoped to help herself by being completely submissive to him. She would call him sir, she wouldn’t look him in the eye unless he commanded it…and she would keep her temper under control.

The only thing she had going for her in this situation was that, if he was going to kill her – like when he had almost drowned her in the pool, she would be able to stop him using wandless magic.

“How does my father get you to behave like such a good little slut?” Draco drawled. Hermione jumped, and her trembling only increased. Her stomach roiled, and she worried she would be sick.

“Answer me truthfully.”

“He is kind to me, sir” she told him hurriedly.

Draco made a disgusted sound in the back of this throat. “Well, that’s just no fun. Why would I be kind to you? You deserve what you get. Don’t you think?”

“Yes sir,” she answered automatically. If her body shook any harder, she’d fly into a million pieces. She tried to calm herself by pulling breaths in through her nose. In – one, two, three, four; out – one, two, three, four.

“Are you scared of me, Mudblood?” He was standing in front of her now. She could see bare feet, legs with wiry blonde hair, and the hem of a towel.

She closed her eyes, and the tears of terror she’d been keeping at bay slipped down her cheeks. She cursed herself internally for her fear. It wasn’t like it was irrational, however. This…monster…had done nothing but torment her and brutalize her from the first day. “Yes sir,” she whispered, hating the sound of her own voice at that moment.

“Good.”

Hermione was shocked when he walked away from her without touching her, but her relief was short lived. “Stand and do something with that mop of a rat’s nest you call hair. I need it out of my way.”

She despised the way she scrambled to her feet. She had nothing to secure her hair with and didn’t know what to do with it. Hermione gathered it in her hands and twisted it in a messy bun on top of
her head. Then she held it there with her mind whirling as to how to pin it in place. Quietly, when she realized Draco had disappeared into his wardrobe, she called for Tinny who appeared immediately.

“Tinny,” she whispered quickly. “The young master has ordered my hair up and out of the way, I have nothing to fasten it. Could you –?” She didn’t have to finish the request. Tinny snapped her fingers and instantly, Hermione’s hair was secured in place. “Thank you, my darling little elf,” she told Tinny with sincere appreciation.

Tinny was gone by the time Draco returned from his closet. She watched him through lowered eyelashes as he dragged a chair around from his desk and pointed at it. “Sit, Mudblood.” She moved to it and sat with as little sound as possible.

“Incarcerous!” he snarled the moment her bottom touched the seat of the chair. She whimpered as her fear renewed and the trembling (that had calmed somewhat as nothing awful had happened yet) grew even more pronounced as her arms, legs, and torso were secured to the chair with bindings that flew out of his wand.

“Do you know what the Dark Lord told me tonight, Mudblood?” He paused, seemingly for dramatic effect, before he continued without an answer from her. “He told me that you tested powerfully… more than powerfully. At the highest potency there is without matching the Dark Lord, himself.” The tone of his voice was full of disgust, it was obvious that Draco found her magical ability abhorrent.

“I was taunted… taunted… before of a room full of Death Eaters because you could… because you have overpowered me.” He stopped talking again, but his breathing had grown erratic with obvious fury. He took a moment to calm himself before he continued, “I have pleased him, though, Mudblood. I’ve brought him a wonderful gift. A gift that took me these past weeks to track down, collect, and return to him. It was no small feat – this task. Because of this, because of my dedication to him, he had a gift for me.” Here, he held out a simple necklace. It was a ring of some sort of crystal and was very, very pale purple in color. Possibly goblin- or Elvin-made.

“Do you know what this is, Mudblood?”

“No sir,” she whispered, looking at curiously.

“This is a collar,” he murmured. His tone had changed exponentially and caused a chill to course through her. “Goblin forged crystal tanzanite… do you know what it will do?”

“No sir.”

He let a laugh; a sadistic laugh of pleasure. “The brightest witch of the age doesn’t know the answer to my question?”

“I don’t, sir.” Her voice sounded small to her own ears.

“Well, let me be the first to enlighten you… This necklace will bind your magic, Mudblood.”

Her eyes flew to his in horror. Bind her… bind her magic?! He grinned at her maliciously, knowing her thoughts exactly. “Please no,” she was unable to stop herself from gasping the request.

“Oh yes,” he answered as he slowly moved in front of her. One long-fingered hand slid gently around her neck and she was sure he could feel her heart thrumming a trillion beats a second. He gave a gentle squeeze before releasing her in order to use both hands to open the collar and slip it over her flesh. It was cool and oddly flexible, but that didn’t last.
The moment the crystal touched behind her neck, it burned hot, became rigid, and tightened so it dug just slightly uncomfortably into her skin. “Stunning,” Draco whispered before he pressed a mocking kiss to her forehead. Hermione held herself very still when all she wanted to do was jerk away. He had whispered it like an endearment. As if he were giving her a gift she should be appreciative of.

Then her thoughts were ripped away as the ring of gemstone grew uncomfortably hot, she gasped loudly as she flailed against the bindings, wanting to raise her hands and rip the necklace away. Just before it felt as though it would scorch her skin to ribbons, it cooled and turned into a cold lead weight against her throat.

“If you try and use magic against anyone, it will heat as it gathers the energy. As soon as it collects the energy away from you, so you’re unable to use it, it will cool and harden. Only people who have the Dark Mark can remove it.” He watched her watch him with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

Suddenly, his face cleared, all trace of evilness gone as he amicably suggested. “Let’s get started, shall we? Best not to keep the Dark Lord waiting.”

Her mind reeling from shock that her ability to use her wandless magic had just been completely stripped from her, Hermione didn’t even think to fight him as he cancelled the Incarceration Hex and pulled her to stand. For the first time, he removed what was left of her clothing – probably because of the vacant look in her eye that told him she wasn’t finished processing what had just happened.

The next time Hermione was aware of what was going on, she found herself face down on the bed. Her feet were still planted on the floor, but her hands were bound at the small of her back. “I’ve been craving your ass again, Granger,” he was murmuring in that twisted, seductive voice of his. “No numbing creams this time, you’ve had opportunities to get used to being taken like this, I’m sure. My father certainly has had you all to himself for many, many hours. I will use lube, though. More for my pleasure than yours.”

Even though her heart rate accelerated again, Hermione tried to force herself to relax. She knew this would be awful, but so far, the wretch was actually being somewhat gentle with her. He hadn’t slapped her or shoved her.

She felt the spell that indicated he had cleared out her bowels, and she heard him lather himself in what must be lubrication gel – the wet, sloshy sound of him stroking himself. He lined himself up at her rear entrance. “Brace yourself, darling.” His tone had turned evil again, and he mocked her with the endearment. Suddenly, she knew she had been wrong to feel even fractionally at ease. “I won’t be gentle.”

She was unable to hold back the scream as he entered her.

She was sobbing uncontrollably with the pain of his assault when he rolled off her. She had never felt so ashamed in all her life. He had used little slicing hexes on her while he had painfully taken her arse and blood dripped from the cuts that were literally all over her body. Her breasts were once again covered in bite bruises and she could feel the stickiness of blood and ejaculate leaking out of her.

“Get dressed,” he growled, taking her by the arm and tossing her to the floor where her pile of clothing lay. She desperately tried to control her breath, to stop the sobs. She knew he was taking her to see Voldemort now – but she didn’t know why.

Shakily, she dressed herself. She couldn’t stop herself from wincing when she noticed blood from the dozens of cuts that littered her body were seeping through the gown. The moment she slipped her
shoes on, he grabbed her roughly by the elbow, turned on the spot, and Apparated them with no warning.

She dropped to her knees the moment they arrived and her stomach – upset from the entire experience with Draco and rolling because of the side-along Apparition – heaved and she expelled her dinner in front of her the moment they landed.

“Watch it. Merlin you are a disgusting little cunt!” he snarled at he as he back away from her pool of sick.

She didn’t respond, just sucked in deep breaths through her mouth before she spat forcefully and wiped the sick from her chin with the back of her hand. She forced herself to stand and follow him. They appeared to be at some large, ancient house. She felt like she was going to vomit all over again when she saw the surname “Lestrange” twisted into the iron of the gates. She forced herself to focus, to follow Draco’s white-blond head as they made their way inside and twisted through the hallways of the estate. Within a few strides, he was meters ahead of her. She flinched when he looked over his shoulder at her and, noticing how far behind she was, let out a string of expletives.

She froze and shrank back when he turned on his heel and stalked back to her. Once he reached her, he grabbed her arm roughly and literally dragged her after him while ignoring her pitiful mewls of discomfort. The hex slices burned with each breath she took, her stomach rolled with the movement, and her bottom protested each step.

Draco was unusually quiet as he led Hermione along the maze of rooms and hallways. His bruising grip on her forearm left her no choice but to keep up with the quick stride of his long and determined legs. She realized they must be getting close to their destination when she began to hear the soft baritone of male voices. When Draco halted before a set of heavy French doors, she peeked up to see that his face was tense, and his eyes were hard and focused. Looking back in front of her, the doors were somewhat intimidating with large brass handles and intricate vine carvings along their panels.

Draco let out a deep exhale of air. It was obvious he was on edge. She wondered if his mission had been some sort of test. He certainly wasn’t exhibiting his normal cocky swagger. He spared her a glance, his lip turned up into a sneer. “Don’t speak unless spoken to and don’t move unless instructed.”

Hermione couldn’t help but to nod in understanding, his nervousness had her almost in a panic. She watched as he tapped his wand on one of the handles and whispered his name. The ominous doors swung open revealing a large antechamber where several witches and wizards were convened. It was quite a large crowd which included, much to Hermione’s relief, Lucius and Severus. Lucius must have received a summons, after all. The wizards glanced at her entrance but paid no interest before looking away and resuming their intimate conversation. Hermione couldn’t help but feel a bit disappointed at their disinterest in her arrival. It was likely for show, but it still stung. Draco dragged her over to join them.

Hermione had to keep herself from cringing when the sneering drawl of the Lucius Malfoy of old greeted her ears. She had forgotten he could sound that way. “Draco, really. You could have allowed the girl to put on a clean dress and fix her face and hair. What will the others think?” Frankly, she had forgotten he could look that way as well – snooty… haughty… infallible. It reminded her of all those years ago at the bookstore in Diagon Alley. It was hard to believe that was only five years ago. It felt like a lifetime.

Feeling self-conscious, Hermione peeked down at herself. Her dress was littered with patches of dried blood from Draco’s earlier torture. The cuts were still painful as they had not been healed. She
had been too distracted to notice, but now they were screaming at her. She looked back up at Lucius to find he was watching her. His face gave nothing away, but his eyes...his eyes met hers for the briefest of flashes and she could see the concern in them. It was a such a simple thing, that flash of worry, but it calmed her more than she could express. He was here with her and he would do his best to protect her, she knew that. Even if his best would still be the absolute minimum.

At his father’s rebuke, Draco looked at Hermione with his hard and glowering gaze. He scrutinized her face and hair before he glanced down to her wrinkled and blood-stained dress. With a slight roll of his eyes, he whispered, “Tinny!”

Instantly a loud pop was heard at their feet, and the small elf was looking up with large and nervous eyes.

“Fix that,” Draco ordered, gesturing towards her as though she were merely the wobbly leg on a table.

She offered Tinny a tentative smile in thanks when the elf snapped her fingers, and Hermione felt the hair shift on her head. Unable to see herself, she could only guess by the look on the men’s faces that she was presentable. She glanced down and found her midnight blue dress to now be as perfect as when she first put it on. The blood stains were gone, however the cuts remained hidden underneath and were still painful. They must have clotted over as there was no fresh blood leaking through the fabric.

With a second pop, the elf was gone.

When she looked back up towards Lucius, she found his focus was on her neck. She immediately reached up and felt her new collar. The necklace that was binding her magic. His eyes moved to hers for the merest of seconds before shooting to Draco.

“A new collar for our charge, I see. I don’t recall you asking my permission for such a thing.”

“I hardly need your permission to do as our Lord instructs.”

It was Snape who responded. “The Dark Lord commanded this?”

Draco looked away from the doors to his Godfather with a victorious grin on his face. “He - and I agree wholeheartedly - feels she needs to be kept in her place. She cannot be allowed to have flashes of such magic. She is a Mudblood, she doesn’t deserve such a skill.”

Snape’s expression was inscrutable as he studied his Godson for a moment. “I think, Draco, you might be misinterpreting something of great importance. This collar you seem so pleased about speaks more of your lack of ability to control her than anything else.” He looked about the room. “You seem terribly pleased that your captive needs to have her magic bound in order for you to...contain her.”

Hermione couldn’t help the internal jump for joy at the sudden pained and frustrated look on Draco’s face. She felt a flush of pride for herself and a huge amount of gratitude towards her old professor. She peeked up to find he was looking around the room again as though bored.

Draco on the other hand, became fidgety. It was obvious that Severus’ words disturbed him greatly. He didn’t say anything, though. Instead, he kept his attention on a second set of doors which were flanked by two masked Death Eaters.

“Draco, why so nervous?” Lucius asked with what, on the surface, seemed to be mild interest.
Draco shot his father a self-important glare. “You’ll find out soon enough, Father. That is if that blasted door ever opens and allows us entry.”

Hermione didn’t miss the shared look between the two older wizards. They seemed as in the dark as she was.

All heads turned towards the second set of doors when they flew open, allowing a confident and smirking Bellatrix Lestrange to exit. When she spotted Draco, she sauntered over. Ignoring Hermione completely, and barely sparing a nod for Lucius and Severus, she fawned over her nephew. “Ohh, Drakie. I’m so proud of you.”

To Hermione’s astonishment, Draco practically blushed at his aunt’s praise. “Thanks, Aunt Trix. I couldn’t have done it without Uncle Rod’s help.”

She practically purred as she stroked his cheek with a long, red nail. “Well then, be sure to give credit where credit is due before our Lordship.”

“Oh of course,” he agreed readily.

“In that case, he is waiting for you.”

“Excellent,” Draco offered in return. “Are you coming to watch the show?”

Bellatrix smiled playfully. “Of course, nephew. I wouldn’t miss your;” her focus shifted to Hermione, “big moment.”

Hermione could feel Lucius tense beside her. Clearly, he was apprehensive.  For her part, Hermione was part terrified and part curious. Draco had implied multiple times that she would take great interest in his mission. While she knew it would likely be something truly horrible, she couldn’t help her own morbid curiosity. Snape was the only one who seemed unfazed and disinterested in the conversation.

Draco grabbed her arm roughly before turning to Lucius. “Are you coming Father? Severus?”

Both men nodded their assent and followed.

They entered what was essentially a throne room. It was a large, rectangular space, with huge stone fireplaces adorning the long walls to the entrance’s right and left. Straight ahead, at the end of the room was a large, regal chair where Voldemort sat in voluminous and heavy black robes. Hermione couldn’t be sure, but it seemed the self-appointed king looked smaller somehow. He was still terrifying to look at, but it was as though his robes were too big for him.

As the small group walked the length of the long room, Hermione felt more and intimidated by the space. It had a medieval feel to it and she found herself wondering just how old this Manor was. This particular room was very castle like. The brick and stone walls were all covered with large, wool tapestries while the floor was adorned with various rugs, animal skins, and fur. From the ceiling hung six monstrous, multi-tiered iron chandeliers. Each arm held a wax candle. Large sconces were spaced at even intervals along the walls and between the hangings. Flames and shadows danced as though playing hide and seek.

As they moved closer to the monster whose audience they were seeking, Hermione felt her terror rise again and struggled to keep up with the young blond sadist. **Why am I here? What do I have to do with this? Is Draco going to kill me? Is murdering me his big moment?** Or was she here to witness the death of another? Perhaps she would be the first victim of a new potion or hex? Something Draco created maybe? She knew she should stop trying to guess; she was only making things worse.
When they were about ten feet from the dais, Draco fell to his knees as did Lucius, Snape, and Bellatrix. A hard pull on her arm had Hermione on her knees as well.

“Ahh, Draco. Your big night has finally arrived. Your…punishment for your little Mudblood. I see you have brought Lucius and Severus with you…how delightful.” His eyes then moved to Bellatrix. “Back so soon, Bella?” He gestured to a pillow to the left of his chair. “Here my pet, sit beside me.” Hermione knew without question the witch was stark raving mad when she eagerly rushed to her master’s side and kneeled on the pillow as though it was the happiest moment of her life.

Hermione internally flinched when the monster’s thin and spidery hand reached out and stroked Bellatrix’s head. As though he could read Hermione’s mind, he smiled grotesquely to show yellow teeth the color of mustard. “Lucius tells me you are coming to accept your place in this new world. Does he speak truthfully? Are you prepared to end your defiance?”

Hermione’s mouth was bone dry. “I…yes, sir. I humbly apologize for my past behavior. My only wish is to not give offense and to be of some small use to your Lordship.” The words tasted like ash. She hated the sound of them. She hated to submit, even if it was a lie. She could feel Lucius relax a touch as he remained kneeling to her right. Draco, who was to her left, let out a small indignant scoff.

“You have something to add, young Draco?”

The younger Malfoy kept his head bowed. “She still fights, my Lord. She still resists her new world.”

“Ahh yes, Lucius wrote to me of your latest…scuffle. However, she is collared now. I hardly see how that will be a problem going forward.”

Suddenly Hermione was struck with a new panic. With her magic bound, would she still be able to Occlude? What if he looked into her mind and saw her true magic sphere?

“Besides, Lucius doesn’t seem to encounter the same struggles that you do. Therefore, she will remain collared when under your charge. Lucius, however, can choose whether he wishes her to remain so when in her presence.”

“Thank you, My Lord,” Lucius responded reverently.

It took all her control not to laugh at the insult. Draco had to be fuming. She would likely pay for it later, but she would enjoy his misery while she could.

“This all leads us to why we are here.” His voice rang out with a false resigned air to it. “It saddens me that it has come to this, but Draco has a right to punish you for your assaults on his person, Hermione. You are his to do with as he chooses, and you are not allowed to fight him.

She hated the sound of her name coming out of his mouth. Call me Mudblood. Call me whore. Call me anything, but please don’t make me cringe at my own name.

Then his words hit her – she was here for a punishment. A public one. And it involved Draco’s mission.

Suddenly, she knew. Oh God! No! Her eyes welled with tears as the worst punishment came to mind. Her body began to tremble, and she broke out in a cold sweat. Please let me be wrong!

“Well, Draco. It is time.” The despot announced ominously. “Bring them in, Wormtail.” He then waved his hand dismissively at Draco and his entourage. “You may stand.”
Hermione’s legs were like rubber. She felt weak. Sick. It was Lucius who reached down and cupped her upper arm. “Stand, Miss Granger.” The bond forced her to find the strength and, with his help, she made it to her feet.

She closed her eyes, praying that by some miracle she was mistaken. A small voice, the voice of reason, told her it was impossible. How would Draco even find them. She could feel the blond’s hateful and expectant glare on her but refused to look.

It felt as though her guts had fallen to the floor as all hope vanished suddenly; she would recognize their footsteps anywhere. Her parents, now known as Wendell and Monica Wilkins. Unable to stop herself, she turned her head and watched their approach with agonized eyes.

Their expressions held confusion as they glanced about the faces in the room. The pain of them not recognizing her was overshadowed by her fear for their lives. Their focus paused on Draco before moving toward the grotesque thing on the modified throne. Hermione didn’t fault her mother for her inability to conceal her shock at the snake man before her.

Hermione’s first tear fell when her father spoke.

“Young man? What’s going on?” His questioning eyes were back on Draco.

Hermione couldn’t help but look up at the younger Malfoy to find he was smirking maliciously. “First off, call me Draco. It’s my real name, after all.”

“My question exactly,” he responded. “You are mistaken… Steven, or whatever your name is… we don’t have a daughter,” Wendell rebutted.

The gleeful laugh and accompanying clap from the demon spawn sitting on the throne caused all eyes to turn his way. “Oh, Draco! Such entertainment you manage to provide!” He looked down at Bellatrix. “Do be a dear and allow the others from the foyer to enter. I think our young Draco deserves an audience in recognition of his hard work.” Bellatrix was on her feet quickly and dashed off on her task.

He looked back at Draco. “How did you find them?”

Draco bowed his head in servitude. “No task is too great when requested by My Lord. I enlisted the guidance of Rodolphus. His tracker abilities are well known.”

“Yes, yes. Please continue.” He gestured back towards Hermione’s parents, clearly more interested in the show than Draco’s actual response.

Hermione heard the clacking of heels and boots as more Death Eaters and recruits entered the large room. She stared at her parents with apologetic eyes as their confusion and fear continued to mount.
Hermione’s mother’s voice was panicked. “Please! What is going on?”

Draco turned to Hermione. “Why don’t you explain, Mudblood. They are your parents after all.”

Lucius was stunned and, what was worse, he was essentially paralyzed. He could do nothing. It was Narcissa all over again. He tried to maintain his composure and held his Occlumency without pause. He couldn’t risk his feelings on the matter discovered but behind those shields his concern for Hermione had him wishing he could pull her into his arms and take her far away, hide her, and protect her. He looked back towards his Lord. No, it would never work. He would be found; by Rodolphus or another of the bloodhounds amongst the Death Eater ranks.

He watched in silent support as Hermione did as Draco said. She turned towards her parents who obviously held no recollection of her. What was worse, their irritation and anger were only slightly overshadowed by their fear.

His eyes fell on Hermione’s mother. It was uncanny how much Hermione looked like her. The shape of her face, her mouth and nose…but it was the eyes – a warm and chocolatey brown. They were expressive and showed the same vulnerability that Hermione’s often held despite her best efforts to conceal that side of herself. He glanced down her figure and it was like looking into a crystal ball. This was what Hermione would look like in another thirty years. A slightly heavier frame, but not fat. Hips that were shapely beneath a slim waist. Hermione’s mother was a lovely woman.

Lucius then glanced at Hermione’s father and could see where the hair came from. Before he could make any more comparisons, he was pulled from his observations when Hermione tentatively spoke. Her voice was slightly shaky but became more grounded as the words spilled from her lips. “Draco is telling you the truth. My name is Hermione Granger. I’m your daughter. You don’t remember me because your memories were modified so that you would forget you had a child. I did it to protect you.” She looked about the room. “From this.”

It was Snape who said what Lucius was thinking. “Perhaps, the best course of action is to reverse the memory charm.”

Hermione looked to her right in response to the black-haired wizard. “I…I don’t know how. I always intended to learn…if I survived, that is. Regardless, with this collar on…I have no magic.”

“Magic?” Wendell started to laugh. “This is all a joke, right?” He looked at his wife. “Any minute now someone will jump out and yell, ‘Surprise, you’re on candid camera!’”

Monica didn’t laugh, she just kept staring at Hermione. Lucius noticed her forehead crinkled just like Hermione’s when Hermione was trying to figure something out. Her voice was soft, just above a whisper. “I’ve seen you before. In my dreams.” Her eyes began to well. “I always wanted a daughter. When I was in college, I decided that if I ever had one, she would be named Hermione.” She swallowed. “I love Shakespeare, you see.”

Hermione began to cry. “I know you do, Mum. You used to read it to me every night when I was a little girl.”

It was then that Monica’s tears began to fall. “I dreamt that. I dreamt about reading to a little girl who looked just like me.” Her eyes shot to her husband’s. “Dell, look. Look at her.”

Lucius could tell Hermione was barely keeping it together. He watched as Hermione’s father began to believe; began to understand it might be true. The room was dead silent – all eyes and ears were glued to the drama unfolding.
“This is all very touching, but let’s move along shall we?” Voldemort’s words caused all focus to shoot his way. He gestured to Severus. “Severus, you do it. Restore their memories so that we can speed this process along.”

Hermione looked back towards her prior professor, desperation in her eyes.

Lucius rather hoped the wizard would be unsuccessful. It would only make Hermione’s misery worse if her parents remembered her before they were tortured and likely killed. He had not missed his son’s earlier statement that they were kidnapped to ensure Hermione’s best behavior, but Lucius knew the Dark Lord far better than Draco. It was unlikely the Granger’s would live to see dawn. There were far too many Death Eaters about…and recruits; recruits who were chomping at the bit for a chance to prove just how depraved and creative they could be with Muggle torture.

Severus stepped forward while drawing out his wand. “Keep your eyes open,” he commanded softly at Hermione’s father as he directed his wand at him.

Lucius could see the struggle on the man’s face. He clearly didn’t know whether to agree or fight. When his eyes dipped to his daughter’s, Lucius could see the flash of resignation. “Alright,” he responded.

It was silent as Severus stared into Wendell Wilkins’ eyes. He maintained his focus as he spoke to Hermione. “Impressive, Miss Granger. A scaena quattuor obliviation. This is Master charm level work.”

Lucius was once again stunned. A scaena quattuor obliviation was the deepest and most difficult of them all. It would wipe out only the memories of a specific person, while weaving through the mind and filling the holes with information that kept gaps from becoming troublesome. It was highly complex and impressive magic. Especially for a teenage Muggle-born. The murmurings from around the room proved that others felt the same way.

“Ahh, what a treasure you are Miss Granger,” Voldemort crooned. For the first time, all eyes remained on the action before them instead if turning towards the megalomaniac.

It was then that Lucius noticed his son out of his periphery. Draco was irritated and highly impatient. He wanted to get on with his torture. He wanted to break Hermione and turn her into a shell of the woman she was. Lucius swore to himself he would not let his son succeed.

Hermione, in turn, made no response. She simply kept her focus on her father. After another minute, Severus slid his wand into his sleeve and stepped back.

The transformation was instant. Wendell Wilkins no longer existed, and David Granger fell to his knees as a sob escaped from his chest. “Hermione?”

Hermione flew into her father’s arms, weeping as he held her and rocked her. “Oh, my darling daughter. My little pumpkin. What have we done? What have your mother and I allowed you to get yourself mixed up in?” His words caused Hermione to sob harder.

Hermione’s mother looked from her husband and estranged daughter to Severus. Her plea was desperate. “Please! Give me my daughter back!”

Severus stepped towards Monica, once again reversing an impressive scaena quattuor obliviation. When he was finished, Hermione’s mother rushed towards her daughter and Draco made his move. A flick of his wand blasted Hermione across the room and away from her mother’s pending embrace. She crashed into a stand with a sculptured bust, causing it to topple over. She let out a
squeal when the heavy piece landed on her leg.

“Hermione!” Jane Granger screamed and started to run across the room towards her daughter.

“Ah, ah, ah.” Draco said in a sing-song voice. Another flick of his wand caused Hermione’s mother to fall backwards.

“Jane!” The muggle man bellowed, dashing to his wife and assisting her to stand.

Draco surprised Lucius with his good sense when he turned to the Dark Lord and asked, “Any requests or restrictions, My Lord?”

“No more or less than we discussed earlier, Draco. Go ahead. Have your fun.”

Draco smiled, wickedly. “Thank you, My Lord.” He then looked back at Hermione who was now standing and starting to limp towards her parents. “No. You stay there.” Hermione stopped, aggravation and tears on her face. He then looked at Lucius. “Father, don’t interfere.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it, Draco. You’ve outdone yourself.” Lucius responded with a fake show of pride on his face. Underneath the façade was growing concern for his girl. She was clearly in pain and small patches of blood were beginning to leak through her dress. He noticed the worst spot was on her abdomen and her dress had a tear where she had had to pull it to get it out from under the heavy sculpture. It was a miracle the thing hadn’t fallen on her head and killed her.

Draco smirked in response and silence descended over the room as he sauntered towards the Muggle couple. His voice was polite, as though he were making introductions at a social gathering. “First off, please. Introductions are in order.”

He gestured towards Voldemort. “The esteemed and powerful wizard you see to your right is the Dark Lord. Consider yourselves honored to be in his presence. My name is Draco Malfoy,” he said with a slight bow of his head, “and that man that resembles me is my father, Lucius Malfoy. To his right is my Godfather and Headmaster of Hogwarts, Severus Snape. The lovely woman you see next to our Lord is my Aunt, Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband, Rodolphus is…” he peered about the room. “Ahh, there he is.” He laughed before sharing conversationally, “Forgive him. He’s just acquired a new Mudblood and he simply can’t keep his cock out of her.

“Uncle, I know Lizzie is a treat, but please…join in the fun, won’t you?”

There was scattered laughter and cat calls about the room as Rodolphus grunted, “Almost finished here.”

Lucius looked up at the dais to see the Dark Lord was laughing and looking quite pleased with the performance.

“The other faces you see are more Death Eaters and recruits who wish to be of service to his Lordship.” He let out a breath. “Whew. Oh, and just so you understand. Your daughter is bonded to myself as well as my father, which means she has to do what we say, when we say – at all times.”

He looked back towards Hermione. “Meow like the pretty little pussy you are, Mudblood.” Hermione began to mew like a cat.

When her father growled, “You bastard!” and started to lunge toward Draco, the young Malfoy was ready for it. “Crucio.” Hermione’s mewls became drowned out by the sound of her father’s screams.

Jane Granger fell to her knees, crying for her husband who was writhing on the floor before her.
Draco lifted the hex to the sound of laughter and yells of ‘encore’ from the crowd.

Lucius only had eyes for Hermione and kept his attention on her. She was bawling as cat-like sounds choked out of her mouth. He felt sick – the scene before him was obscene – and he was ashamed. He had been cruel like Draco, at one time. He had never brutalized women, but he had certainly raped them and tormented them for sport. It had been many years since he had found enjoyment in such behavior, though.

Draco beckoned Hermione over and ordered her to cease with the cat sounds causing Bellatrix to stop laughing and let out a disappointed sigh.

“So, where were we? Oh yes. Now that you know who we are, lets learn who you are.” He smiled heartlessly at Hermione as she hobbled over. “Why don’t you introduce your parents.”

Hermione’s voice was raw and sounded strained. “Everyone, these are my parents, David and Jane Granger.”

There were mocking and teasing greetings from about the room.

“Delighted.”

“Charmed, I’m sure.”

“Your daughter has great tits.”

Draco chuckled. “Yes, she certainly does.” He looked up at David. “But then again, you probably know that, don’t you?” The room grew silent. “ Hmm? How about it? Have you seen your daughter’s tits before?”

David was now standing, his face full of loathing. “Of course not! She’s my daughter!”

Draco lazily scanned up and down Jane Granger. “Does her mother have nice tits?” He smiled conspiratorially at David, “Come now, you can tell me.”

Lucius could see where this was going but, for the life of him, he could do nothing to make it stop.

“What? You won’t tell me?” Draco pouted. He looked about the room. “Well, is anyone else curious?”

There were claps and whistles and various responses.

“I am.”

“Let’s see ‘em.”

“They look kind of small.”

Draco scanned the now large crowd. It seemed many had been summoned to the fun. “Ahh, Macnair. You want to do the honors?”

“My pleasure,” his gruff voice responded as the sound of his heavy boots approached from the back of the room.

Draco looked back at Jane’s horrified face. “Tell me, are there limits to what you would do to save your daughter’s life?”
Jane swallowed heavily, her eyes on Hermione. Her voice was strong, and Lucius saw a great deal of Hermione in her defiant expression and tone. “There is nothing I wouldn’t do for her.” She began to speak to her daughter directly. “Hermione, I love you. Whatever happens. Know that!”

As Macnair came up behind Jane and pulled her away from the clutches of her husband, Hermione cried harder. “I’m so sorry Mummy. I’m sorry!”

When David charged after Macnair, another whispered “Crucio” had the man writhing on the floor once again. The focus of the room seemed to shift from the father on the floor to the mother having her clothes torn from her body. When the curse was ended, and David Granger lay whimpering and panting on the floor, Hermione did the only thing she could. She begged. She turned to Draco with imploring eyes and desperate words. “Please, sir. Please, I’ll do anything. ANYTHING! Please! Just don’t hurt them. They are innocent.”

Draco turned on her, fury in his eyes. “Innocent? Innocent, you say?” He looked back at the now topless woman whose breasts were being fondled by the large, ape like hands of Macnair. Glancing down at the defeated man on the floor, he shook his head in disgust. “They are not innocent. They created you! You are an abomination; you are worth nothing more than the warm cunt between your thighs.”

Draco looked back at the brute Death Eater towering over Hermione’s mother. “Have a go if you want.”

Macnair grinned. “Well, since you offered.”

Draco then looked at his Father. “Father? Forgive me. I should have given her to you first.”

Lucius looked from Draco to Hermione. “While I appreciate the offer, I have no desire to sully my cock on a Muggle. It is bad enough we have to dirty ourselves with that.” Lucius died just a little on the inside when he saw more light go out of the girl’s eyes. He hadn’t meant it. She had to know that!

Draco laughed. “I see your point, Father. Still, there are many here whom I doubt hold themselves to your standards.”

When Lucius looked back at Macnair, it was to find him buried balls deep in Jane Granger, her mouth gagged with cloth as he bent her over a side table. A crowd was forming around the assault. Draco pulled Hermione over to her mother. “Don’t look away, Mudblood. This is your doing. You caused this. You fought the bond. You fought me.”

He stepped closer to Hermione’s mother, bending down and whispering into her ear as her body jolted with each brutal thrust of her rapist. “This is your daughters doing. You would still be working on that little ocean front cottage if she hadn’t forced me to come looking for you.” He smirked cruelly as the woman made pained noises and grunts with each intrusion of Macnair’s cock. “Oh, look Mudblood – mummy’s crying.” He gathered Jane’s tears on the tip of a finger before turning to Hermione’s and rubbing his fingers together to spread the liquid. “I do so love it when they cry, you know.”

Draco smirked as Hermione’s tears fell faster down her cheeks before he looked about the faces of the voyeurs. “Have a turn, each of you. We’re running low on time, though. Best you become creative.”

Draco pulled Hermione away from the ensuing gang-bang of her mother and led her back to David who was trying to stand. When Draco released her arm, she stumbled to her father and had just
wrapped her arms around him, when Draco ordered her away again.

Her eyes were imploring as she saw the tears stream down her father’s face. He had no choice but to stand by as his wife was being triple penetrated not ten feet away. Hermione began to sob hysterically. “Daddy, I’m sorry. This is all my fault. I’m so sorry.”

Lucius was impressed as David Granger immediately stopped his tears and wiped his face with his sleeve. He never took his eyes off his daughter. “You listen to me young lady, this is not your fault. You are my brilliant and beautiful little girl. And I love you always…no matter what! Whatever happens here – remember that!” The words caused Hermione to double over in her grief and terror, clutching her stomach as she choked on sobs.

“How droll.” Draco carelessly flipped a hand at a few younger recruits. “Why don’t you gentlemen teach him to hold his tongue? No one wants to hear that sappy nonsense spouting from his mouth. Being that he’s a Muggle – perhaps use Muggle methods, so he’ll understand what’s happening, you know.”

Hermione shrieked and tried to put herself between her father and the four young men who were approaching David. She was unable to move because of Draco’s commands. “Please stop!” she begged when one hopeful Death Eater locked David in a full Nelson from behind while another landed a hard blow to the man’s gut.

Lucius had to enforce his Occlumency shield even more as his son ordered Hermione to watch her parents closely as they were tormented, so she would learn her lesson. Her pallor grew more and more white with each blow her father took and each screech of pain that emanated from her mother. He saw when her legs gave out and she dropped into a tall kneel while she begged Draco to stop their torment and promised she would never defy him again. She apologized over and over again between broken screams and gasp of air.

It was minutes that felt like hours before Voldemort spoke. “Enough! I’ve grown bored, Draco. I think you’ve had plenty of fun for one evening. I would suffice it to say that Miss Granger has learned her lesson.”

For the first time ever, Hermione was grateful for the Dark Lord. Her words came out muffled and choked and interrupted by hiccoughs. “Yes. Yes, sir. I pro –” hic “promise I won’t ever resist ag –” hic “again. I’ve learned my lesson.” She was trembling. (Had she stopped trembling for even a moment since Draco appeared this evening?) Had there been anything left in her stomach, it would have made a reappearance by now.

Voldemort stood. “We shall see, we shall see. Leave. All of you.” He turned to Bellatrix. “Except for you my pet.”

The assault on Jane Granger instantly stopped, and the men who were beating David dropped him to the ground. As the Death Eaters and recruits adjusted their clothing and refastened their zippers and buttons, Draco ordered, “Get your mother, Mudblood.” Draco ordered.

Hermione rushed to her mother only to find her covered in secretions and sweat. Her eyes were closed, and her naked body shivered as her teeth chattered. Hermione couldn’t help the fresh rush of tears. “Mum, you need to stand. It’s over. Come on, mummy.” Jane moaned and winced as she struggled to right herself. David painfully pulled himself to stand and moved to his wife’s other side, helping her up along with Hermione. Lucius and Severus moved to lead the way and Draco followed with his exhausted and traumatized Muggle captives and Hermione in tow.

“Oh, Hermione.” The group froze at the sound of Voldemort’s voice from behind them. I meant
what I said. It would be a pity for you to lose both your parents. Behave!”

They had just started to walk again, believing him finished speaking when the curse came. “Avada Kedavra!” The sound of the body hitting the floor was followed by a scream of anguish that shook Lucius to the core. His eyes flashed from his witch to Severus in stunned surprise when her collar arched out flashes of bright-white light and pulses of energy that caused his hair to blow. It was magnificent and heartbreaking at the same time. He swallowed, battling disappointment and relief when the collar finally overcame her magic. He looked away, reinforcing his Occlumency shields, when Hermione collapsed to her knees, sobbing… Broken.
Lucius knew she was in shock. Outside of the horrified scream of pure anguish that would haunt him until the day he died, she had made no sound since it had happened.

They had returned to the Manor with Snape and her parents in tow. Draco had left Lucius and Snape with only a brief explanation that he would ready a dungeon cell for a long-term stay. Lucius had called on Bilby and had given his own instructions, however. Those instructions had included warming charms, blankets, and three full meals daily. Lucius would check on the prisoner himself every evening.

Lucius had not moved any of the Grangers from the Apparation foyer; a small antechamber to the main floo foyer where friends and family could directly Apparate in and out of the manor. It was a plain room in comparison with the grandeur of the rest of the Manor. Four walls done in slate blue, hardwood floors, a couple of chairs and a large cloak rack. There were no portraits.

Hermione stared unseeing at Jane and David Granger, both on the floor. One was weeping terribly for the other and the sobs reverberated through the small room. Lucius wanted nothing more than to pull Hermione into his arms, so he could tell her how sorry he was. That the loss of a parent was terrible. That the cruelty in which the loss had occurred was uncalled for. He knew she had felt they were safe. She had thought that it could have been so much worse, would likely be horrific in the days to come, but at least their deaths would not be tonight. She should have had time to speak with them; she should have had time to hold them to her – and her to them.

Now one was gone forever, and it was his son’s fault.

*Will she ever be able to look at me the same again?* The words flashed through Lucius’ mind and caused his stomach to ache at the unwelcomed thought.

“I should take the body,” Snape said quietly after several moments. “Where should I put it?”

“Not ‘it.’” It was the first time Hermione had spoken in almost twenty minutes. Her voice shook. “Him. That’s my father, Professor. Not an ‘it.’”

Jane Granger’s sobs grew louder, and Lucius watched her clutch at the traveling cloak Snape had thrown around her nakedness.

“The Muggle’s cell is ready.” Draco reentered the room with the snide declaration. “I’ll take it down.”

Lucius closed his eyes, steadying himself when Draco’s words and reappearance caused Hermione to finally breakdown. She threw herself at her mother, sobbing hysterically, and the women clutched at each other with their heads resting together as they cried. He saw the evil glint in Draco’s eyes and knew there was nothing he could do to prevent what was about to happen, but he swore to himself that he would make it up to her as soon as he could.

“Come, mummy Granger. Time for you to learn your place.” Lucius watched silently and with a guarded expression as Draco marched haughtily to the woman who looked so much like his little witch and grabbed her under her elbow roughly. “Come, filth.”

“Malfoy,” Hermione gasped, trying to keep her mother clenched in her arms as Draco attempted to
rip the two women apart. Jane was utterly defeated, sobbing incoherently through the trauma that had been the evening. She had one hand wrapped around her daughter’s wrist whilst trying to lay over her dead husband even as Draco tugged none-too-gently on her arm. “Sir, please give us just a few moments.”

The plea nearly broke Lucius’ heart and he watched out of the corner of his eye as Snape turned abruptly on his heel and stalked out of the room.

“Request denied,” Draco sneered. A grin crossed his face when this caused Hermione to break down all over again. “Up you go, Mummy-Mudblood.”

“Hermione?” Jane asked brokenly.

“Mum, it’s okay,” Hermione gasped through her own tears. “I promise I’ll come see you as soon as I can. It’s going to be okay.”

That she was trying to comfort her mother while her father lay dead on the floor, not even cold yet, shattered Lucius completely. He couldn’t stay quiet any longer. “Draco, you are dismissed,” he ordered coolly.

Draco’s head whipped to face him, his jaw going slack. “Excuse me?” he finally was able to utter after a solid three seconds of silence.

“You are dismissed,” Lucius repeated even though he knew he had been heard perfectly the first time. “I will take care of the rest this evening. You have more than outdone yourself – I am beyond proud of you. You should find your rest, you’ve been away from your own bed too long.”

Draco’s furious surprise turned into contemplation and then he smirked. “That actually sounds wonderful, father. Thank you.” He returned his attention to Hermione and Lucius had to grind his teeth at the next words that fell from his son’s lips. “Up, Mudblood. You’ll come with me tonight.”

“Yes, si –” Lucius cut off her instant, dejected reply.

“She needs to be healed, her leg could be fractured. She’s oozing blood. I know how much you enjoy causing her to bleed, Draco, but you shouldn’t allow that filth to touch your skin. I will have her cleaned and healed and you can start with your canvas fresh in the morning.” The words were said slowly and steadily, conveying no emotion. Not for the first time in his life did Lucius feel grateful for his sharp mind and silver tongue.

Hermione had flinched at the sound of his voice, but he could spare her no mind until he got his evil son out of there. He would hurt her if it meant protecting her and he wouldn’t feel guilty about it. When she had time to process, she would understand what he had done. He couldn’t worry about what was running through her mind now.

Draco was staring at him intently as though he could see right through to his thoughts. It bothered him, even though he knew his Occlumency shields were firmly in place. Finally, his son looked away. “You’re right, father,” he said simply. “I’m exhausted. It’ll be so much more fun to play when I’ve had good rest.” He turned back to Hermione who was no longer crying. She held her still upset mother in her arms again while staring blankly at her father’s body. Lucius clenched the head of his cane when Draco ordered, “You will come to me after you fuck my father tomorrow morning, Mudblood. Be prepared for a long day.”

Her monotonous answer was pitiful. “Yes, sir.” Then Draco was gone.

He waited two full minutes to make sure the boy had truly retired. Quietly, Lucius muttered, “Bilby,
Tinny, Janky.” The three elves popped up, startling Jane and causing Snape to return to the foyer looking icily composed. “Janky, please take Mr. Granger’s remains and prepare him for burial.”

Jane gave a nonverbal protest, but Hermione shushed the woman gently and ran her fingers through her mother’s hair soothingly. “It’s okay, mum. Mr. Malfoy will make sure they treat him right.”

A warmth that he could not explain filled him fully at the girl’s quiet assurance and he had to clear his throat before giving the next directives. “Tinny, ready a bath for Miss Granger in the Mistress suite and prepare her night things.” Tinny left with a loud pop immediately as Hermione carefully extracted her mother’s grip from her father’s hand. With a discreet look at Lucius, Janky touched David Granger on the shoulder and the two were gone with the same noise.

He chanced a look at Snape, who he found to be watching Hermione intently. The Headmaster’s face was blank, but his eyes held a subtle concern. When Lucius returned his attention to Hermione, it was to find silent tears streaming down her cheeks as she hugged Jane close. Her cheek was pressed into Jane’s hair as daughter comforted mother.

She saw him looking at her and answered simply. “He was my father,” her voice was hoarse, “but they’ve been together almost forty years – since they were teenagers. I was born late in their lives,” she continued to explain. “They didn’t think they could have children, you see. My mother was forty when I was born.”

Lucius was shocked, that would have to make Jane Granger almost sixty years old – she didn’t look a day over fifty. Hermione continued speaking softly. “It’s going to be okay, Mummy. I’ll be good – I won’t give them reason to hurt you again. I swear it.”

Snape made a low, disgruntled sound and left the room again. Lucius found he wanted to join the man, so he could give the women some privacy. He knew he had to press forward, however, he was concerned that Draco may come back to see what was going on.

“Bilby,” he said softly. Hermione’s eyes locked to his and he saw her grip on her mother tighten. She was a smart girl, and she knew what was coming. Hoping beyond hope that neither Draco nor Snape would come back, he moved to the women and knelt before them. “I am sorry, Hermione. She must go. I will make sure she is well cared for.”

Her eyes bore into his as her lips trembled, and a fresh splash of silent tears spilled over her lower lashes. Lucius reached out slowly and brushed the moisture from one cheek with his thumb. A part of him – his heart? – jumped when she leaned into his touch. He had been so sure she’d push him away.

Hermione seemed to take strength from his caress and she carefully moved her hands to Jane’s shoulders and pushed so she could find her mother’s eyes. “Mum, Bilby is going to take you to your…room?” She gave Lucius a questioning glance and he shook his head apologetically. She sighed and closed her eyes. “Okay,” she continued. “I’m not going to lie, Mummy; we’re in danger. You’ll be going to a cell. Just do what’s asked and you’ll be okay. I swear I won’t let them hurt you, okay Mummy?”

Jane was staring at her daughter, somewhat dumbfounded. Suddenly, a fire lit in her dark eyes. “What am I doing? Sobbing all over you when you just lost your father.” Much to Lucius’ shock… and then amusement…Jane straightened her shoulders which caused Hermione’s hands to fall. Mother grasped daughter’s face. “I will be fine; don’t you worry for me. You take care of you and we’ll figure a way out of all this.”

Hermione’s face crumpled, and great big gasping sobs heaved from her. This caused Lucius to reach
out reflexively and grasp her hand. Hermione returned his comfort by squeezing his hand tightly as two sets of large doe eyes turned to him. One filled with anguish, the other with a dawning light of understanding.

“You will care for her?” Jane asked, studying him contemplatively as her daughter collapsed against his chest, still sobbing. Mrs. Granger’s look unnerved him and, despite her role as captive and his as captor, he found himself nodding as he wrapped an arm protectively around the girl.

“And you,” he promised.

“Just her. I can fend for myself.”

Lucius wanted to laugh. Then he wanted to cry. He settled for a grimace. “Madam, I am the Master of this house. We are at war, however. I will do what I can – for you both. Bilby will take you now, he will keep you comfortable. If you need anything, just say his name.”

With one last fierce hug for her daughter, Jane Granger and the elf were gone with a pop.

“Come, Miss Granger,” Lucius said while grasping both her elbows and pulling the girl to stand. She hissed painfully as she put weight on her injured leg and he could see fresh blood stains across the bodice of her gown. “Why are you bleeding? What happened?” He tried to catch her eyes, but she pointedly looked at the ground. He hated the defeated slump to her shoulders, despised the tears he could see dripping off her chin.

She pulled her arms away from him and hugged herself tightly. “Slicing hexes,” she answered brokenly.

“Severus,” Lucius called out. “Help me take her to her suite.”

Snape reentered the room for the second time looking perfectly composed. “One of your elves asked me if I needed anything. I told him to take the required potions and pastes to Miss Granger’s room. I also have some Muggle pain medicines and sedatives. Should you require them, send an elf to Hogwarts. Do you think your leg is fractured?” He directed the question to Hermione, who shrugged noncommittally. “You shouldn’t walk, then.” “I’ll Apparate her to her room,” Lucius offered. Snape nodded and all three were standing in the middle of the Mistress Suite less than two seconds later.

Lucius found himself completely enraged when, upon doing a quick inspection of the portraits in the room, he spotted Abraxas leering from over one book shelf. Fucking hell! I can’t give this poor girl a break tonight.

He pressed his lips into a hard line and pointedly looked at Snape. The Headmaster caught on quickly and glared around the room. Abraxas and Ediva and one other obscure portrait were in the room. Ediva was the least discreet of the portraits about her opinions of Hermione. Abraxas watched and leered and reported to the Dark Lord, but Lucius’ great-grandmother was the epitome of a cold-hearted bigot bitch and her look of disgust had become a permanent expression since Hermione’s takeover of the Lady’s Parlor.

Tinny was readying Hermione’s things in the bathroom where no portraits were. Silently, the dark man jerked his head and Lucius nodded. The only way for them to talk freely would be to take her into the en suite.

The moment they closed the door behind them, Snape cast a silencing charm and ordered Tinny away. The moment the muttered “Muffliato” was spoken, Hermione seemed to throw all caution to the wind and threw her arms around Lucius’ waist before burying her face in his chest and starting to sob yet again.
He froze, his gaze rising and clashing harshly with the startled face of his friend. He was half terrified that she was dooming them both, while the other half was so utterly relieved that she was seeking comfort from him that he wrapped his arms around her and dropped a cheek to the top of her head. She needed him; she wanted his comfort. How was he supposed to deny her after all she had endured – not only tonight, but in the last several weeks?

Her tears and shudders seemed to escalate the moment his embrace tightened around her and it caused Lucius’ heart to stutter in his chest. He raised his head to find Snape studying the floor instead of watching them. The look of discomfort on his face almost made Lucius laugh. When their eyes met again, Snape spoke.

“You are fine,” he said calmly. “I fear you and I are in the same sinking ship, Lucius. There isn’t much I wouldn’t do for Miss Weasley as well.”

There.

There it was.

The trust they needed to establish was finally being laid out before them both.

Snape cared about Ginny.

Lucius cared about Hermione.

They both knew each other’s secret.

They would both keep the other’s secret.

Lucius gave a curt nod before gently pushing Hermione away from him. “Cry and grieve as much as you need to, Miss Granger,” he said gently, “but please tell me why you are bleeding all over your gown.”
Tuesday, July 8

Hermione knew she should eat.

She knew she should bathe.

She knew she should get out of bed.

But it was hard.

It was hard to do any of those things when you simply didn't care.

Why bother with living when the monster who is going to eat you is merely hovering?

Waiting.

For what, she didn’t know.

There were a few things she did know, however. She knew her life was expendable and would be short, she knew her mother was locked in a cell that Hermione wasn't allowed to visit, and she knew the man with her right now - the one wizard who cared about her - could or would do nothing when it came down to it. He had been there. He had laid witness to the abuse of herself and her parents and had done absolutely nothing. He hadn't even tried. It's not that she was surprised. Just because he had feelings for her didn't mean he cared enough to risk his own neck. Or his son's.

She knew it was her heart talking. Her heart wanted her father back and blamed Lucius for his inaction even though her head knew it was not his fault. There was nothing he could have done. And he did take risks for her. She couldn't deny it. Substituting his sphere for hers to protect her was a huge and dangerous gamble. That was just one of the things he had done to protect her since she had come to be a possession of the House of Malfoy. Most recently, he had kept Draco away from her. He had overruled his son's orders and demands on her under the guise of sending him on errands for ME and the Manor that needed to be done after Draco's long absence. Because of this, Draco had not touched her since that awful night.

Now, after protecting her for so long, he was worried about her. He didn't come right out and say it, but his constant pacing about the room accompanied by the concern in his voice gave him away. The voice that offered to take her for a walk, suggested a journey to the library, or even a horseback ride. That had been day one, however, and his suggestions had become much less ambitious with each passing sunrise. Currently, his encouragements were more about eating and bathing and coming out from under the pile of pillows that had become her refuge, her escape.

This morning was the start of the third day since her father had been killed and her mother raped. Much to Lucius' frustration, Hermione had not been for a walk or picked up a book and had certainly not laid eyes on a horse. Other than necessary trips to the loo, she had spent the past two days
shutting herself away from the world; reprimanding herself.;

What had she been thinking?

She had dared to hope.

She had allowed herself to believe.

In Lucius.

In herself.

After all, she had magic! Strong magic. Magic that was possibly as strong as Voldemort himself. But even that had been taken away from her. The collar around her neck felt heavy, but not from weight or mass. It was heavy with its cruelty. It's thievery.

"Hermione. You need to get out of bed."

If I'm quiet, he might go away.

"I know you can hear me. Please. You need to eat. You need to bathe. You need fresh air."

She flipped to her right side; away from the nagging man's words.

She heard him let out a heavy sigh. His voice was just above a whisper. It sounded exhausted, resigned. "It's…it's been three days, Hermione. I can…I can resist a while longer, but Draco…he…"

Her internal dialogue drowned out the unwelcome words.

Fuck. Of course! The bond!

It would need to be renewed, soon. Draco would come for her.

"Well, I guess he'll just have to touch a Mudblood who truly is filthy then, won't he?!" Her voice was hoarse from lack of use.

The bed dipped as he sat next to her and the pillows over her head were pulled away one by one. Her hands flew to her eyes in a last-ditch effort to deny the sunlight. "He'll just do what I have resisted. He will simply command you to bathe. Wouldn't you prefer to do it of your own accord before he has the chance to belittle you for your hygiene?"

She had to concede the point, but what did it really matter? He would belittle her for something, regardless. "I don't care." She rolled back towards him, her brandy eyes glistening. "I can't Lucius. I just… I can't."

His words were firm, but his tone was kind. "Yes, you can, princess. You can do it and you will do it. Because you are Hermione Granger and Hermione Granger does not let Draco win!"

"Win what?" She tossed the last pillow aside angrily as she sat up. "Please tell me! Because I really want to know. What exactly am I supposed to be fighting for?"

"Yourself, Hermione. As long as you live and breathe you have something to fight for. Including your mother."

Hermione's chocolate eyes softened from anger to pain. Heartbreak infused resignation permeated her tremulous voice. "My mother. My mother whom I can't even visit!"

Lucius took another look around the room, confirming there was no sign of Abraxas or Ediva or any of the other family portrait spies for Voldemort. "Tonight, Hermione. You will see her tonight. Draco
has plans. He leaves this afternoon with friends for a short holiday. With him gone, I can bring your mother into the main part of the house. You can spend time with her. You can…grieve. Together." He took her hand in his, looking at her neck. "Tonight, we'll remove that collar. Severus has visited twice the past two days. He's coming again tomorrow. Don't you want to practice your wandless magic? Is that not something to get out of bed for?"

"My father is dead because of your son, Lucius. Draco didn't cast the curse, but he was just as responsible as that snake-faced abomination you call master. He found my parents, – whom I Obliviated and hid away in another country to protect! He brought them here to die! How am I supposed to face him today? Face what he is going to do to me? I just… I don't know how much more I can take." She growled when a tear escaped her lower lashes followed by another. She wiped them away roughly. She was tired of crying. She had cried more in the last few weeks than in her entire life combined. Tears did nothing. They accomplished nothing.

"One day at a time, Hermione. One day at a time. Why don't you get up and take a shower? Wash your hair? Clean your teeth? I promise you'll feel better. Then we'll take the next step." He looked at her sternly. "That will help you far more than hiding under a fort of pillows and blankets."

Hermione didn't respond. She knew he was right.

Lucius seemed to sense her contemplative acquiescence. "Hermione, you have to do this.; you have to face the day and you have to face him. Just…" His index finger stroked her top lip to her bottom one, "don't fight him with this." He lifted her hand and curled it into a fist. "Or with this." His liquid grey eyes met hers, "Fight him with this," his hands cradled her head before his right trailed down her face to her chest and over her heart, "and with this."

They stared at each other for a moment. "You can't win with words or with your fists. Your heart and your will are strong. Your mind is brilliant. Use them, let them be your weapons. Your common sense and the love you have for your mother. Don't provoke him. Just get through today. I'll be close by. Tinny will be watching and will retrieve me if anything gets out of hand." His hand draped over one of hers. "Can you do that? Can you just get through today and then tonight you will see your mother? You can have dinner with her? Share a suite with her, if you like?"

Hermione wanted to see her mum more than anything. "Yes, Lucius, for her. For her I can endure anything."

He smiled at her warmly. "That's my girl"

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Hermione was nibbling on a croissant when Draco came for her. She had done as Lucius asked. She had bathed and had allowed Tinny to fix her hair and dress her in a simple but pretty, pale-green gown. She couldn't say she felt any better, however. Her heart was still broken, and her father was still dead. but at least her cleanliness would not be a bone of contention for Draco.

She cringed at the sound of his voice. "Ahh, Father. I see you are feeding the Mudblood in your suite this morning?"

Lucius was a master at appearing bored. "I'm afraid I wore her out a bit, son." He gave Draco a conspiratorial grin. "I was contemplating another round with her before you steal her away for the day."

"No, Father. Not for the day, just a little fun this morning. Did you forget I'm going to Spain with Theo and Blaise for a couple of days? We leave in a few hours."
A look of sudden remembrance on Lucius' face matched his words. "That's right. It had slipped my mind. Will you be taking the girls along on this trip?"

"No, they have their own thing going on. Shopping or something or other."

Lucius picked up his paper. "Well, enjoy yourself."

"Oh, I intend to." Draco's gaze shot to Hermione. "Come along, Mudblood."

Hermione stood obediently, without saying anything. Lucius appeared to be absorbed in his paper and said nothing as Draco led her out of the Master suite. She kept her eyes downcast as she followed the blond devil incarnate through the labyrinth of hallways, down a set of windy stairs she had never seen before, and out a side entrance into the cool morning air. He cut her a glance. "I'm sure you are wondering where I'm taking you this morning."

Hermione didn't answer. She wasn't wondering. She really didn't care.

"Oh, I see. You're giving me the silent treatment." He chuckled. "That's okay. It won't last. It never does." His eyes scanned her neck. "How's your new necklace working out?"

He didn't order her to answer, so she didn't. Her silence caused his malicious grin to grow wider.

It became obvious where they were going as they passed one of the gardens. Morning mist sporadically dotted the pastures where the white Arabian horses were frolicking and grazing, leaving the barn quiet and empty. He directed her inside and into a large room full of saddles, horse tackle, and grooming supplies. She closed her eyes and breathed deep. The smell of hay and leather was soothing somehow.

She paused her movement when she reached the middle of the room and realized he was no longer following. "Turn around and undress," he commanded lightly as he leaned against the door frame. She could feel his eyes on her skin as she kept her focus submissively on the ground before her.

As she was unzipping her gown, Jupiter came bounding over to Draco with the same excitement he had greeted Lucius. When the massive dog was close, he sat at Draco's feet expectantly with a furiously wagging tail. His bright eyes were focused unwaveringly, clearly waiting for a signal from Draco or hoping for some attention. Draco was ignoring the dog completely, however.

Jupiter clearly couldn't take it anymore and he pawed Draco's grey trousers, leaving a trail of mud and white fur on the fine fabric. Draco's response was instant; he backhanded the poor creature across the head, causing the animal to topple over and let out a yelp. "What the fuck is wrong with you, dog? Get away from me!" Jupiter scurried away quickly, his ears back and his tail between his legs. Hermione simply couldn't bring herself to care about the dog's plight. Serves him right for wanting anything to do with the sadistic blond.

Draco's focus was back on Hermione, and, even though she wasn't looking at him directly, she could feel the malevolence radiating off him. She could tell by the sound of his voice he thought himself very clever. "Even though you didn't ask, I'm going to tell you. The reason I brought you to the barn is because when I discovered you here with father, it occurred to me that the stables are actually quite fitting for you. You know, hanging with the animals - animals who are ridden and harnessed and controlled? That's what you are as well, right? An animal to be ridden? Maybe even saddled up? Harnessed to pull a cart?"

He paused for effect. "We could move you out here. Maybe even get you your own stall?" He grinned nefariously. "Or you could share."
His words had no impact. She slipped off her bra and watched his feet as he stalked towards her. "Do you like that idea?" His right hand reached forward and gingerly stroked her left nipple, causing it to harden and peak in the cool morning air. "I think you do. Look how your tits perked up at the suggestion." Both of his warm hands were now on her breasts, fondling and plucking her nipples.

Hermione was freezing. She could feel the goosebumps forming all over her body but simply kept her eyes on the ground. She ignored his touch and his words. It was just white noise in her mind. Nothing she needed to focus on. She knew her body would comply to any command without her conscious acknowledgment of it. She had learned that about the bond. Her body would simply obey. She shut him out of her mind.

As she felt his hands on her, her mind drifted to memories of her father – memories of him taking her to school as a little girl. She loved to learn but she hated school. She hated not having friends. She was the little know-it-all who no one wanted to spend time with. She loathed crossing the playground and seeing the other girls in their little cliques and groups. All of them ignoring her as she made her way into the building. Her father did his best to distract her. Every day he would tell her a joke as she exited the car so that she would enter the school grounds with a smile instead of a frown. Each day when he picked her up, he did his best to boost her confidence. He explained that one day she would be accomplished and successful and those same school mates who shunned her would seek her company and her genius. He also told her she would eventually find friends and when she did, they would be life-long.

He had been right about that. Harry and Ron had been worth the wait.

He had been wrong about the rest of it, though. She was still an outsider. Only now she was likely going to die because of it. Just as he had.

Hermione was so absorbed in her thoughts she was not aware of her body being bent over and taken from behind. She did not feel her hair being pulled, or, if she did, she didn't care. She could vaguely hear the hateful words du jour spilling from the ferret's mouth; words like pathetic, ugly, and worthless. The insults buzzed in the periphery of her consciousness but held no interest to her.

She was, however, jolted out her mind's wanderings when she heard him snap, "What the fuck is wrong with you today? It's like you're not even here!"

She didn't answer. She just kept her eyes on the floor and her body bent over the bench as he had positioned her. He was no longer inside of her and, judging by the drippings down her inner thighs, she realized he must have finished.

He moved close as he fastened his trousers. "You don't get to be absent from this, Mudblood! I know you are in there. Where are your tears? Where is that temper?"

However, Hermione couldn't be bothered. Not even when he charmed a horse's leather halter to fit and placed it over her head and then slipped an accompanying bit into her mouth. She could hear his guffaws and see he was doubled over with mirth at the sight of her, however she simply didn't care.

Her thoughts went back to her father. When she was little, he had insisted to be the one to take her to and from school every day. He claimed that Hermione and Jane already had a lot of one-on-one time together and he wanted to have his own traditions with her. He arranged for his office staff to adjust his schedule to give him the hour he needed for his daily jaunt. Looking back on it, Hermione loved her father even more. He had put up with her tears, her impatience, and her misery as he masterfully coaxed her through her frustrations and emotions until she felt okay again. He had done this every day for years and she had not realized at the time how lucky she was to have such an attentive and loving father.
Hermione barely felt the first slap of the riding crop on her bum. She had finally managed to achieve what she had wished for all along. She was mentally removing herself from what was happening to her. Only, she was so absorbed in the thoughts of her father, she didn't even realize she was doing it.

Snape would later explain to her how rare her gift really was. She was not only able to Occlude her thoughts from others, but she had the very rare ability to Occlude her emotions, as well as some physical pain, from herself as well. It was like closing the blinds to what was going on around her. Very few could accomplish it. Even Snape would admit to struggling with the skill and only being able to do it in small doses. In her case, Snape would tell her he felt it was because she had been obsessing, or heavily focusing on, her memories, that her mind shut Draco out. It was like a daydream on steroids. The death of her beloved Dad proved to be quite an adequate catalyst for the manifestation.

Snape told her that, with time and practice, she would learn to have more control of the skill and would be able to force her mind to wander as needed. When she became really proficient, she would even be able to be aware of every touch and every word around her and still feel removed from it. She would doubt him at first. How could she do any of that? She was collared! However, she would be relieved to learn that while her collar prevented any kinetic force or manifestation to her environment or those around her, it could not prevent what was going on in her head. While magic could not leave her body, her mind magic was unimpeded.

Of course, she knew none of that now. At the moment, she was simply lost in her memories, recalling the first time her parents had taken her to the Tower of London.

She was pulled back to the present by the sound of a new voice.

"I think you've broken your toy, Draco. You're beating her senseless and she doesn't even care. Honestly, I don't think she even knows you are doing it." Expensive Italian leather shoes were suddenly in her line of site. A hand waved in front of her nose before long, graceful fingers tilted her chin up. Brown eyes scrutinized her own. Blaise Zabini.

Blaise dropped his hand from her face dismissively. "This is boring, Drake. She's finally cracked. Fuck her if you haven't already and let's get out of here."

Draco tossed the riding crop to the ground and stomped towards her. He bent over and whispered in her ear, "I'm letting you off the hook this time because I have to go, but you won't get away with this again! Mark my words."

"Theo, are you coming?" Hermione heard Draco ask.

" Uh, yeah. I brought those rabbit treats you said Jupiter loves. You want to give them to him?"

"Fuck that. That beast is a menace. I'd AK the stupid dog if it wasn't Father's. Come on, let's go."

"I'll be there in a minute. I happen to like Jupiter and want to give these to him."

"Whatever. Don't touch my Mudblood, Theo." The sound of retreating footsteps told Hermione that Draco and Blaise were heading back to the manor.
"As if I would want to, Drake!" Theo yelled to their backs.

Hermione's focus was now completely on her surroundings. She was very aware she was naked and bent over a bench with a horse halter on her head and a bit in her mouth. She swallowed awkwardly. She wanted to right herself but didn't know if she could, much less if she should. She didn't know Theo Nott, but she had no way to protect herself if he decided to touch her. Her back was killing her, her bum was on fire, and her legs were stiff. Just as she started to right herself, a blanket was draped over her back and around her shoulders.

His voice was soft. "Here. Let me help you." Hermione froze as Theo's gentle fingers focused on the clasps of the halter as he gently undid them. He slid the leather straps off her head and pulled the bit delicately from her tender mouth. "That had to feel awful," he whispered before casting a warming charm over her. He stepped back and watched her with a resigned and somewhat frustrated look on his face. "It's wrong. It's wrong what is happening to the Muggleborns and *supposed* blood traitors. It makes me sick."

Hermione stood up straight and pulled the blanket around to cover herself completely. Sensing a trick or a trap, she didn't say anything. She just watched as Theo fished in his pocket and pulled out a couple of wrapped sweets. He held them out to her. "Here. To help get the taste out of your mouth."

She didn't take them. She just stared at him.

"Ah. They aren't poisoned if that's what you are thinking. Pick one. Pick one and I'll eat it."

Hermione looked at his hand and pointed at the yellow one. He smiled. "I was hoping you'd choose that one. Lemon cream truffle. So good." He unwrapped it and popped it into his mouth. "Here, this one is mint cream and chocolate. I already ate about four of those today."

Hermione hesitantly took the treat from him and unwrapped it before tentatively putting it in her mouth. It tasted divine. She hadn't had candy in a very long time.

He smiled at her. "Good, huh?"

She nodded but still didn't say anything. Hermione had never paid Theo much notice at Hogwarts. He was always around Draco and his cronies but never really said much. He was thin and tall, at least six feet, with wavy, dark-brown hair that was cut above his ears and deep blue eyes that were framed with long lashes. He ran his hands through his hair as he looked around. "Where is Jupiter, anyway? He and Draco are usually inseparable."

Hermione wanted to put her dress on, but she wasn't about to drop the blanket in order to do so. Instead she watched as Theo started to look in the stalls. His voice was nurturing and soothing when he found him. "There you are. Hey buddy. Why are you hiding in here?"

She could hear the paper being torn off the dog treats and quickly bent to pick up her dress. She stepped into a stall and shut the gate to dress with some privacy. When she came back out it was to find Theo looking uncomfortable and Jupiter looking up at him adoringly. Theo was stroking the dog's head affectionately.

"Draco hit him. That's why he was hiding," Hermione explained, her voice barely above a whisper.

Theo's brow crinkled. "I don't understand Drake these days. He's completely changed. The only thing he loved more than Quidditch was this dog. Now he couldn't care less about either." He looked towards the manor and back at her. "I need to go, but I thought you might like to know that Lavender is alive. She was in a bad way. Greyback's bite didn't kill her, but it almost did."
shuffled his feet and tucked the candy wrappers into his pocket. "She was gifted to Dad and me, but he's the only one who is bonded to her. I never...I don't...well, Dad...he loves her." His eyes darted up to hers as though looking for a reaction. "I told her you were here, and she's been asking about you constantly. She said to tell you that she's thinking about you and praying for you." He shrugged. "She's a really sweet girl, actually."

Hermione's hand flew to her mouth as a sob escaped her lips. She had seen Lavender get attacked! How had the girl survived? How was that even possible? This time it was tears of happiness that filled her eyes. She and Lavender had never been the best of friends, but they had shared a dorm for six years and Hermione cared about the girl. Judging by her gut reaction, right now she downright loved her old room-mate.

Hermione swallowed and then replied in a slightly choked voice. "Please, tell her I'm praying for her as well and that I'm so happy to hear she is alright. Does she know Ginny is alive?"

Theo nodded. "Yeah, she knows." He looked towards the house again. "I really do need to go., but I want you to know that I'm not the only one. There are others who feel the way that I do. There are others who are merely going through the motions to stay alive and in favor. The problem is, no one knows who they can trust." He let out a breath. His blue eyes were determined with their sincerity. "I'm sorry about your dad, Granger. I wasn't there but I heard about it. I just want you to know you aren't alone. There are others. Others who are thinking of making a stand."

She absently watched as he stroked the dog's head one last time before offering her a small wave and starting towards the manor. She was too stunned to say or do anything as he left. Her mind was whirling with what he had just said.

Her hands cupped her mouth as she felt hope swell in her chest once again. *Lavender was alive! Others were thinking of making a stand!* Unable to help it, her brain immediately fired into planning mode. What could she do? *Professor Snape!* She would have to find a way to let him know that Theo was one of the good guys and that there were others. Did he know? Was he already planning something?

She sat on the bench, trying to remain calm. She held her hand out to Jupiter who padded over and licked her fingers. "Jupiter, I can't let myself give up. There is hope. I have to be strong and I have to do what I can - for myself, for my mom, for Ginny, for Lavender and for who knows who else."

Hermione could swear the dog understood her when he let out a small bark of encouragement and then licked her cheek.

Hermione shouldn't have been surprised when she called for Tinny and the elf simply stepped out from one of the stalls further down the row. Lucius had told her Tinny would be watching to make sure Draco didn't get carried away again.

The elf Apparated her back to the Mistress Suite and quickly began assembling and organizing clothes and toiletries. "Good witch needs shower and clean dress. She's must looks pretty and healthy for..."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, yes. I must look pretty for the Master."

Hermione actually felt a pang of fear when the little elf shot her a reproving glare. "Nots for the Master. No! For the Muggle mother. The kind Muggle who worries and asks Tinny about the good
witch, asks if she's is eating and if she's be hurting."

Hermione's eyes softened affectionately at her little friend. "Oh, Tinny! Tell me…Is my mother okay? Is she warm? Does she have enough to eat?"

Tinny drew herself up proudly. "Tinnys be taking good cares of the good witch's Muggle mother. She's have warm clothes and soft bed and good foods to eat. Tinny tells her she must eat and bes strong for the good witch."

Hermione smiled at her elf friend. "Thank you. Thank you for taking care of her and for taking care of me. I know I don't always make it easy."

Tinny looked up at her briefly before setting back to her task of laying out Hermione's bath things. "Good witch be Mistress of Malfoy Manor one day. She not only good witch but loved witch by Master. Bilby tells Tinny things. We's knows."

"What? Lucius? Love me?" Hermione said through a laugh. "No, he likes me. He cares about me … but it's not love, Tinny. He is merely—"

The knock on her door was followed by Lucius' swift entry. He walked over to her quickly and scanned his eyes up and down her form. "Are you hurt? Did he harm you?"

Hermione could swear Tinny smirked.

It was the perfect spot; under a huge willow tree, not far from one of the gardens. The sweet smell of roses permeated the summer night air when a slight breeze blew. The branches overhead rustled, and Hermione looked up. Stars and a bright moon peeked through the leaves and stems. It was a beautiful night for a solemn occasion.

Jane Granger stood to Hermione's side, a handkerchief in her left hand and Hermione's hand in her right. Her tearful eyes were focused on the fresh soil before them. The soil that covered David Granger. Firefly lanterns were scattered around them, offering soft illumination. Lucius had suggested they wait until tomorrow to go to the burial, but the minute he had told them that David's body was being respectfully tended to, the women wanted to see. They just couldn't wait.

Hermione's eyes were on the wizard standing to her right. The sweet and kind wizard who arranged this – a proper burial for a mMuggle man he didn't even know. On Malfoy grounds, to boot.

Lucius sensed her staring and gave her an apologetic smile.

Hermione shook her head internally. As though any of this were his fault. No. It wasn't his fault and her heart realized it as much as her head. It had just taken a little while.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Lucius cleared his throat. "It's…nothing."

Hermione's ear swollen eyes moved back to the grave before her. Another round of tears avalanched her pink, puffy cheeks when a wail escaped her mother's lips. Hermione felt the release of her mother's hand when Jane Granger fell to her knees, sobbing.

Hermione collapsed to her mother's side and rubbed her back as her own tears continued to fall. She
didn't even realize she was cold until she felt the warming charm Lucius cast over them. Within a moment or two, when her mother's cries subsided, and her self-control returned, Hermione assisted her to stand.

Lucius' voice was soft. "I am sorry I do not have a…priest? Is that what you call them? To preside over and conduct a proper service."

"We don't need a priest. This is –"

Lucius was suddenly looking back over his shoulder. "The wards. We have company."

Hermione grabbed her mother's hand as a swell of panic began to overcome her.

Lucius recognized Hermione's fear and quickly clarified. "No, it's alright. It's Severus. He and Ginny wanted to come."

Hermione watched towards the manor as the two distant figures slowly grew clearer and closer. Ginny rushed to her side as soon as their eyes met.

Lucius stepped away to give the three women privacy and entered into a whispered conversation with Severus.

"This was… kind.," Severus said.

Lucius had notified Severus via owl that he was providing a burial and suggested Severus bring Ginny. His note implied that the burial and Ginny's invite were to further ingratiate himself to Hermione and therefore gain more trust of his captive to whatever end the Dark Lord desired. But the note was only worded in such a way in case it was read by another. Lucius knew that Severus understood his true regard for Hermione. It was a tremendous relief that he and his friend had finally admitted to the feelings they held for their charges.

Lucius watched as Jane hugged Ginny after Hermione reacquainted the two women. He shrugged lightly at his friend's words and responded, "It was the very least I could do."

Lucius stared at the ceiling. His bed felt empty. He was allowing Hermione to share the Mistress Suite with her mother while Draco was away. Jane would be relinquished back to her cell upon Draco's return, but for now the two could reunite and mourn.

Only now that he was in his bed and alone, he found he didn't like this arrangement.

He missed her smell.

He missed the way she migrated towards him until she was snuggled into his side.

He missed her hair and its vicious attack, leaving him finding strands in the oddest of places.

He missed her soft snore which she refused to acknowledge.

Most of all, he missed her warm eyes peeking secret glances at him as he read before sleep each night. He didn't know what she was looking for, but her irises were becoming a cognac for his soul and tonight, he missed his drink.

He heard a small whimper to his right and peeked over the side of the bed to find Jupiter looking up
at him, an entirely different set of brown eyes. Much brighter and jubilant than to what he was accustomed. "Go to sleep, Jupiter. Why don't you lay by the fire?"

The dog let out a resigned sigh and collapsed on the rug next to Lucius’ side of the bed, preferring to be close to his master than across the room in front of the mantle.

Lucius couldn't help but smile. Narcissa wouldn't have heard of letting Jupiter into the house. In fact, Lucius would sneak the dog in despite her protestations when it was particularly cold outside, but in the interest of peace, that was all. Tonight, however, as they were walking back from the burial, Jupiter had greeted them and accompanied their stroll back to the manor. When he had shut the door behind them, leaving Jupiter outside, his brilliant little Muggleborn had turned to him and asked why. Why did he not allow Jupiter inside? Lucius had simply stared at her, his mouth gaping in astonished realization, before promptly opening the door and whistling. The dog was ecstatic. If Lucius had had a tail it would have been wagging as much as Jupiter's. Fortunately, he was able to contain his own excitement to an appropriate level until he and his best friend were in the privacy of the Master suite.

Lucius let out a sigh as he peeked over the side of the bed one more time to find pleading eyes on his. "Fine, come on – but just tonight."
Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter by LissaDream

Chapter Notes

AN: ** Con te partiro (Time to Say Goodbye) written by Francesco Sartori and Lucio Quarantotto released as a single in 1995.
We took inspiration in this cover version by Hope:
https://youtu.be/J7bwSk5pCsg

BETA love: RaynePhoenix2

Sunday, July 10th

Lucius set his coffee cup down when Draco entered the dining room. His son paused in his step when he noticed Hermione’s absence.

After taking his seat and spreading his napkin across his lap, the younger Malfoy looked at his father and asked with a hint of irritation, “Where is the Mudblood? It’s Sunday brunch, why is she not here?” After Bilby poured his coffee, Draco added cream and took a sip.

Lucius feigned boredom as he flipped the page of the newspaper. “Miss Granger is dining in the dungeons with her mother.” The lids over their plates were lifted to reveal sliced tomatoes, link sausage, bacon, sautéed mushrooms, fried eggs, beans, and toast. Lucius folded the paper before spreading his own napkin and added, “A small reward for good behavior.”

Draco scowled as he cut into his sausage. “Really father, you spoil her.”

“Perhaps,” Lucius falsely conceded as he took a bite of egg. He found he wasn’t particularly hungry. He nonchalantly studied his son as he ate his breakfast. Lucius just didn’t understand. Where had his boy gone? This angry, distant, and abusive young man sitting at his table was not someone Lucius knew or understood. He was so unlike the son Lucius had raised.

It had to be madness. There was no other explanation. Draco had been brought up exactly as he, himself, had been raised; the same as his father before him. Malfoy men were well educated, well spoken, generous to the right causes, and faithful to their bloodline. They married well and reared sons to secure the family name for future generations. None of the Malfoy men, save perhaps Lucius’ father, had ever been abusive that Lucius was aware of.

Lucius peeked at his father’s sleeping portrait. While there was a time that Lucius had loved Abraxas, he had never liked the man very much. He hated the way his mother, Willow, had been seemingly afraid of the man. However, while Lucius knew his father had employed a biting tongue and had been distant towards Willow, he had never imagined there had been any physical abuse. That was until Lucius was older and learned the truth.

Lucius still shuddered at the memory of one of the worst days of his life. He had been swiftly taken from his warm bed at Hogwarts and rushed to the Manor to be told his mother had fallen down a
flight of stairs to her death. It was all very suspicious and there had been whispers that Lucius was not privy to. However, Abraxas’ slip from his typical stern and stoic façade into that of a grieving husband had been convincing enough that those whispers and accusatory stares disappeared fairly quickly. It wasn’t until Abraxas’ death that the portraits around the mansion spoke up. The patriarch no longer held power over them and they were finally free to out the truth.

Lucius had been furious with his father when he found out about the years of abuse. He had even contemplated burning his father’s portrait, but ultimately his dedication to family tradition prevailed. All the Malfoy patriarchs were represented throughout the Manor. He could not deprive his father of that right.

Willow’s portrait had not taken months to awaken after death, but years. And other than a few one syllable words, she had not spoken much. Then she suddenly stopped speaking altogether over a decade ago. Lucius had tried to engage her many times over the years but, while her soft eyes were always full of love and understanding, she wouldn’t respond. Lucius suspected his father’s portrait might have something to do with it.

Taking a bite of tomato, Lucius looked back at his son. Was it the Black family madness? It had to be. Draco had not been raised to be abusive. He had not been raised to hate so acutely. He had been brought up to respect himself and his rights as a pureblood. He had been warned from associating with Mudbloods and Muggles, but he had never been encouraged to inflict violence on them or anyone else.

Lucius gave up on attempts to eat and put his fork down as his thoughts drifted to the Dark Lord. Pledging himself to that monster had been the biggest mistake of his life, but Voldemort had been very different when Lucius was young. He had been Tom Riddle back then; handsome, charismatic, and respectful to his peers and supporters. He said the right words and supported the right causes. He had a sharp mind and a quick wit. He rewarded his followers by taking interest in them and helping them succeed where they were lacking. He connected people with others who could help them and in turn connected those people with others to return the favor. Most importantly, he understood the frustrations the Purebloods felt as Mudbloods infiltrated the blood lines and spread their contemporary thoughts and Muggle ways. They were like a virus slowly taking over everything and Voldemort had plans to change all that. Things were going to be righted and shifted back to the way they should have always been.

By the time violence became part of the recipe for reform, it was too late. Lucius was already marked and had no choice but to obey. Tom Riddle slowly morphed into the Dark Lord. He recruited unsavory followers and sent them on horrific challenges. It was to appease those types that the revels started. Lucius, Severus, and Rabastan – as well as several others – were unhappy with the new tactics. However, there was little they could do other than adapt to the new ways. Any thoughts or inclinations to resist were abruptly halted by witnessing the fates of the few whom had spoken up – the few who had resisted. They were dead for their bravery and forthrightfulness; Fortescue MacMillan, Regulus Black, and Marty Bulstrode, to name a few.

Lucius had done terrible things for which he was ashamed. He had beaten men and he had raped women. As sick as it made him now, he took small comfort that it had never been of his own volition and never when he wasn’t ordered to. Even though he had bullied and raped women on command, he had never struck one. Not the way his son was repeatedly beating Hermione. He had never left a bruise. It was something he was acutely aware of; that small line he swore he would never cross.

He learned to do as he was told. He had a role to play and the best way to get along was to play along. He could not appear weak and he could not appear anything less than enthusiastic about the changes taking place around him. His life, the life of his wife, and – most importantly – the life of his
son had depended on it.

Once again, his gaze fell on Draco. This young man before him was still a child in so many ways. Lucius had tried to protect the boy from the clutches and influence of the Dark Lord, but he had failed miserably. One of his biggest mistakes had been letting Narcissa convince him to leave Draco at Hogwarts. The minute Lucius’ Dark Mark had begun to darken again, and it became understood among the Death Eaters that Voldemort was likely still alive, he had wanted to send Draco to Durmstrang and get him out of the UK. Narcissa had begged him – pleaded with him – not to send her boy away. Merlin forgive him, but he had conceded.

In truth, he dreaded his son being at Durmstrang every bit as much as Narcissa. It was a very different experience from Hogwarats. It was comparable to what Muggles would call military school, and Lucius had wanted Draco to have the same joys and experiences he had enjoyed as a student at Hogwarts. Looking back, he realized he had indulged Draco to a fault. He hadn’t done it on purpose, but when he found out Narcissa could bear no more children, he found himself unable to deny the boy. He would do anything to keep him happy…and alive. Including selling his soul to the Devil.

Yet, despite his attempts, his son had become the very thing Lucius didn’t want him to be. His sacrifices had been for nothing. His wife was dead, and Draco had not only been marked, but had been seduced by the worst amongst the Dark Lord’s followers; Bellatrix, Rodolphus, and MacNair. However, in truth, their influence alone wouldn’t be enough to change a person to such an extreme. There had to be other forces at play. The change in Draco had seemed to happen so suddenly.

Draco had been conflicted for some time. As a sixth- and seventh-year student he held burdens and moral dilemmas that most grown men would never have to face. It didn’t help that Lucius had been imprisoned after the Ministry fiasco, leaving Draco with the worry of protecting his mother.

Because of all that, Draco had started pulling away and becoming his own person over the past year. However, it was after the Defeat of Hogwarats that there had been a real change…after the loss of his mother. Narcissa’s portrait was still certain the catalyst was grief, but Lucius just couldn’t agree. This was too extreme. It was the Black madness that was perhaps accelerated by grief. It had to be. Draco was so very much like Bellatrix now; full of hate with a complete lack of empathy and a disinterest in the things that had once been very important to him. He seemed to be singularly obsessed with torturing Hermione just as Bellatrix was singularly obsessed with pleasing the Dark Lord. Was that what it was? An illness of hate and obsession? It was exhausting to try and figure out.

Lucius tossed his napkin on the table as he asked tiredly, “How are you feeling, son? Have you been resting well?”

Draco looked away from the Daily Prophet and seemed to contemplate. “Yes, Father. I’ve been sleeping very well, thank you.” He smirked. “I’ve been quite exhausted at night. Between tormenting the Muggle and fucking the Mudblood daily, I find I’m quite tired in the evenings.”

Ignoring his frustration from Draco’s response, Lucius looked for answers. “You never did tell me, Draco. How did your mission come to be?”

Draco shrugged. “After the bitch attacked me, I went to our Lord seeking justice. I asked if I could find her Muggle scum parents and bring them here. I knew that torturing them would be the ultimate punishment for the Mudblood.” A slight scowl crept over the younger Malfoy’s face as he admitted in a low voice. “I didn’t plan to kill them. I wanted to have them both to torment her perpetually with.” He sighed, “But one is better than none, I guess.”

Lucius forced a smirk. “You’ll find the Dark Lord always peppers his rewards with a bit of disappointment. He rarely rewards us with exactly what we want.”
Draco didn’t say anything but had a contemplative look on his face.

It was a last resort, but Lucius hoped it would work. “Draco, have you spoken to your mother since her portrait manifested? She talks to me about you. She watches you constantly and worries about you. Don’t you miss her?”

Draco looked bored. “What’s the point? It’s not like it’s really her. As you can both see, I’m doing very well. I don’t need her concern, and nor do I want it.” Draco tossed his napkin down. “I’m meeting Pans. I’ll be around later.”

Lucius swallowed his disappointment as his son made a quick exit.

He watched as she lay listlessly on the davenport in front of the fire. The same one he had fed her on a little over a week prior. So much had changed for her since then. Lucius knew she was depressed, but he also knew that she was safe from herself. Orders to not harm herself notwithstanding, he knew she would never take her life now that her mother’s life depended on her.

He couldn’t imagine what was going through her mind – wouldn’t want to. She had performed magic above and beyond the skill of most fully mature adult witch or wizards to protect her parents and it had been all for naught. Lucius almost felt she had every right to wallow in her self-pity and depression, but his chest ached watching her do it.

He had been hopeful. After the excursion with Draco in the barn, Hermione had been much more like herself. He wasn’t sure why, but it hardly mattered as, unfortunately, it hadn’t lasted for long. She didn’t do anything outside of Draco to drag her to various parts of the house to use and abuse her and the daily shower he had been able to convince her to take. The only time she perked up was when he was able to give her time with her mother – as he had this morning. Severus had been by for two wandless magic lessons – of which he reported only adequate performance.

She had eaten little over the week, and it showed. She was too slender – had been since the moment Voldemort had thrown her at their feet…had it really only been just over a month? So much had changed…

He, himself, had only taken her once since her father’s murder and only because he could barely breathe due to the anxiety clawing in his chest. He had felt disgusting while doing it, even though she had assured him it was fine. He had been gentle and had focused on her until she had asked him in a cool tone to just get it over with. He’d had to pause and excuse himself to the bathroom to take a stimulation potion – there had been no desire on his end – not with her so void of any emotion. There had just been the desperate clawing ache that needed to be sated so he could breathe properly.

He glanced around the room at the portraits to see who was watching them. His mother dozed in one while Narcissa’s eyes darted around the room to take in the girl, Lucius, and the other portraits. The ache was returning, and he didn’t know if he could put either of them through another round of intimacies like the last they had shared. It had been truly awful.

Snape was coming early the next evening for a wandless magic lesson. The last two had not only been unproductive because of the girls’ lack of enthusiasm, but short as the Dark Lord had changed staffing for the upcoming school year. Lucius would not wish Snape’s responsibilities on his most reviled enemy. To have to keep so many students safe from the Death Eaters their master was putting into positions of power had to be utterly nerve wracking.

Hermione had been kept collared unless she was in their suite… Their suite? When the hell had it become their suite instead of his suite? He shook his head, dispelling the thought.
Narcissa caught his eye and he gave her a sad smile. She glanced between him and the little witch on his couch and raised an eyebrow. Instantly, the smile disappeared, and he gave her a look and a shrug that clearly stated, “I don’t know what to do.”

Narcissa let out a silent huff before raising her hands and pantomiming playing the piano. Of course! His wife was a genius…the piano! His shoulders slumped when the tension he hadn’t even known he had been holding in them melted away.

“Miss Granger,” he addressed her before wincing. He had startled her so much she had jumped and tumbled off the davenport. He had to stifle a laugh as her head popped up, her large eyes comically wide.

“Yes?” she answered softly. He could see the caution on her face and it only increased the sympathy and sadness he held for her.

“Come with me,” he commanded before flinching as her body automatically responded to the directive with eager haste. “I am sorry,” he murmured. “You can stop. I meant to say ‘Please, won’t you come with me?’”

She gave him a half smile as her feet slowed before she nodded. “Of course, sir.” Hermione followed slightly behind him, having no trouble allowing him to wind her through the halls. She was confused when he paused momentarily outside of the Parlor before squaring his shoulders and pushing inside.

Hermione averted her eyes as she entered the room behind him. She was positive her long absence would cause an uproar from the portraits who had come to depend on her piano playing for their entertainment.

She was partially right; there was a collective intake of breath as they entered the room before low, unintelligible murmurs came from every direction. He led her to the piano, and Hermione could not help the racing in her heart or the sweat on her palms. Did he know? She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye to see him frowning down at the closed instrument.

After an entire minute of still silence from the man, he spoke, “My mother played,” he started in a soft voice. “As I said before, this was a gift to her. She loved this piano.” Lucius turned to her and Hermione’s heart clenched at the sadness in his eyes. “She was magnificent at it. I’m positive, had she been allowed to choose her own path in life, she would have chosen to pursue this instrument to the highest levels of her abilities.”

Hermione glanced from Lucius to Willow Malfoy’s portrait. The beautiful, young woman was watching her son with tender eyes that looked suspiciously wet for a painting. Her attention moved back to the man. “She desperately tried to teach me but when it came to the piano, I had no talent. Not like you do.” Here his gaze locked to hers and Hermione swallowed audibly. He knew.

Instantly, she was terrified, though she didn’t quite understand why. Outside of the time he sent her to the dungeon, Lucius had never hurt her with purpose. This was his mother’s piano, however, and she had been playing it without permission.

“I’m so sorry, I just needed –”

He cut her off with a wave of his hand. “You are not in trouble.” He looked slightly hurt that she had thought so. “You are welcome to this room – I told you this before. If it had not included the piano, I would have said so.

“I cannot say that I am not disappointed you chose to hide your talent from me, Miss Granger,” he
continued. “You see – I adore the piano. It brings me great comfort – I am aware that playing also soothes you. I wish for you to play for me now. Please, let us both gain from your talent today.”

Without magic, Lucius slid the bench back and opened the fallboard before rounding the side to open the top board using the long prop.

“What do you wish for me to play?” Hermione asked as she carefully positioned herself at the piano. She wasn’t surprised to see the slight tremor of her fingers.

“Your heart.” It was a simple answer – one that caused tears to fill her eyes.

“Did you hear me sing?”

“I did, you have a lovely voice.”

“I’m probably going to cry,” she whispered.

“I have a handkerchief,” he replied just as softly as he settled on a davenport that faced the piano. “Just pretend I’m not here.”

She almost laughed. Almost. Not bloody likely, she muttered inside her head.

Not for the first time since Voldemort had murdered her father did Hermione’s brain instantly leap to an anecdote. How many times had he sat with her in the living room as she pounded away at their upright piano? How many recitals and he and her mother arrived over an hour early so they would be assured of a front row seat? How many times had he held her tightly to calm her nerves over her minor stage fright? How many bouquets of roses had he placed in her hands afterwards with a watery smile and a “You did amazing, sweetheart?”

The tears tumbled over her lower lashes before the first chord was struck. The slow, methodical 4/4 time rolled easily. She didn’t even know what she was playing until her wobbly voice started. It was more of a murmur then a vocal, but it held steady as her grief continue.

“When I am alone, I sit and dream
And when I dream the words are missing.
Yes, I know that in a room so full of light
That all the light is missing,
But I don’t see you with me…with me…”

Lucius recognized the song immediately…even in the Pureblood wizarding world popular, beautiful music made an impact.

“Close up the windows,
Bring the sun to my room
Through the door you have opened.
Close inside of me
The light you see
That you met in the darkness…”

Though she was singing very quietly, and there were large tears rolling down her cheeks, he knew the experience was exactly what she had needed – cleansing and cathartic. A tribute to her father, taken too soon and too quickly. There was a shaky inhalation of breath and the piano paused before she continued,
“Time to say goodbye.
Horizons are never far,
Would I have to find them alone
Without true light of my own?

“With you I will go
On ships overseas
That I now know.
No, they don’t exist anymore
It’s time to say goodbye…”

There was another break in the music. Hermione paused at the end of the stanza and stared blindly through wet, golden eyes out the back-terrace doors that led to the rose garden.

If anyone could have read her thoughts, they would have found that she was not in the room. She was a million miles away in memories where she saw herself…

…as infant, squalling for her mother’s breast as her father desperately tried to comfort her. Frustrated he was unable to give her what she needed.

…as a toddler, taking her first steps as she stared adoringly into her father’s eyes while giggling excitedly

…as a preschooler with a skinned knee, clinging to her father as he promised to fix it and make it better.

…as a grade schooler, eyes full of tears as she expressed her confusion and hurt that she just couldn’t make any friends and the look on her father’s face as he told her that good friends were worth waiting for.

…as a pre-adolescent, jumping for joy when her father and mother had finally agreed that she could go to Hogwarts.

…as a teenager, holding a letter written in her father’s hand, completely thrilled by his pride in her accomplishments after her OWL scores were announced.

…as a terrified young woman, feeling his warmth seep into her very bones as he had told her their dangerous predicament was not her fault…that he didn’t blame her…that he loved her.

Lucius watched the tears come faster and was humbled by her open and honest emotions. She took a deep breath as she ripped her eyes away from the windows and refocused on the keys with more confidence. She inhaled deeply, and her voice was more resonate as she continued,

“When you were so far away
I sat alone and dreamt of the horizon
When I knew that you were here with me…with me
Building bridges over land and sea

Shining a blinding light
For you and me to see
For us to be…”

As Hermione sang the chorus the final time, her voice broke in many spots. The bravado of the second verse deserting in her time of need. Again, Lucius knew he had done the right thing. Again,
the word ‘cathartic’ tumbled into his mind. Again, he silently applauded his deceased wife for her idea to make her play.

Her hands fell away from the piano as great, gasping sobs started wracking her body. Silently, Lucius stood from the couch and moved to her. He grasped her about the waist and urged her to stand. He supported her with an arm around her shoulders as he escorted her out of the room through the garden doors in spite of many of the portraits asking after her wellbeing.

The rose garden was a small hedge maze that enclosed a moderately sized patio, and their privacy was absolute in it. Because of this fact, Lucius led her to a large, overstuffed patio swing and sat upon it before pulling her down and into his lap. Her tears and turned into muffled sniffles punctuated with small hiccoughs.

Lucius said nothing; he just pressed his monogrammed handkerchief in her small hand as he promised before he wrapped one arm around her waist and tangle the fingers of his other in her hair. He propelled the swing with one foot and buried his face in her fragrant curls and allowed her to cry as he held her, so she didn’t break apart completely.

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**Monday Evening**

Hermione slid into the bath tub with a groan. Her entire body ached. Draco had been particularly rough today. The good news was she had become quite proficient at mentally removing herself from his abuse. The better news was that was he finally becoming bored with her unresponsiveness. His tortures as of late had been more of the excessive chore list variety. Today he had demanded she reorganize his closet. Her humiliation had been to follow the command that she kiss the bottom of each of his shoes before lining them up perfectly. It had taken her all morning, after which he fucked her up against the wall, purposely messing up the shoes she had just spent hours perfecting. He had literally thrown her to the ground after he finished with her and order her to fix them again with an evil laugh.

Once she had finished with the shoes a second time, she had grabbed a quick bite to eat alone in the kitchens before racing to be on time to her wandless magic lesson with Snape.

Her mind trailed off into the memory as she felt the ache slowly escape her muscles…

*Hermione collapsed onto the sofa. Who knew wandless magic could be so exhausting?*

“Yes, that is a brilliant impersonation of a flobberworm, but I was under the impression we were working on your wandless magic today.”

*Hermione cut her eyes at her former professor who was watching her with his signature sneer.*

“Oh? I thought impersonations were on the agenda. After all, your dementor has been quite convincing…hovering and sucking the joy out of every sliver of success I’ve had since we started over two hours ago.”

“If you wish to be congratulated and applauded for mediocre displays of average magic then you will require someone else to train you.”

“You know, a little positive reinforcement wouldn’t kill you. It’s not like you’ll suddenly start shitting rainbows if you say something encouraging or – Merlin forbid – something nice!”

*When Hermione noticed Snape’s lip twitch in an obvious attempt not to laugh, she smiled victoriously. In truth she was growing quite fond of the surly bastard. This was her fourth lesson*
and, in all actuality, she was doing very well. However, she had to make sure she performed poorly when certain portraits were around, and Abraxas had just returned a few moments ago. It had become a game of insults when the unwelcomed visitors appeared.

Hermione and Snape were figuring each other out and were finding ways to communicate. A little over a week ago, she had slipped him a note during their first session, the one right after Theo had spoken to her, letting him know what the young man had said. Severus had nonchalantly tossed it into the fire so as not to be noticed by any prying eyes. In turn, the next day he had left her a note in a book he had brought her. The note was charmed to erase itself after being read. It had reminded her that, for now, Lucius was not to be privy of Theo’s allegiance or any impending resistance. Severus knew that Lucius cared for Hermione and was trying to protect her, however, that was a far cry from defecting to the other side of things. Severus would need more time before playing that hand.

Hermione had responded today that she understood and would keep their secret. She wanted to tell Lucius. She wanted to believe he would fight for the Light, but the man had not implied he would betray his Master and Hermione agreed with Snape – it was too high of a risk to disclose their secret. She knew Lucius cared about her. But he still believed in the pure blood movement, at least she thought he did as it wasn’t something they talked about. She even worried that if she confided in him, he might alert his Master to traitors in his mist in return for her guaranteed safety. It wasn’t a risk she or Snape was willing to take at this time.

Hermione jumped when the devil himself entered the bathroom without knocking, pulling her out of her memories. “Lucius!” she exclaimed, eyes widening as her arms instinctively wrapped around her bare breasts.

She was startled at his wild-eyed look as his icy gaze clashed with her warm one. “What’s wrong?” Instantly, her concern for him overcame her modesty. She rose from the tub, completely ignoring the way his eyes slid hungrily over her body as the water sluiced down her form. She was reaching for a towel, her gaze returning to his face, when it dawned on her exactly what the problem was.

Draco took her at least every other day, she never had to think twice about his bond to her. He would never let it go long enough to cause the anxiety that could creep up with little to no warning. When was the last time she had been intimate with Lucius? She couldn’t…oh. She remembered now. Remembered how awful it had been, but she couldn’t remember how many days ago it was. Lucius hated commanding her to do anything. He did his best to never force himself on her, not since they had come to their understanding. Really, things between them had gotten…good. That was before what had happened with her father, though.

Hermione didn’t even think, she just reacted to his need. It was a good thing, too, because he seemed unable to voice his thoughts. She dropped the towel and was to him in just a few steps. Taking his trembling fingers in hers, she turned to lead him out of the bathroom. She didn’t even look to see which portraits were present, she knew most of the female portraits would see her naked form and vacate the premises. Abraxas and a few other creepy male portraits would probably stay and ogle, but she knew how to deal with them at this point.

Demurely, she lowered her eyes and pretended to be responding to a command. “Yes, sir,” she murmured as she quickly started unbuttoning his work robes. When she reached the bare skin of his chest, she lightly ran her short fingernails through his chest hair, causing the flat discs of his nipples to perk. Heat pooled in her belly for the first time in over a week when two large hands gripped each of her bare hips, pulling her in tightly.

She gave a light chuckle at his caveman response to her bare breasts pressing against his abdomen
and tilted her head back, a small smile curving her lips. “Need me?” she asked in a soft, sweet voice. She liked how the look of surprise in his eyes darkened as she wet her bottom lip with her tongue.

“Yes,” he growled lowly. “You’re okay?”

“I’m okay,” she confirmed before reaching up and pulling him down to her by the nape of his neck. She was. The last two days – the visit with her mother, the piano, the training session – had helped increase her mood. It all helped to bring her a bit more back to herself. She remembered that she couldn’t change her circumstance, but she could do her best to be content in it.

Their lips meeting ignited the heat in her belly to burst into a full-out flame of want. He had become her life line, and she vowed not to make him go this long again. She knew how awful the clawing suffocation was. It wasn’t fair to make him live like that.

Before she even realized what was happening, Hermione found herself flat on her back at the edge of the bed. Lucius was shoving his trousers down out of the way to release his engorged cock. He groaned when he dipped his fingers into her core to find her ready for him. The knowledge that he had barely had to touch her to make her wet for him caused a heat to suffuse her cheeks, and she knew she must be blushing. If he noticed, he didn’t let on. Instead, he lined himself up with her entrance and slid into her in one firm thrust. His head fell back with a deep groan of relieved satisfaction as the bond-induced anxiety loosened in his chest.

He stilled for a moment before dropping his gaze down to hers. Lucius was stunned to see her dark eyes watching him carefully; he was thrilled to see the heat of want in them. Without breaking their connection, he shimmied his trousers down the rest of the way and kicked himself out of them. The movement caused her to whimper and wrap her legs around his hips and her feet locked under his bum, so she could pull him more firmly to her.

Lucius trailed his fingers up her sides and pinched her nipples lightly, causing her to gasp and arch her back, before entwining his fingers with hers. He lifted their joined hands above her head and held them there as he laid his body over hers.

Nose to nose, he whispered in a tone raspy with need, “You feel so fucking incredible, princess.” He growled in satisfaction when her eyes rolled up into her head when he snapped his hips forward. He did it again and her bottom lip was caught with pearly white teeth as she mewed. Her fingers tightened around his and he chuckled darkly as she tried to pull them away.

“No,” he told her before adjusting her so that one of his large hands held both her wrists down as he slid the fingers of his other hand between them to roll the pearl at the top of her slit.

“Fuck,” she hissed as her eyes went wide. He held her gaze as he continued to plow into her, all the while stimulating her clit. He threw her over the edge quickly, causing her to scream her release. She panted through her climax and rolled her hips as if she were trying to escape him as he continued to fuck her and pluck her pleasure point.

“It’s too much!” she groaned as her hips jerked erratically.

“Come again,” he demanded, not even thinking of it as a command. They were both shocked when her womb complied immediately. His bollocks drew tightly to his body as she squeezed her eyes shut tightly, her screams of pleasure raspy. He slid his fingers down to where they were joined to collect more of her silky release before finding her clit again.

“Oh gods, Lucius,” she breathed brokenly as she came down from her second high. “I don’t know if I can again.”
"I’m going to command it," he told her wickedly, smiling down at her. "I want to see if you can. You’ll wait for me, though, of course." He was teasing her, gaging her reaction as he continued to pound into her, the pressure at the base of his spine starting to tingle expectantly as his sac became even tighter. She nodded frantically, wordlessly and was obviously intrigued with the idea.

"I’m going to come, princess. Come with me, now!"

He slammed his hips harder, pushing himself to continue to move even as he poured himself into her. "Fuck!" she cried out, writhing beneath him as he continued his pace. He felt her walls fluttering and knew she had come again. The roaring of his own release filled his ears, blocking out her rapturous cries. Fleetingly, he thought this was interesting…and could be very, very fun if they allowed it to be.

Lucius was unable to keep himself upright as he jerked into her one final time. He collapsed on top of her and released her wrists. Hermione’s arms automatically went around him and one of her hands buried itself into his long hair while the other started tracing patterns onto his upper back.

When they had both calmed, Lucius somehow found the strength to take his weight onto his elbows, so he could look down at her. She returned his stare with glinting eyes, he could tell she was sated – possibly even quite pleased. Then her look turned serious.

"I’m sorry," she murmured, bringing up a hand to brush his five o’clock shadow.

His brow furrowed inquisitively. "Whatever for?" he questioned.

"We won’t let it get that bad again, alright? I know how it feels, that isn’t fair to you.”

“Bah,” he brushed it off, breaking their eye lock even as part of him felt very grateful for her promise. “It wasn’t that bad.”

“Lucius,” she whispered as he moved to sit next to her on the bed and helped her into a seated position. He met her eyes again. “Thank you for being so patient with me. And kind. I – I appreciate all you have done for me. All you’re trying to do to keep me safe.”

Cautiously, Lucius glanced at the portraits. If anyone had been in the room with them, they were gone now. “You’re welcome, Hermione,” he answered softly. “You and I will get through this together.”

She kissed him then, full on the lips, and he wasn’t sure who was more surprised.
“Draco, my word is final,” Lucius said with exasperation, sneaking a peak out of the corner of his eye to watch as Hermione sat stoically in her chair. Her chin was raised, and her eyes were fixed at a point somewhere over his and Draco’s head. “You give Pansy your support tonight. Miss Granger will be my date,” he spat the word like it was dirty, “for the evening. I highly expect you to be celebrating your graduation and the recruitment of your classmates. I don’t believe you will stay sober enough to keep a close enough watch on Miss Granger, nor do I think that you will remain aware enough to protect her from the more … unsavory … of our brothers. I am still operating under the idea that one of us may be forced to marry and reproduce with her at some point. I do not want her touched by any other men.”

He was relieved when, instead of arguing more, Draco simply shot him an obnoxious glare and stormed out of the dining room. Uncharacteristically, Lucius slumped down in his chair before running a palm over his face, trying to smooth his frustrated expression.

“I don’t see why I have to attend at all,” Hermione stated grumpily after a moment of silence. She recoiled when Lucius leveled a glare at her. Instantly, he felt bad.

“We will discuss this later. Snape will be here for your wandless magic lesson, you are excused.” He watched with a bit of rising amusement when she pursed her lips, obviously not liking the way she was being dismissed.

“Fine,” she muttered, pushing back from her place at the high tea table and leaving in as much of a huff as his son had a few minutes prior.

Two hours later, Snape and Lucius were preparing for the evening’s events in Lucius suite. Their charges doing the same with Tinny in the Mistresses room.

“Severus,” Lucius began after many minutes of silence as the men straightened their dress robes and tied back their long hair.

“Yes?” Snape answered when the silence had gone on a bit longer than was necessary. He realized his friend was stalling.

“What are your plans with Miss Weasley tonight? How do you intend to…” He trailed off.

“Protect her?” Snape raised a brow when Lucius let out a huff before scanning the portraits around the room. He wasn’t surprised to not find Abraxas in attendance. The Dark Lord was already on the premises, preparing for the evening in a set of chambers reserved for him – far on the other side of the Manor.

“Yes, protect her,” he answered finally before striding to his sideboard and pulling the stopper out of a crystal decanter of aged scotch. He poured himself and Snape a glass.

“She has been commanded to talk to no one outside of Hermione and any other slave women she recognizes and that she is to return to me if anyone makes her uncomfortable. If she is somehow restrained and unable to come to me, I have commanded that my bond will be triggered so I know to
seek her out. I have a tracking charm on her.”

Lucius froze in his act of handing the Headmaster a tumbler of the amber liquid. “You’re bloody brilliant,” he said in a rare moment of candidness. “You know that, right?”

Snape took the glass from his friend with a slight smirk. “I do,” he said with no modesty. “How are you keeping Miss Granger away from Draco tonight? Or are you not?” Snape asked after taking a swallow of the smooth drink.

Lucius settled himself into a chair near the fire, gesturing for Snape to take the other while they waited for their witches to be ready. “I’ve trumped Draco’s commands for the evening by forbidding her to follow any of his directive for twenty-four hours. He satisfied the bond this morning, so he’ll be perfectly fine. I will have a few moments of privacy with her before we head to the ballroom and give her the same directives you gave Miss Weasley.”

Ginny watched Hermione carefully as the little elf, Tinny, weaved an updo into the older witch’s hair. “So,” she started carefully, before remembering to glance around the room to see if Abraxas Malfoy was present in any of the portraits as Hermione warned her to. “Tell me more about Lucius Malfoy.”

She giggled as Hermione tried to make her face more impassive. “You don’t have to hide it from me, Hermione,” she teased. “I can tell by the way you look at him that you’re totally infatuated.”

Hermione scoffed a little but wasn’t able to move her head for fear of messing up the elf’s work. “I don’t know if infatuated is the right word, Gin. More like – utterly dependent upon him.”

Ginny’s expression sobered. She sometimes had a hard time remembering how completely lucky she was that Snape was her bond-mate. She was well aware that Hermione suffered greatly under Draco’s hands, but she also could tell by the way Hermione gravitated towards and looked at Lucius that her friend was smitten with the other Malfoy. Perhaps she was even as in love with him as Ginny herself was with Snape.

“I think it’s more than that,” Ginny answered honestly.

“Even if it was,” Hermione stated. “What would it matter? It’s not like I’m going to be allowed to – what? Fall in love with him? Marry him? Have his babies?” Her voice was cool and sardonic, and Ginny felt herself wanting to bristle. She had to remind herself again that Hermione’s lot had been much, much worse than hers. Before she could speak, Hermione continued. “Lucius and I have an understanding, Ginny. He protects me the best he can, and I behave well enough not to invoke too much ire from Draco.”

“What…what happened? Since the Defeat at Hogwarts.”
“I can’t talk about this right now, Ginny. I’m too nervous,” Hermione stood and moved to the balcony doors. She paused briefly before pulling them open. The cool evening air hit her face and her shoulders slumped.

Ginny stood to move next to her friend. Maybe if she offered some information, Hermione would open up more. “Severus has been very good to me,” Ginny whispered as she wound her arm through one of Hermione’s. It worked. She felt the older girl relax and smiled back when Hermione sent her a knowing smirk.

“Very good to you?” she teased, and Ginny laughed.

“Even in the beginning, though,” she murmured. “I mean…he raped me, but he didn’t have much choice, did he? If he hadn’t complied with Who-Know-Who’s orders – we’d probably both be dead.”

“Yes, Lucius was the same,” Hermione agreed. “He was gentle – as gentle as one could be when taking someone’s virginity, I guess.”

Ginny gasped in horror and a hand came up to cover her mouth. “You…you were a virgin?”

Hermione glanced at Ginny with a bit of amusement in her eyes. “Who do you think I would have lost my virginity to while fighting the Dark Lord?” Both girls froze in shock at the ease in which Hermione had respectfully titled Voldemort.

“I’m sorry – it’s just…Lucius and Malfoy both call him that, I suppose I’ve just picked up on it,” Hermione tried to explain.

“I know, I know,” Ginny whispered. “I call him that in my head sometimes just because Severus…” She trailed off.

Hermione took the moment to steer the conversation in a lighter direction. “Severus…huh?”

Ginny blushed. “Yes, Severus.”

“He’s very different from how he was when we were in school,” Hermione’s smirk turned into a genuine smile. “He’s fun to pick on.”

Ginny snorted. “Maybe for you – if I get snarky with him, my arse ends up bright red.”

Hermione paused, her eyes widening in surprise at the candid information. “Wha –?”

“The Master and Headmaster Snape is coming, now,” Tinny announced suddenly, breaking Hermione off.

Ginny was snickering into her hand and Hermione hissed with a giggle, “You’ll tell me more, later. I mean it!”

“Sure, Hermione.”

Hermione watched with some amusement as Snape’s eyes widened a bit when he spotted Ginny. The redhead had been Tinny’s focus at the beginning because she and Snape were going to wait in the drawing room for the party to start before taking the floo to the Ballroom and enter like all the rest of the guests. Her friend looked gorgeous in a fitted, midnight blue gown with her red hair up in an elegant French twist and, for a split second, it was obvious that Snape was stunned by her beauty. Then his face shuttered and his normal, bored façade took over. Hermione almost snorted her
amusement.

Hermione was still in her robe, hair barely done, and with no trace of make-up on her face. She watched her professor and friend leave before turning to Lucius.

Hermione stared at her reflection as she pondered the night ahead. To say she was dreading the evening was a gross understatement. After Snape and Ginny had left them, she had begged Lucius to let her skip the graduation party, but the wretched man had refused. He insisted she would need to be by his side (and therefore under his protection) as there would be hundreds of Death Eaters and Voldemort supporters attending. She suggested he simply ward the bedroom suite from visitors, but Lucius gently warned her that drunk Death Eaters could be persistent and hiding her away would only make her all that more interesting to them, especially to the more envious and competitive types who constantly wanted what others had. They might even try to get the Dark Lord involved.

She had continued to plead. “Tell them I’m sick! Tell them whatever that clever mind of yours comes up with! Only don’t make me go, Lucius! Please!”

The thought of seeing the classmates whom had looked down on her at school, the fellow students who would take joy in seeing her as nothing more than a sexual slave, was unbearable. They had won. She had lost. Must she endure their gloating as she knew for certain they would? To top off her humiliation, many had likely seen Draco’s pensieve memories of her being raped. Her stomach roiled at the thought of Cormac McLaggen. According to Draco, the Gryffindor had watched them repeatedly. The thought of having to face her former house mate was mortifying.

She looked up into the stormy eyes of her protector and lover. Her last attempt to sway him was spoken with a tremulous and almost choked cry, “Please, Lucius!”

“No,” he had snapped, his patience having run its course. “I have explained it is for your own good. You will stay by my side and be subservient. You will answer when spoken to; you will be polite and show mild interest in the goings on around you.”

Her frustration and dread turned to fury as she snapped right back at him, “Well, I see that you are back to ordering me around!”

“No you are arguing when you should be mentally preparing! Do you think I enjoy this? Do you think it’s easy for me?”

Hermione stared at him. What was he saying? She let out a slow breath as hope blossomed in her chest. “What are you talking about? What do you not enjoy, Lucius?” She couldn’t help it as her voice began to rise. “Is this not exactly what you want? Entertaining your Master and fellow cronies? Ramping up the troops to do your Lord’s bidding? One step closer to Muggle annihilation?”

“Of course not!” Lucius bellowed. His face was red with rage and his hands were balled into fists at his side. “I hate this! I hate what –” He abruptly stopped speaking and looked about the suite. His relief was palpable when no portraits were occupied. His steel eyes shot back to hers.

Their lips said nothing, but their eyes spoke volumes.

Hermione practically held her breath, willing him to finish his sentence. Her voice was soft, just above a whisper. “What, Lucius? What do you hate?” She prayed he would tell her he no longer supported his disgusting Lord. She was desperate to hear the words. Everything would change. Everything!

Lucius stood paralyzed. It was all on the tip of his tongue, but how could he admit he no longer
trusted or supported the Dark Lord? He could barely admit it to himself, how could he possibly admit it to this angel? This darling girl who would expect him to act and expect him to fight! He couldn’t bear to hate himself any more than he already did and looking into her disappointed gaze on a daily basis would be his undoing. No. It was simply preposterous. Resisting the Dark Lord was tantamount to falling on his own sword. He would lose everything! His son, his home, his friends…her.

She saw it all on his face. The internal battle. She didn’t know exactly what the conflict was, but he was fighting himself. Her hope faded, and her heart fell as his elegantly manicured fingers reached up to latch the emerald studded clasp of his formal robes. It was like shutters had simply closed over his features. His face was the picture of calm and his voice was controlled as all evidence of his anger and inner turmoil vanished. “It would be best if you finished getting ready now. The guests will be arriving in thirty minutes. I will come back to retrieve you.”

It had been just over twenty minutes and Hermione was as ready as she was going to be. Her gown was pretty, elegant even. Lucius had instructed Tinny that Hermione was to look beautiful, but not like the mistress of the house. She was not Lucius’ wife and should not be dressed as such. Her gown should befit her circumstance. Lucius had explained it was for appearances sake. If she arrived in all the splendor and adornments of a Malfoy wife tongues would wag, and Lucius’ goal was to draw as little attention to Hermione as possible.

So, there she stood in an emerald-green, silk gown that hugged her curves and looked more like a sexy nightgown than a dress. It was very simple without lace or trimmings. It was sleeveless and backless, and the V-neck dipped low, offering a peek at the sides of her breasts. The fabric hugged her waist and hips and there was a slit up the side that came all the way to the top of her right thigh. The material was charmed to cling and move with her which accentuated her subtle curves. Meanwhile, the matching four-inch heels gave her such height she appeared lean and sleek. She looked like she was made for fucking and it occurred to her that this was what Lucius had meant when he said a ‘gown to befit her circumstance’. Her hair was in a loose chignon and tendrils of chestnut locks escaped to lightly caressed her neck.

Hermione startled when Tinny popped in behind her with a velvet jewelry box. Her jaw slackened when Tinny stepped bedside her and lifted the lid to reveal pearls. Not just any pearls. These were creamy white and perfectly shaped south sea pearls. The earrings were elegant and substantial with the largest pearl at the top; a total of five in descending size cascaded and fell to just above the tendons where her neck met her shoulders. They framed her delicate features magnificently.

Hermione was used to the Malfoy wealth for the most part, but every now and then something would strike her, and this was one of those times. The necklace was absolutely stunning. It was triple stringed; one acted as a choker, another as a matinee length, and the last, opera. They were heavy, and the longest string draped between her breasts. The matching bracelet topped off the look and suddenly she didn’t just look like a sex kitten in a silk dress, she looked like a sex vixen and it made all the difference in the world. She felt beautiful and desirable. It gave her a power she didn’t realize she was craving and it made the night seem just a little bit less daunting.

She was touching up her dark, cherry lipstick when she heard the light knock on the door. She peeked behind her via the mirror to see Lucius’ stunned orbs at the sight of her.

“Turn around,” he breathlessly commanded. For some reason Hermione didn’t mind being ordered at this particular moment; she spun lightly to face him and peeked up into eyes that were stormy with lust as they cascaded up and down her lithe form. After a minute of obvious admiration, he offered her a playful smile. “You would bring Aphrodite to her knees with envy, princess.”
This was her favorite Lucius. Sweet and flirtatious. Despite their argument, despite him not saying the words she had been desperate to hear, she found that in this moment she didn’t care. All that mattered was the way he was looking at her. She almost laughed as a line from one her favorite movies as a little girl came to mind. It was all she could do to stop the words from tumbling from her lips as they spun in her brain. *Tell me about it, stud.*

“What’s so funny?” he asked when she suddenly giggled.

“Nothing, I’m just reminded of a scene from a movie that I used to love.”

His head tilted inquisitively. “Movie?”

“I’ll explain it another time.”

He peeked at his pocket watch. “Hmm, yes. We need to head down.”

Hermione took a deep breath and followed as he led the way and began reminding her of his earlier instructions. When they reached the top of the grand stairs, where the four main hallways from each wing converged, he added “Remember, stay by my side unless I tell you otherwise. Draco has a date, so he should leave you alone for the most part.” He stopped and looked back at her, the regret on his face matched his whispered words. “Please, don’t believe anything I tell anyone about us… about you. Only you know how I really feel.”

Hermione smiled lightly and nodded. “I understand. I’m hoping to tune it all out anyway.”

She took a step to head down the staircase but paused when she noticed he hadn’t moved. She glanced up to find he looked vulnerable; his eyes had gone soft and he had a slight flush to his cheeks. She tilted her head enquiringly.

He looked to his left and right before grabbing her hand and pulling her into a room to the right of the stairs. It was dark, and the unused room was cool which caused gooseflesh to rise on her arms. He pulled her close, instantly rendering her warm as his hands ghosted along the silky, bare skin of her back. His nose and lips dipped to her neck and trailed lightly to her cheek as he inhaled her scent. His lips tenderly stroked hers before he pulled back and allowed his nose to tap her own. It was such a sweet and innocent display of affection that Hermione’s stomach dropped.

Her hands reached up and cradled his face. “Lucius, is everything okay?”

His words almost sounded desperate in their need to be heard but came out so soft and rushed she almost didn’t hear him…almost. “I don’t want to take you down there. I would spare you all the pain and sorrow in the world if I only could. The truth is I…I…” His forehead rested on hers and she found her heart was practically pounding in her chest.

*What?* Her imagination was racing ahead as the possible responses to that question came to mind. Was he trying to say what she suddenly wished he would?

Lucius righted himself and stepped back, once again in control. He reached his hand out and took hers. “Let’s head down and hope this night goes quickly.”

Hermione simply nodded, her head still reeling with his unspoken words. After a moment her common sense returned, and she understood her imagination had run away with her.

She felt foolish for thinking he had been about to say such a thing. She felt pathetic for wishing he had and confused as to why she felt that way.
Hermione and Lucius entered the ballroom to find Draco and Pansy had just arrived.

“I see you made it in the nick of time, Draco,” Lucius scolded lightly. The patriarch then addressed Draco’s date. “Ahh, Miss Parkinson. Pretty as the flower whose name you bear,” he offered with a small bow.

“Thank you, Mr. Malfoy,” Pansy replied distractedly. Hermione, whose eyes were downcast, could feel Pansy’s stare.

“Pansy, you remember our Mudblood, Hermione Granger, don’t you?” Draco asked.

Pansy’s voice was as nasal and irritating as it had ever been. “Yes. Hello, Granger.”

Hermione was about to respond and take the high road by complementing Pansy’s dress, but what does one say when someone’s dress makes them look like a goth marshmallow? She was about to open her mouth when Draco sneered, “Respond, Mudblood.”

“Hello, Pansy. Congratulations on graduating.” It was painful to say the words, but she refused to let anyone see her resentment.

Pansy puffed herself up and pressed into Draco’s side. It was obvious the witch was staking her claim when she responded in a haughty tone, “It won’t be too much longer before you’ll be congratulating me, and Draco as well I dare say, for something far more interesting than graduating.” She batted her eyelashes up at Draco. “Isn’t that right, love?”

Hermione felt Lucius stiffen next to her. “Draco? Is there something you wish to tell me?”

“Nothing of consequence, Father,” Draco responded before looking down at Pansy in a placating way. “Eventually, Pansy. Let’s not put the cart before the thestral.”

“But you said…”

“Hush, now. I told you. Don’t pressure me.”

Pansy looked dumbstruck and Hermione actually felt a tiny bit sorry for the stupid girl. Honestly! Who would want to marry such a prick? In truth, Hermione doubted Pansy really knew this monster she thought she was in love with. That part of Hermione that always wanted to console and to take care of others spoke up, “Your hair looks lovely, Pansy.”

“You will address my girlfriend with the respect she deserves, Mudblood. She is Miss Parkinson to you.”

Hermione wanted to roll her eyes when the vapid girl looked up at Draco adoringly. The witch had no clue that the statement’s intent had nothing to do with her and everything to do with making Hermione miserable. He went on to say, “If at any time you notice her or my drink is less than half full, you will rectify that immediately.”

Lucius cleared his throat gently. “That won’t be necessary, Miss Granger. Did you forget, Draco? You and Miss Parkinson have Bilby assigned to you for the evening. He will be seeing to both of your needs,” Lucius continued conversationally with a touch of pride. “It’s not every day a wizard’s son graduates from Hogwarts. Tonight, each graduate and his or her date will have a house elf assigned to meet his or her every need.” Just then the floo activated and Lucius added, “Ahh, the guests are arriving.”

An hour later the party in the ballroom was in full swing. The liquor was flowing and the jubilation
in the atmosphere was practically manic. There were those celebrating graduation and there were those celebrating that they had been chosen and would be receiving the Mark tonight. Then there were the few whom were celebrating both; Blaise Zabini, Zacharias Smith, Vincent Crabbe, Gregory Goyle, and Daphne Greengrass.

Hermione had done as Lucius said. She stayed close and she stayed quiet. She found if she focused on the floor and didn’t look at the faces around her the situation was more tolerable. She let herself become immersed in trivial facts; so far there had been one hundred seventy-seven pairs of black shoes. Out of one hundred fifty-two men’s shoes, only seventy-three had been lace up. Most women’s shoes were charmed to match the color of their dresses.

She became irritated whenever someone distracted her from her counting by actually speaking to her. Fortunately, it had only happened a few times and three of the distractions were welcome ones; Ginny and Snape and then Theo.

Unfortunately, Hermione did not get to spend much time with Ginny as Snape kept the redhead close. The Headmaster’s attentions were much demanded upon by parents and Hermione was reminded of the delicate tight rope that man traversed daily.

As she took one of her rare glances about the room, Hermione noticed Theo had Millicent Bulstrode on his arm. Only this was a Millicent Hermione hardly recognized. The witch had grown about two inches and lost about two stone. She was still curvy and had some extra weight on her, but it suited her, and she looked quite beautiful in Hermione’s opinion. It was obvious Theo was quite smitten with her by the way he doted on the witch.

Her attention was pulled from the couple when a soft voice to her left spoke just above a whisper. “Hi, Hermione.”

“Lavender!!” Hermione squealed. Unable to resist, she pulled the witch into a tight hug.

The gentle clearing of the throat to her right reminded her to keep her enthusiasm in check. When Theodros Nott and Lucius fell into conversation about their sons, Hermione chanced a good look at her former roommate. The blonde looked beautiful despite a few scars to her cheek and neck.

Hermione kept her voice low and calm so as to draw little attention. “I’m so happy to see you! You look well.”

Lavender smiled warmly. “You too, Hermione! You look amazing.” Her eyes darted around nervously before she whispered, “Are you…okay?”

Hermione nodded. “I’m alive and I’m learning to adapt. Things could be much worse.”

Lavender nodded. “Yes. Same.” Suddenly, Lavender’s heel slipped out from under her and she fell to the floor. “Oh me. I’m so clumsy in these heels.” Lavender grabbed Hermione’s leg under her dress as she attempted to stand. Hermione could feel the slide of a piece of paper being tucked into her shoe. It happened very quickly and when Hermione reached down to pull her friend up, their knowing eyes met.

Lavender kept her head down and peeked about the room from under her lashes in an embarrassed fashion. Hermione chanced a glance as well and found that, other than a few curious glances, no one seemed too bothered that the girl had fallen.

“Come stand by me, pet,” Theodros commanded. “You can’t even be trusted to stand without my constant oversight.”
Lavender quickly complied, but Hermione didn’t miss the tender way the man touched her arm when she was next to him. Hermione was unsure if Lucius noticed, but felt certain he did not, given how the men were positioned. The two couples were strategically standing in a corner leaving them free from visual assaults on two out of four sides.

Hermione was desperate to know what was in the note but felt certain it was from Theo. She had to wonder which side Theodros was on as well.

This caused her thoughts to wander to Lucius. She felt certain he was unhappy with his servitude to Voldemort. That didn’t mean he was ready to jump ship, however, and she could understand why he would never voice that change of heart out loud. If only there was a way she could let him know he wasn’t alone. It was an impossible situation.

There was a hush over the crowd and all eyes were on the heavily robed creature that slithered in from another room. Not only did the entire ballroom go quiet but there was a vibe of terror as well. She could practically smell the fear permeate the space.

The despot said nothing as his red eyes gazed mercilessly about the room. It was Bellatrix who spoke on his behalf. “His Lordship wishes to congratulate the Graduates. He is also ready to receive offerings of servitude from those of you who feel you are worthy. I shall escort you into the receiving room one at a time.”

Theodros and Lavender stepped further into the room and Hermione couldn’t resist the jab. “Hmm. Such a loquacious Lord you serve, Lucius,” Hermione whispered. “I can see the appeal,” she added sarcastically.

“You have no idea,” Lucius whispered in response. “Remind me to show you a memory sometime.”

Hermione wondered what the motivations were of the twenty-five or so individuals who were making their way towards Bellatrix. What could possibly be the draw? Peer pressure, perhaps? Fear? She was relieved to see that Theo was not amongst them.

Gregory Goyle stood paralyzed with fear. He didn’t want to do this. There was nothing about this monster that Greg respected. Of course, absolutely no one knew that he felt this way - not his friends and certainly not his father. So here he was, waiting to pledge his life and loyalty to a man he feared.

Greg didn’t care about blood purity; he cared about living to the next day. He wanted to move along with his life and be respected in the process. He cared about his friends and the cute little American witch, Lexie, who had transferred into Hogwarts for her senior year. Greg was completely head over heels for the blonde beauty with the adorable Texan accent. Of course, she had no idea. She didn’t even know he existed for all Greg knew, but the minute he saw her get sorted into Hufflepuff he knew she was the witch for him. He had tried to work up the courage to talk to her, but Greg knew that conversation wasn’t one of his strong suits.

His hope was to take the Mark and pledge his allegiance and then go home. Go home to the beef stroganoff his mother made for him. Then maybe tomorrow he would try to figure out a way to casually bump into the witch of his dreams. Maybe she was okay with a burly guy who didn’t talk a lot. Maybe she would be someone he could finally be himself around. He could admit to wanting to be a chef. He could share his love of food and cook for her. He would speak to her with a culinary language.

He ran his sweaty palms along his dress robes. One more to go. One more and then he was up. He watched as Cormac walked out of the receiving room. The blond boy looked dazed and was holding
his arm tenderly. Greg watched as Death Eaters approached the newly sworn servant and patted him
on the back. Shots of firewhisky were tossed back and with a wink-wink, Cormac was offered a cute
blonde by Rodolphus. “She’s a nice little lay this one. Enjoy!” Cormac was obviously thrilled with
his prize and was quick to pull the girl into another room.

Greg wasn’t sure, but he thought the girl was another American. A Muggleborn by the name of
Lizzie. Draco had mentioned how hot she was and that Rodolphus had let him have a couple
tumbles with her. Maybe he would get a turn with her too? He felt his stomach go sour. He really
didn’t want a girl who didn’t want to be with him. He had partaken of only a couple of the girls the
Dark Lord had offered Slytherin. He didn’t really see the appeal of being with a girl who didn’t want
to be with him. The first girl he had taken had been doused with a lust potion, only he didn’t know it.
The joke had been on him. He thought the girl was genuinely lusting after him and it had been an
amazing lay. When it was all over, he was laughed at when he boasted about how much the chit
craved his junk. He lost his taste for the gifted girls after that. When he partook, it was only to save
face and fit in.

He looked up as Zacharias Smith walked out. The boy was congratulated and applauded just as
Cormac had been.

This was it. He was up. Bellatrix would be coming any minute. He glanced back into the proud eyes
of his father and swallowed heavily. He really didn’t want to do this. He really didn’t want to be
alone with that disgusting thing.

He followed Bellatrix when she came for him. The room he was led into was a study with a very
large hearth. It felt hot from the raging fire but the half-man, half-snake on the wingback chair was
wrapped up in cloaks as though it were freezing. The large python that Greg had heard so much
about was coiled around the base of the chair. Its head came up and its tongue darted out towards
Greg as though it wanted to get a taste of him.

The voice was raspy and high pitched. It made Greg cringe. “You look frightened, boy.”

Greg didn’t speak. He couldn’t if he tried. Suddenly, he just wanted to leave.

“You are here to offer your pledge, yet I see a scared little boy who still needs his mother.” Greg
could feel sweat forming on his brow. “What do you think, Nagini?”

The Slytherin was frozen with fear when the huge snake began to glide towards him.

“Tell me, young Goyle, what is it you have to offer Lord Voldemort?”

Greg’s feet shifted nervously as the snake began to slither around him. “I…I can...”

“Look at me, boy.”

Greg looked up into piercing red eyes and instantly there was pain. His head felt as though it were
going to explode as the powerful wizard before him invaded his mind. He was completely
unprepared for the assault and was terrified as every thought and every experience was at this
monster’s perusal. Greg saw what he saw. His genuine mistrust of the megalomaniac as well as his
extreme fear. His dislike of violence and his tolerance of Muggleborns. His disinterest in blood
purity. His desire to run away and be a chef.

He fell to floor when his mind was his own again and a scream escaped when the curse was thrown
his way.

The voice was loud and strong, and the creature’s robes fell as it abruptly stood and approached.
“Who are you to come with these traitorous thoughts?!”

Greg was barely aware of his surroundings as the pain was all he could process at this time. It was too much. Fire burned his skin, knives filleted his flesh, and forks gauged his eyes. He heard screaming but wasn’t aware it was his own voice. He just wanted it to stop. Death. He would choose death over this.

“Wish granted.”

Then there was nothing.

Lucius waited patiently as the Dark Lord met with the recruits whom were pledging fealty. He could sense Hermione’s unease at his side, but for the most part the evening had gone well. With all the celebrations going on, Hermione was not drawing attention other than several lusty stares. Lucius had received many offers for a turn with her, including offers of Galleons. She had no reason to worry on that accord, Lucius would never share her - she was his.

The crowd grew uneasy when screams could be heard from the study. When Bellatrix came to retrieve Gregory Goyle senior it was assumed the younger Goyle’s pledge had been refused. When Gregory exited carrying the body of his son, you could have heard a feather drop. The crowd parted allowing the stoic faced man the space he needed to maneuver through.

Lucius followed with Hermione on his heels. “Gregory, go through’s the floo. I will levitate him through behind you.”

The older Goyle was shell shocked and merely nodded as he relinquished his boy to Lucius before grabbing some floo powder and calling out “Goyle Cottage.”

Lucius looked down at Hermione’s contemplative but sad face. “Toss some powder into the floo.” She complied as only the bond would allow, and Lucius levitated the lad into the floo before calling out the destination. When the boy was gone, he heard Hermione let out a sob.

Her voice was low and trembling. “I never liked him, he was a bully and he was mean, but he didn’t deserve to die. I feel sick.” She looked up at him accusingly. “How can you bear it? He was your son’s classmate!”

Both of their attentions were drawn to the figures of Draco and Pansy as they quickly approached. Pansy had tears in her eyes.

Draco’s tone was one of irritation. “Fool. He had no business trying to swear allegiance. He was weak.”

“Draco!” Pansy scolded. “He was your friend!”

Draco shrugged. “Well, he’s not anymore.”
Just as the party was to end, Bellatrix announced that all slaves in attendance, as well as all Marked Death Eaters, were to remain behind for a special announcement from the Dark Lord. Her voice was commanding and reverberated menacingly around the room. Hermione exchanged a questioning glance with Lucius and could tell from the brief flash in his eyes that this news surprised him.

It was around midnight and the last of the guests were leaving. She had watched Draco escort Pansy out, presumably to the Apparition foyer. Near the front of the room, Snape and Ginny were huddled close together and near the dais, she found Nott Sr. and Lavender speaking. The later of the three couples looked slightly stressed and it was obvious the girls were getting instructions from their older men.

Likewise, under the cover of the chaos with guests leaving, Lucius was able to whisper quick and harsh instructions in her ear. “I have no idea what is happening, but I order you to only answer questions that keep you safe. For any question that would be compromising to you, me, Draco, Snape, or anyone else you deem important, you lie – you don’t know the answer, you can’t remember – whatever works best. Understood?”

“I understand,” she murmured in return.

“Tell me you want me to take you in the cupboard to fuck you – make it convincing,” he whispered, and Hermione couldn’t help it when her body stiffened in surprise even as her mouth let the words spew.

“Lucius, please,” she whispered, her voice going husky with need. It surprised her that it seemed this was as much of a turn on for her as it was embarrassing. “Take me into the cupboard and fuck me; I need you.”

“Such a naughty girl,” Lucius murmured. His voice was louder and dripping with obviously feigned affection. “But I will not fuck you right now, pet. You’ll have to wait until after we meet with the Dark Lord.” His hands, which had been resting on her hips, slid up her rib cage and she gasped when one set of fingers plucked at her nipple through her silk gown.

Whether it was to savor the sensation or to block out prying eyes, she wasn’t sure, but she allowed her eyes to close as she felt her face flame with embarrassment. She instinctively knew they were being watched, he would never do this to her on purpose. His lips came closer to her ear while one hand continued to pluck and roll her nipple and the other slid to enclose lightly around her throat. “I am sorry, princess.” The words were barely discernable, but the hot heat of his breath caused her own respirations to hitch in her chest. “Forgive me, this. We are being watched.” He nipped at the underside of her jaw, causing her to whimper before he set her away from him. “Such a wanton little slut you are. Go find your friends – I told you, you’ll have to wait.”

“Yes sir,” she whispered, trying to keep her mortification out of her voice. She knew her face must be flushed with her combined lust and embarrassment. When she looked up to scan the room for Ginny and Lavender, her eyes skimmed over Antonin Dolohov and Rabastan Lestrange ogling her. A tick of fear caught in her throat and she forced her gaze away from them.
When she did, she found a group of rebel slaves being corralled together near the entrance, and there were a couple of unfamiliar wizards and a few witches gathering the group. Wait…no. One of the wizards was familiar. It was Healer Jacobs, the man who had tended to her injuries and UTI as well as healed Draco the day he had belted her and Tinny. Then she noticed that the other wizard and witches were dressed in the same robes – Healer robes from St. Mungos. Her heart started slamming in her chest. What is going on?

She reached Ginny and Lavender in just enough time to begin to ask them what was happening before Healer Jacob’s took her by the arm. Both of the other girls watched her with large, fearful eyes and one of Ginny’s hands stretched out as if to comfort her. I’ll be fine, she mouthed at them. None of the three of them knew if that was true.

“This way, Miss Granger, the Dark Lord wishes for you to be the first to be tested.”

“Yes sir,” she murmured respectfully. She let the man lead her away. She was surprised when she was escorted to the second level of the house where a few guest room doors stood open. Healer Jacobs stopped in the doorway to the first room and ushered her inside. Her gaze darted around the room, taking in a small tray of medical instruments.

“Do you know why you are here, Miss Granger?”

Swallowing audibly, she answered, “I do not, Healer Jacobs.”

“I have been asked to do a full physical examination on you, to ascertain your overall health,” the man answered in a calm, kind voice. “You may change into that robe,” he pointed to a thin, white cotton garment. “I will give you a moment of privacy.”

Shaking, and not quite understanding what was going on, Hermione complied as soon as the Healer left the room.

The examination went as expected. She’d had a yearly exam every summer since she could remember, and, although the results were much quicker than in the Muggle world, the process was much the same. Healer Jacobs even had a witch come in and stand with him as he performed the pelvic exam.

After the physical examination was over, he asked her dozens of questions about her childhood, her family’s medical history, her menstrual cycle, and her sleep cycle.

When that was finished, Hermione almost couldn’t believe it when he told her, “Your physical examination is nearly perfect.” His tone was professional, clipped, and cool. “Your stress levels, your serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine levels, and your sleep patterns are a bit off. You are also a little underweight. However, for someone in your circumstances, this is to be expected.”

Hermione gave a bewildered little nod. She had asked Healer Jacobs at least four times why this information was needed. Instead of answering her, he refused to meet her eyes and continued with his examination.

“The Dark Lord wishes to see you in his chambers, now that we’ve completed your checkup,” Healer Jacobs said after a moment of uncomfortable silence. “I am to escort you.”

“What about the Death Eater meeting?” Hermione questioned as her stomach turned uncomfortably. Why would Voldemort want to see her?

“It’s over, it only lasted about ten minutes. We need to continue, Miss Granger, as I have a few other exams that will be my responsibility tonight.” He gave her another brief reprieve of privacy, so she
could change, and then had her follow him to the last door in the hallway. “His Lordship is expecting you inside. Good luck, Miss Granger.”

She watched with an increasing sense of dread as the Healer walked away from her, not once looking back. Hermione turned and looked at the door for a solid minute before she raised her hand to the handle. She decided she would do her best not to show her fear. Tilting her chin up and steeling her features, she pushed through the doorway.

Voldemort was sitting in a chesterfield chair near the fire with a thick fur draped over his legs. Bellatrix was on the floor at his feet – one would think she was a beloved pet. She was crooning softly as the thing that sat in the chair rubbed circles onto her scalp through her thick mop of curly black hair.

“Oh, Miss Granger.” The breathy, hissing voice welcomed her, but Hermione had never wanted to flee more in her life. Anxiety and fear clawed through her and rendered her unable to breathe.

“Please have a seat.” He gestured to the chair sitting opposite him. Trying not to show how terribly afraid she was, Hermione crossed the room quickly and took a seat at the edge of the chair. Taking a moment to try and calm herself, she arranged and smoothed the silky fabric of her skirt.

“I hear that your physical examination went well?” It was a question, and Hermione felt it was so utterly absurd to be discussing her physical health with the man who allowed her to be raped and tortured on a daily basis that her eyes lifted to his in surprise. She was only able to hold his red stare for a few seconds before she dropped her gaze to the fire.

“Answer the Dark Lord, filth,” Bella demanded when the silence stretched longer then was probably appropriate.

“Yes sir!” Hermione hated how her voice squeaked, but she did not want to find herself on the business end of Bellatrix’s wand – again.

“Good…that’sss very good.” Voldemort continued stroking Bellatrix’s head like his favorite cat, but Hermione’s gaze was drawn to the presence of Nagini, who had slithered between her master’s feet. “I have a presssent for you, my dear.” The way he was drawing out his S’s made her shudder slightly. “You have been ssso well behaved sssince the … unfortunate … introduction of your parentssss.”

There was a beat of silence where Hermione wondered if he wanted her to respond, but he continued without provocation. “In light of your … ssstunning … MPS and the fact that you have been cleared physssically, not to mention your good behavior, I have decided you will be allowed to sit your NEWT examinationssss as you requested.”

This time Hermione didn’t need to be prompted, she quickly dropped to her knees and bowed her head. “Thank you, sir,” she would be damned if she would call him ‘My Lord’. She hoped ‘sir’ would do. He didn’t seem to mind. “I’m grateful to be allowed this opportunity.”

Somewhere in the recesses of her mind, she knew it was ridiculous to be thanking him for something that should be automatic. If he didn’t exist – if he wasn’t the evil bastard that he was – she would have sat her exams months ago after finishing her final year at Hogwarts. She would probably be living with Ron and Harry at Grimmauld Place. Maybe she and Ron would have finally gotten together…but then you wouldn’t have met Lucius.

She felt guilty that such a selfish thought had even popped into her head. For all of her affection for Lucius, she would rather her friends be alive! Maybe you would have met him another way. She was startled out of her thoughts when Voldemort spoke again.
“You will be contacted by a ministry representative.” He flicked his hand at her dismissively and Hermione realized he had been hissing his S’s on purpose. _Bastard must know how intimidating it is, _she thought in disgust.

“Tell Lucius I thank him for his hospitality, Bellatrix and I will be retiring to Lestrange Estate. You are dismissed.”

Hermione quickly gave one more, “Yes sir,” before rising to her feet and falling into an awkward little curtsy. Without another thought or glance behind her, she turned and strode quickly out of the room, taking care not to slam the door behind herself.

As she let the door click quietly into place, her arm was grabbed roughly. She gasped and whirled to face her attacker, and her entire body slumped with relief when Lucius wrapped her tightly in his arms and Apparated them away.

Lucius hid his frustration with his usual ease as he and Severus waited for the meeting to begin. All of the bonded Muggleborns and blood traitors who were in attendance at the party had been gathered and shuffled off together for some kind of medical testing, while all Death Eaters had been told to wait. The last partygoer had left over an hour ago, including the dates and wives of the Death Eaters. In truth, the mood of the party had taken a significant nose dive with the death of Greg Goyle. Many of the graduates were upset and parents, both Death Eater and not, were beyond stunned, and not a small bit terrified, by what had occurred. There were many out there who were unfamiliar with the Dark Lord’s tactics for control and obedience; tonight had been a crash course for more than a few.

The room was growing impatient as the Marked attendees continued to wait for what they had been told was a mandatory meeting. Lucius was eager for it to start so that he could get to Hermione. It made him uncomfortable how she had been immediately led away the moment she approached the group of slaves. He was certain this gathering had something to do with what the captives were enduring right now, and he wanted to know what was going on.

The ballroom quickly drew quiet when Voldemort finally stood and addressed his congregation. His arms were spread as though he were embracing the room and his attempt at a smile was truly grotesque. “Welcome all! Welcome to my newest pledges, my most distinguished Death Eaters and everyone in between. Tonight, I call you all together to announce a plan. A groundbreaking plan that will be instrumental in securing the future of the British wizarding race. A plan to make our magic stronger and therefore our world more secure.”

He began to pace with his arms tucked behind his back as he continued to address the crowd, “Now, some of you are going to scoff at what I have to say. Some of you will feel sickened by it. Rest assured, I am sympathetic, but we all must make sacrifices for the greater good.” Lucius and Severus exchanged glances with eyebrows slightly raised. What on earth was this madman getting on about?

The Dark Lord moved to his chair, which had been placed at the head of the ballroom on a dais, and looked out into the crowd from his impromptu throne.

“I think we can all agree that inbreeding has become a problem. A problem which has led to mental and physical illnesses, as well as an increased squib rate. When there are only a handful of truly pure bloodlines, the choices for matches are very limited.” In that moment Lucius knew what was coming and, judging by the subtle shift of his best friend’s feet, Severus had immediately figured it out as well.

Voldemort looked towards Dolohov. “As you all know, Antonin has created an invaluable charm that will determine the magical potency of a witch or wizard. His MPS is truly remarkable and is a
testament to his genius. He will be rewarded greatly for this achievement. As many of you are already aware, all the Mudbloods and blood traitor’s MPS levels were tested and I confess to having been quite surprised by the results. There were a handful of Mudbloods who tested quite high on the scale.”

Lucius let out a slow breath as he began to wonder if Hermione would be taken from him on this very night. His calm exterior belied the panic he felt in his heart and gut.

Voldemort waved off the few murmurs of disbelief that resonated from the crowd. “I am certain there is an explanation for the…anomalies. These individuals must have magical ancestors that they are unaware of. There is no other explanation for such results. Whatever the impetus, suffice it say we have some magically powerful Mudbloods under our control and it is my intention to use them to our advantage.

“Therefore, tonight I announce the initiation of a new program; a breeding program.”

When he paused, loud murmurs of surprise and discontent permeated the air. Voldemort ignored them and the minute he opened his mouth to continue, the crowd was silent once again. “To start, there will only be a choice few Mudbloods utilized, but the selected will be wedded to magically strong wizards and witches in the hopes of creating strong magical children. This will, of course, require all of my Death Eaters to undergo MPS testing as only the most powerful of you will be candidates for the trial run. Now, I know what most of you are thinking. You are wondering why marriage is a necessary component. The answer is simple. These children are not to be brought into the world as illegitimate bastards. They should have the dignity of two legal parents, regardless to being only Half-blood. That being said, marriages can be dissolved after the births as necessary,” he added off-handedly.

Lucius wondered if anyone would request a dissolution after only one child, he wouldn’t be surprised if unions produced at least two children before dissolution out of fear alone.

He refocused his attention as Voldemort was still speaking, “Once a Pureblood wizard or witch has at least one magically strong offspring, that witch or wizard can be rid of their Mudblood. This way, that individual can then marry his or her chosen partner and raise the children in a proper Pureblood home.”

He sighed as though he were greatly disappointed. “Now, I realize this is the very thing we have been trying to prevent. Sullying Pureblood with mud. This is what I meant when I said sacrifice. By all means, if you wish the magic to die out of your bloodlines, then refuse. If you wish to be denied betrothals for your offspring because they don’t have a fresh infusion of magic that other families are looking for, then refuse. Your family can even leave the UK and bury roots elsewhere; without you, of course. You belong to me and will stay where I need you.”

Lucius felt Severus’ glance come his way. This was not going to be received well. Lucius felt like everything he had fought for all these years was imploding before him. What was the point of it all? True, Hermione’s magical strength and intelligence had caused him to question his core beliefs, but she was the exception. Other Mudbloods were far inferior to her. The Dark Lord was surely correct when he said the magically strong Mudbloods likely had magical ancestors they were unaware of.

Severus suddenly felt a true glimmer of hope. The bastard was finally overstepping and digging himself a nice, deep grave. Murdering Greg Goyle had seemed very impulsive, even for Voldemort. Severus could sense the apprehension amongst the followers who had children and he knew they were all fearful for their lives. Now he was introducing a program that would force unwanted marriages upon his followers.
Severus couldn’t help his own excitement. It was going to be much easier to garner support for the Light. His best friend was a case in point. Lucius would not want to lose Hermione to another wizard and he certainly would not want to be forced to marry another Mudblood. Well, unless it was Granger, but what were the odds the Dark Lord would give her to him? He had a feeling Granger might be given to Dolohov, provided that the wizard tested well.

Severus felt a shimmer of relief that blood traitors were not part of the trial run. Ginny was safe. In truth, blood traitors were Purebloods themselves and would probably be matched with Muggleborns as well.

When Voldemort stopped talking the murmurs of discontent grew loud. He raised his hands and spoke over them. “Ask your questions and I will answer.”

The room grew quiet, no one dared to speak. Nor did anyone want to appear in any way not in favor.

“No one?” He smiled and laughed. “Pathetic! Of course you have questions. Ask them!”

Rodolphus cleared his throat. “My Lord, I am eager to be of any assistance in this bold plan. I am wondering if married wizards and witches are to be included?”

Voldemort smiled. “That is a reasonable question. For the first run, only unmarried candidates will be utilized. We will address the more complex issues after the trial period is concluded.” He looked about the room. “Any other questions? No? Excellent. See Antonin to be tested before you leave, and you will be contacted if you are chosen for the initiation run.”

As the Death Eaters left the room after being tested, they congregated throughout other parts of the Manor. Lucius noticed Draco standing amongst the newly marked. Most were young, either Draco’s age or only a few years older. As Lucius eavesdropped, he could hear them asking Draco copious questions. It seemed the new recruits had mixed responses to their first Death Eater meeting and had many concerns. For the most part they were terrified of being forced to wed and have children.

“I’m too young”, Daphne whined. “I don’t want to have babies yet!” Blaise had his arm around her and Lucius recalled the two were dating. She looked up at him. “What will we do if one of us is paired with another? I only want to be with you!”

Draco had his arms crossed and had a scowl on his face. “It’s simple. You will do as is required. Your will is the Dark Lord’s from now on. It’s a shame you didn’t take this into consideration before you took the Mark.”

Cormac shot a look of incredulity at Draco. “C’mon on, Draco. Even you can’t have seen this coming!”

Draco shrugged. “His Lordship has hinted multiple times that either Father or I will be wedded to Granger. Now I know why. It’s no secret the bitch is magically powerful.”

Daphne sounded thunderstruck. “But what about Pansy?! She’s been counting on you marrying her for years!” It was clear Daphne was properly incensed on her friend’s behalf.

Draco sounded nonplussed. “Eh, if I decide to marry her, she’ll just have to wait for me. After Granger squeezes out a pup or two, I’ll reassess.”

Blaise tried to calm the rising indignation of his girlfriend. “Let’s all just stay calm and be reasonable. The odds of one of us being chosen is slim. We are his newest recruits.” He looked at Draco. “He
would probably pair Lucius or Severus, or maybe even Dolohov, with the Mudblood over you, Drake.”

Draco laughed. “I highly doubt that. The Dark Lord has hinted it will be me. Father doesn’t know, but our Lord was impressed that I tracked down Granger’s parents and showed such initiative. Given how I tested tonight, I’m fairly confident I’ll be in the running.”

“You don’t seem upset, Draco,” Zacharias observed.

“What’s there to be upset about? I’d have a powerful wife who fucks like a succubus on pepper up and who would provide me with magically strong children. This, in turn, would only help me maintain favor with the Dark Lord.” He laughed without humor. “You folks need to get your head in the game.”

Lucius didn’t want to hear anymore and headed to see if Hermione was released from the mediwitch yet.

He was stunned when Severus informed him Hermione was with the Dark Lord. Thankfully, he didn’t have to wait as at that very moment she was quietly exiting their Lord’s presence. The minute the door was closed behind her, he held her close and whisked her away.

Hermione didn’t let go when they landed in the Master suite. She was finally free to show her fear and she freely allowed all the pent-up terror and emotion from the night to erupt out of her. Her hands grasped handfuls of his fine robes as she buried her face into the security of his chest. Her body trembled, and silent tears cascaded down her cheeks. Her legs felt weak and she thought she might collapse but Lucius had a strong hold of her. It felt so good to be in his arms and back in the comfort and safety of his suite.

Lucius held her close, summoning his cashmere robe to wrap around her as he scanned the portraits. Only his mother was present, and she was dozing.

His voice was calm. “Shh, it’s okay, kitten.” He could tell she was on the verge of a panic attack. She needed his reassurance and strength and he was going to give it no matter his own fear for the future that was welling inside. He held her close and stroked her hair tenderly as he released its clips, allowing it to fall and cascade down her back. “Just breathe. You are safe,” he whispered as he continued to rub her head in a soothing fashion.

Lucius’ fingers slid to the magic binding collar, which had been charmed with a Notice Me Not, and he could feel some of the tension escape her shoulders the minute he removed it. He couldn’t imagine having to endure such a thing and was always conscientious to remove her choker as soon as possible.

Hermione felt herself begin to relax as the familiar warm flow of her magic’s freedom began to stretch its legs. Now that she was becoming more proficient with wandless casting, she was also becoming more in tune with how her magic felt within her. She could feel it ebb and crest with her moods and she was learning to control it. Right now, however, it seemed as though it were trying to calm her instead of the other way around.

Her words were shaky, but she was composed enough now to talk. “What’s going on, Lucius? Why was I examined?”

“Come. Let’s sit and have some tea.” He led her to the settee and cast an Incendio into the hearth. The flames ignited, and the warmth came fast. He pulled her onto his lap as he sat on the loveseat
“Tinny,” he called out in a quiet voice. The elf instantly appeared with wide eyes focused on her friend. “Tinny, it’s been a rough night. Perhaps some tea? Something soothing?”

“Yes, sirs. Tinny will be right back.” She was gone with a pop.

“Tell me what happened, Hermione. What did the Dark Lord say to you?”

Hermione nuzzled her head further into his neck. Her voice sounded muffled. “He… he said he was going to allow me to take my NEWTS. As a reward for good behavior and because my MPS score was high.”

His hands gently rubbed her back and he kissed her temple. “Well, that’s a good thing, right?”

“Yes,” she responded simply.

“If you would like to, tell me about the medical exam.”

His attempts not to order her did not go unnoticed. Just then there was a pop of Apparition as Tinny reappeared with an abundant tray. “Good witch needs food. Tinnys has brought croissants and cheeses and sliced fruit as well as shrimps and lemon cookies. Hot cocoa and chamomile tea to drink.”

Tinny set down the tray and then looked from Lucius to Hermione. Suddenly, a knowing look appeared on her little face as she studied the brunette. “Tinnys will be back with hot water bottle and potions for good witch. Hers belly will be cramping tonight.” Another pop and she was gone.

Hermione let out a groan into Lucius’ neck. “As though I need to fuss with that right now?!”

Lucius knew what the hot water bottle and potion was for, Narcissa had experienced terrible cramping over the years during her cycle and Tinny was well versed at curing those ails. There were many reasons Lucius was pleased to have been born a man, but avoiding monthly bleeding was definitely in the top five. He continued to rub Hermione’s back. “Do you want to tell me about what happened?”

Hermione sighed. “Healer Jacobs, he said that I was to be examined first. He did a very thorough physical including a pelvic exam but was rather abrupt. He said that he had others to examine after me.”

“And did he say you are in good health?”

“Apparently, I am slightly underweight, and my monoamine neurotransmitters are off kilter. He also said my…”

“Mono-what?”

“It’s the chemicals in the brain that affect mood.”

“You are quite smart, you know.”

“Yeah and look where it’s gotten me.”

“Yes, look where it’s gotten you. You are alive, Hermione.”
When she didn’t respond he prodded, “What else did Healer Jacobs say?”

“He said my sleep and stress patterns are off.” She let out a huff of frustration as she grumbled under her breath, “Although I could have told him that and spared him the trouble.”

Lucius chuckled lightly and then immediately tensed when he felt fresh, hot tears on his neck. “Are you okay?” he whispered as he tilted her chin back and up with his index finger so that he could see her face. Her face was tired and worn and her eyes were puffy and red. In that moment she looked so much older than merely twenty, and it saddened him.

“Physically, yes. But the rest of it? I’m so tired of my body not being my own. The bond has been bad enough, but tonight… Tonight I was cattle. No one would tell me why it was happening…I still don’t know.”

He was contemplating a response when she continued, “I’m tired and I’m cranky and I’m sick of crying. I have cried more in the past month than in my entire life, Lucius. I want to be angry. I want to yell and hit something - preferably Draco’s face.”

She peeked back over her shoulder. “And I’m starving.”

“Well, that is something I can fix. Look at what Tinny has brought you.”

Hermione scooted off his lap and picked up one of the small plates off the tray.

Lucius watched as she piled several of the large chilled shrimp, a croissant and some cheese onto her plate. She slumped and curled back into the sofa as she began to eat.

Lucius stood and unlatched his robe before draping it over the chair. “The reason you were examined was no doubt to determine your suitability to bear children, Hermione.”

Hermione froze mid chew and stared wide-eyed at him as he continued to undress his many layers of fine clothing. When he was down to his trousers, he sat back down next to her and rubbed his face before looking at her and speaking softly. “Breeding. It’s all about breeding. The Dark Lord is trying to strengthen blood lines by mating magically strong Purebloods with Muggleborns who are also strong. We were each required to test our MPS scores tonight so that he can choose the initial pairings.”

Hermione put her plate down, no longer hungry, and listened as Lucius recounted the details. When he was finished, she suddenly grew pale. “Would he…would he pair me with someone other than you?”

Lucius swallowed thickly. That was the question and he didn’t have an answer for. His eyes met hers, but he didn’t respond. There was no need to. They both knew the answer.

She looked at him knowingly and in a very Hermione-esque, know-it-all frame of voice said, “Well, I can only imagine how that change of agenda is being received. Forcing purebloods into the very thing they had rallied behind him to prevent.” She shook her head in dismay and then looked at him in more bewilderment than anger. “He killed a Pureblood boy tonight. Does that not speak against everything he has preached over the years as well? How can anyone trust him?” She let out a humorless laugh as she looked back into the fire.

Lucius couldn’t help it, he felt a twinge of anger and his walls erected. He felt himself become defensive of his life and the choices he had made. Damn this girl for her self-righteousness! She didn’t understand, and she never would. How could she?! Whether it was a defense mechanism of wasted years of devotion or whether it was simply that he couldn’t acknowledge that he had been so
incredibly wrong, he defended the very man he had grown to hate and mistrust.

“The Dark Lord is a brilliant man, Hermione. He understands that extreme measures are necessary to ensure the end result that the wizarding world needs. He is willing to make sacrifices and he is strong enough to ensure that we make the needed sacrifices as well. Without him, Muggleborns would continue to infect our world.”

Hermione sat thunderstruck as Lucius raged. She watched as he stood and paced before her, sprouting off the same propaganda she had endured ever since entering the magical world.

“You simply can’t understand, Hermione. You are not a Pureblood. You are not wired to think like the Dark Lord!”

*What? He doesn’t know?* Hermione smiled viciously; her anger finally had an outlet. “Oh Lucius, I think you need to sit down. I don’t think you really know this man you have pledged your life to.”

When he just looked at her, she continued, “Tom Riddle, aka Lord Voldemort,” she said with derision, “is a Halfblood! His mother was Merope Gaunt, but his father was a Muggle!”

She felt triumphant as Lucius’ jaw dropped and he stared at her with wide-eyes. After a pause he responded dismissively, “You don’t know what you are talking about.”

Hermione stood, her face red with rage. The anger felt brilliant, like clean air let into a smoke-filled room. “No, Lucius. It’s you who doesn’t know. Tom Riddle is a *Half-blood* who craves power and control and who gets his jollies by tormenting and killing. He couldn’t care less about blood purity! If he did, he wouldn’t be forcing Purebloods to breed with Muggleborns. It’s probably all just a joke to him and he is cackling behind your backs about how *stupid* you all are!”

Lucius took in her victorious glare for a split second before growling, “Get out!” He whispered through clenched teeth. “Go to the Mistress Suite and stay there until I or Draco come for you.”

Hermione’s breath hitched as her feet began to move. Tears, this time of anger, furiously fell down her cheeks. She yelled back at him as she stomped towards the hidden door. “You can’t even defend yourself, can you?! Instead, you just take the final word by sending me to my room, invoking the disgusting bond. You’re pathetic!”

Lucius collapsed onto the sofa the second he heard the door slam.
Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter by LissaDream

BETA love: RaynePhoenix2

It was the wee hours of the morning and Lucius couldn’t sleep. Hermione’s last words kept reverberating in his head like a metronome.

“You can’t even defend yourself, can you?! Instead, you just take the final word by sending me to my room, invoking the disgusting bond. You’re pathetic!”

He was pathetic. Responding to her declaration the way he had was adolescent behavior at best, infantile at worst. He should have asked her to leave more politely. He should have told her he needed time to calm down and think.

It was all he had been doing since the door between their rooms had slammed into place. At first, he had paced like a maniac, unbelieving and angry – so very angry. It took a while for him to realize that his rage was directed at the Dark Lord. He needed to know if Hermione’s declaration that Tom Riddle was a Half-blood was true. It couldn’t be true – could it?

A quick floo call later, and Severus hesitantly confirmed Hermione’s words. Lucius was glad that the floo call meant his friend could not see his cheeks darken with rage and betrayal. Outwardly, he maintained a detached cool. He thanked Severus and retreated back to his room.

Their room.

His gaze roamed the space. Her clothes were in his wardrobe, her book was on the nightstand on her side of the bed. He knew his shower was filled with feminine soaps and shampoos. There were other subtle changes that the elves had made – a vanity with an upholstered pouffe took up space near a window, another hook had been installed at the foot of the bed for her robe.

Somehow it had become their room – and he had banished her from it. A sliver of guilt sliced through him but he pushed it away, still too upset by the unsettling events of the evening and the triumphant look on her face as she shattered a long-held ideation.

Lucius forced himself through his nighttime ablutions before crawling into bed. It was only moments before his guilt returned, along with a rock in the pit of his stomach. How on Earth had he become so used to sleeping with someone? He was forty-three-years-old and had never actually shared his bed. Narcissa would join him for intimacies but would always retreat tactfully to her own chambers at some point after, and he had never shared her room. He had only been sharing his bed with Hermione for a few weeks, and yet the loss of her presence left him chilled.

Lucius tossed and turned for the next few hours. He called for Bilby and asked the elf to retrieve Jupiter for company. An hour later, the dog was completely passed out at the foot of the bed and had really been no comfort at all. No, he wanted the young woman – not the loving dog.

Even though Lucius was angry at her – not her, but her smugness; her self-righteousness – he missed her. He still wanted her with him. He cast a tempus charm, peering blearily through the darkness, to find it was a little after four o’clock in the morning. He sat up, letting the bedsheets fall to his waist,
and ran an exasperated hand down his face.

Lucius knew in that moment that he would not sleep a wink without apologizing for his anger. None of this was the girl’s fault, he should not have lashed out at her. Not even bothering to put on a robe, he slipped out of bed and padded to the hidden entrance of Hermione’s suite.

He found her in a restless sleep, her breathing uneven, and her arms curled around a hot water bottle pressed to her lower abdomen. Silently, he slipped into the bed behind her and wrapped an arm under her breasts before pulling her back flush to his front. For the first time all evening, Lucius’ body relaxed.

He nuzzled his nose into the hair at the back of her neck just as she murmured, “Lucius?” Her voice was raspy with sleep.

“Yes,” he answered quietly. “I couldn’t sleep. I realize what a pompous arse I’ve been.”

The low chuckle that left her made his chest warm. “You have given me much to think about tonight,” he told her quietly. “I can’t promise not to argue with you more about everything, but right now I just wish to sleep beside you. May I stay? Can you forgive me my temper?”

“Yes,” she breathed out on a sigh. The word answered both questions and, shortly thereafter, she was wiggling her bum into the cradle of his hips to get closer to him.

“Thank you.” His voice was a bit choked with her sweetness, but he forced himself to continue. He gently pushed her hair out of the way, so he would be more comfortable before telling her, “Sleep, kitten. We’ll talk more soon.”

“G’night Lucius.”

“Goodnight, Hermione.”

The next week passed in a blur of activity for those at Malfoy Manor. The morning after the graduation party, an owl delivered instructions for Hermione to be collected every day for four days in a row where she would be taken to the Ministry to sit her NEWT examinations. She would be tested in all subjects, which horrified her as she had dropped several after her third year and a couple more after her OWLs to focus on the ones she felt would be most beneficial for a career at the Ministry.

Lucius found her adorably amusing, Draco voiced his concern for satisfying the bond and not having his slave around to do his bidding. Until he realized she had her period. Then he bemoaned the disgustingness of having to take her while she bled. He commanded she use tampons and took her arse once two days in to her period and waited until she was done bleeding to fuck her again.

Hermione blocked it all out. She had to. In true Hermione fashion, nothing could divert her focus from the exams.

She was dismayed that her proctor was none other than Dolores Umbridge, who felt Hermione being tested was a massive waste of government time. Hermione did her best to ignore the woman, which was made much easier after she heard the toad complaining to a co-worker about how she hadn’t been invited to the now infamous graduation party.

The first day she took the Potions, Transfiguration, Herbology, and Charms exams. The following two days was Care of Magical Creatures, Dark Arts and their Defense (to be honest, there wasn’t a
lot of defense on the exam), History of Magic, Ancient Runes, and Arithmancy. The last day, she wasn’t collected until two o’clock in the afternoon. She completed her Muggle Studies and Divination exams before she was given a (very) light supper, allowed to rest, and then taken to the observatory to complete her Astronomy exam.

She slept for an entire twenty-four hours following her Astronomy exam under Lucius’ protection and against Draco’s wishes. Even though she had been practically comatose and utterly distracted when she was at the Manor, Draco had satisfied the bond daily (after her monthly had abated) and Lucius twice.

It was a week after the party, and Hermione found herself finishing another wandless magic lesson. Still not feeling completely herself after her brutal examination schedule, coupled with Draco’s attentions and layered with Snarky Snape, she was in a very whiny mood.

“Do we have to do this now? I’m exhausted.”

“I know you are, Miss Granger,” Lucius answered her sympathetically. “However, I wish to know where your Occlumency skills lay for certain. Being tired and having someone as skilled as Severus Snape enter your mind will tell me if your defenses can be broken. We need you to always be able to keep the Dark Lord out of your important memories, my dear.”

Hermione felt her anxiety climb. Her gaze flicked back and forth between Snape and Lucius before she finally nodded her consent. Severus replaced her collar and Hermione felt the familiar lock down of her power. She sighed with regret. She hated putting the collar back on, but they needed to know how well she could keep Voldemort out with it on. It had been a miracle that she escaped her last interview with the megalomaniac without her mind being invaded.

Quickly and effectively, Hermione let her mind shut down. She raised her subtle shields and pushed less significant, but still somewhat important, memories to the front before she mixed them with thoughts from her childhood, her time at Hogwarts, Draco’s abuse, and Lucius’ “feigned” affections. She knew the goal was to keep Snape from accessing her memories of Lucius hiding her power, Theo telling her his secret, and Hermione’s knowledge of Snape’s true allegiance.

Fifteen minutes later, she stood before the Headmaster as Lucius looked on, his mouth set in a grim line. Sweat beaded on her brow, but the subtle upturn of Snape’s mouth told her she had succeeded.

“Brilliant, Miss Granger.” Snape told her before turning to Lucius. “Her mind is veritable labyrinth. He’ll never know she’s Occluding.”

Lucius’ grin spread wide on his face. “Good.”

“Come sit by the fire, Miss Granger,” Snape continued a breath of a moment later. “I have your test results with me today.”

“Oh my God!” Both men watched with a mixture of amusement and exasperation as Hermione completely bypassed the chair which was indicated to her and paced relentlessly before the hearth.

After watching her pace for a moment, Lucius took Hermione by the wrist before leading her to the settee and pulling her down to sit with him. Severus, shaking his head with mock annoyance, handed an official looking letter to the girl.

“Do you know what they say?” she asked him as she looked up with wide, worried eyes.

“This is honestly more terrifying to you than going before the Dark Lord, isn’t it?” Severus asked with a light sneer.
“Of course, it is – these are test results! NEWT results!”

Both men chuckled before Severus answered her previous question. “I do know what your results are. Open the envelope, Miss Granger.”

Taking a deep breath, Hermione opened her correspondence.

She let the form letter fall away as she searched for the breakdown of grades. She held her breath as she read:

*Ancient Runes – Outstanding*
Arithmancy – Outstanding
Astronomy – Exceeds Expectations
Care of Magical Creatures – Exceeds Expectations
Charm – Outstanding
Dark Arts and their Defense – Acceptable
Divination – Acceptable
Herbology – Outstanding
History of Magic – Exceeds Expectations
Muggle Studies – Poor
Potions – Outstanding
Transfiguration – Outstanding

Pass: 11
Fail: 1

*Congratulations on your eleven NEWTs!*

Severus waited for the girl to burst into tears. He was no fool – she would have done much, much better had she been given the opportunity to study. He wouldn’t have been surprised if she had earned all twelve NEWTs with an Exceeds Expectations or better. However, the fact that she received eleven NEWTs after a year on the run, followed by the hell she had been through was beyond impressive. Even for Hermione Granger.

He was surprised when the only thing she did was pass her results to a curious Lucius before she looked up at him with a serious expression that was belied with bemused eyes.

“Tell me – how in the word did I pass Divination but fail Muggle Studies when I was raised Muggle?” When Severus snorted a laugh (they all knew that the Muggle Studies Curriculum under Voldemort was skewed), she cracked a grin. Much to the surprise of everyone in the room, she stood and wrapped her arms around his middle in a fierce hug.

Severus locked eyes with Lucius for a moment before patting her awkwardly on the back.

“Congratulations, Miss Granger. A very spectacular result, considering your circumstances.”

When the girl pulled away, she turned a bashful expression on her captor. “Congratulations, Hermione,” he said kindly before reaching out a hand to her and pulling her to sit back next to him. Severus looked away as his long-time friend pressed an affectionate kiss to the girl’s temple.

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It had been a week; a week since the party and a week since their fight. A lot had happened since then. She had taken her NEWTs! She still couldn’t believe she pulled off eleven passing scores. However, now that her exams were over, she couldn’t stop thinking about her fight with Lucius the
prior Saturday night.

Hermione had felt tremendous relief when Lucius had come to her bed that night. She hadn’t wanted to fight with him. She had known she couldn’t fault him for being who he was - for being who he had always been – a Pureblood supremist. He was her protector, after all. It would not do to upset him and lose his support.

At least that’s what she had told herself.

It wasn’t because, despite her anger, her heart had fallen on the floor when he sent her from his room.

It certainly wasn’t because she could hardly breathe due to fear he would never kiss her again.

It wasn’t because she cared for him or was falling for him.

After all, it would be foolish to fall for such a man. A bigot. A Death Eater. A bloody, sodding Malfoy! No, she was just making the best of a dreadful situation. Right? Right!

She had just dozed off when he had come to her room and crept into her bed. He had whispered words of apology for his anger and admitted she had given him much to think about. He had said they would talk later, so she had allowed herself to enjoy the comfort and security of his arms as she felt that pesky sense of hope rear it’s teasing little head. Hope that she could sway him. Hope that all was not lost. Lavender’s note had been a simple question. Can LM be turned? Hermione’s life would be so much easier if he could.

As he had drifted off to sleep behind her, she had contemplated what she could say to help him change his views. Looking back on their argument, she could see why he had become defensive. She realized that with a man like Lucius Malfoy, it might be better to lead him to the pool of enlightenment and wait for him to swim on his own rather than force him into the water.

Only now it was a week later, and they had not broached the subject again. Because of this, each passing day her heart broke a little bit more. Granted, the four days of testing her NEWTS had been a huge distraction, but it had still weighed on the back of her mind. The past couple of days it had practically been all she could think about. How could he care about her as much as he seemed to and still believe her blood made her unworthy? Unworthy to share his world. It didn’t make sense. It was a contradiction he explained by simply saying she was the exception to the norm. How convenient. How obtuse.

Lucius had clearly sensed her growing distance, and with each day seemed to dote on her a little bit more. It was obvious to her that he had not changed his mind and was not going to apologize for his beliefs. He simply wanted them to move past it and carry on as they had been before. Hermione’s hope for him to change was fading fast.

All of this was weighing heavy on her mind when she arrived at breakfast on Sunday. Of course, the moment she sat down and Draco peeked over his paper and said, “Tomorrow you will resume your morning visits to my room after Father is finished with you,” her thoughts moved from Lucius’ future to her own. Because of her NEWTS, and then Lucius allowing her to sleep all day Friday, the routine of her going to Draco in the mornings had been put on hold. Her reprieve was at an end.

It was with great effort that she kept herself from rolling her eyes and throwing her croissant at his arrogant and sadistic head. Instead, she showed no emotion and didn’t grant him a response. There was no need to. They all knew the bond would give her no choice but to obey.
After a moment, Draco took a sip of coffee before announcing, “I’m off. The Dark Lord is sending me to check out a four-year-old Mudblood who just manifested her magic. Going to put a trace on her.”

“A trace?” Hermione couldn’t resist asking.

Draco looked at her disdainfully. “Yes, a trace,” the blond responded condescendingly. “He feels the Ministry has been lax in its monitoring and that these abominations should be watched closely until they are dealt with.”

“Dealt with?”

“That will do, Draco. Say no more,” Lucius commanded quietly without moving his eyes from his paper.

“Well, she asked.” Draco responded with a sneer and a mocking tone. “It wouldn’t do to be impolite, now would it?”

“And you answered. Good luck on your quest, Draco.” Lucius replied with his own signature haughty drawl.

With that, Draco tossed his napkin on the table and left without another word.

When the silence had screamed for longer than a minute, Hermione demanded in a whisper, “What did he mean by…dealt with?”

Lucius sipped his coffee without responding and folded his paper. “Why don’t we eat and then you can spend some well-earned time with your mother. Afterwards you can enjoy the fresh air of a walk to the barn before mucking the stalls.”

*What?* It was a second before Hermione realized he was still playing his role. She chanced a glance about the room and noticed Ediva and Abraxas watching them astutely.

Subverting her eyes to her plate, she responded simply with a “Yes sir”, hoping that this meant he would explain later.

It was after ten-thirty when Lucius finally escorted Hermione to the stables with an excited Jupiter on their heels. The air was crisp, and the walk was invigorating. For the middle of July, it was rather cool outside.

The minute they were inside the barn, Lucius turned to her. “I thought I might take you riding. Would you like that?”

“With you on the horse with me?”

“Well, no. Although we *could* ride bareback and you could sit in front of me on Zeus if you prefer.”

“Yes! I would like the second option. I can maybe build up to riding on my own.”

Lucius chuckled at her nervousness. “You really don’t like anything where your feet aren’t on the ground, do you?” He grinned mischievously, and before she could respond he took two steps and pulled her close. His lips grazed her ear and his breath tickled her skin when he whispered, “Well, with the exception of one thing. You do seem to enjoy them over my shoulders if memory serves.”

“Lucius!” she playfully scolded and slapped his arm. Hermione liked his playful and flirtatious
teasing, but there was a small part of her that was uncomfortable. That piece of her that felt ashamed for enjoying his caresses. That sliver of her that knew falling for this man would end up breaking her heart. After all, he was still her enemy’s minion when it came down to it. He was not really on her side.

Lucius didn’t let go of her. He peppered soft kisses along her neck and drank in her scent. Because of her NEWTS and her exhaustion, he had only taken her a couple times the past week and it was all he could do not to throw her down and devour her.

Instead, he kissed her temple and stepped back as he looked around the stables. He spotted his white Arabian, Zeus, in one of the stalls to the right. When he approached, he found the miniature pony, Mony, in the stall alongside the beast. For some reason, the largest stallion in the barn had an affection for the pony whom the other stallions scorned and ignored.

Lucius internally pondered again how much Draco had changed. The boy used to love his little pony so much that he would sneak out to the barn at night to watch over him and make sure he was okay. Just this past Christmas break Narcissa had thrown a fit because Draco had sneaked the pony into his bedroom suite on a particularly cold night. But now? Now Lucius doubted Draco had thought about Mony even once in the past few months.

“Oh, my goodness! Is that a miniature pony?” Hermione asked when she stepped up beside Lucius and peered over the stall.

“Yes. This is Mony. He belongs to Draco.”

“He’s so cute!” She looked up at Lucius and suggested with a teasing smile, “How about you go ride Zeus and I’ll stay here with Jupiter and Mony?”

Lucius chuckled and contemplated her for a minute. “Tell you what; how about you ride bareback with me for a quick trail ride? If you hate it, I’ll never ask you to ride again.”

Hermione thought for a moment. “Compromise, I like it.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent.”

Hermione watched as Lucius looped a lead over the stallion’s head and led him out of the stall. Mony let out a small whinny and followed on Zeus’ heels.

Lucius accio’d a bridle with his wand and quickly had it placed on the horse. Hermione couldn’t help but to recall the charmed-to-fit bridle Draco had put on her just a couple weeks before. She felt badly for the animal. “Does he have to wear that?”

“What? A bridle?”

“Yes, does he have to? Because they are very awkward, and the bit tastes terrible in the mouth.”

Lucius pulled the reins over the horse’s neck. “What are you talking about? How could you possibly know that? The horses are used to it. It’s well known it doesn’t bother them,” he responded in a somewhat dismissive way.

Hermione had to hold her tongue. For some reason his matter-of-fact rebuttal irritated her. Did this
man simply believe everything he was told? Did he question nothing?

She kept her tone calm and her know-it-all-ness to minimum. Her voice was soft and regretful. “I know because Draco used a bridle like this on me not very long ago.”

“What?” he snapped, his eyes wide with complete shock.

“Yes. He charmed one to fit me and forced the metal bit into my mouth. It tasted terrible and hurt my tongue and lips,” she said simply as she pet Zeus’s neck. “If it doesn’t bother them, then it’s only because they have adapted to it. I can assure you it’s a very unpleasant experience.”

Lucius simply stared at her as she continued to stroke the horse’s mane and shoulder. After a moment, he looked back at his horse and checked the bit to make sure it was fitted properly. “Well,” he whispered. “I’ll be more mindful in the future.”

He led Zeus out into the midday sun towards a large tree stump. Lucius stepped onto it and then jumped up onto Zeus’ back, swinging a leg over as he went. He looked down at Hermione and held his hand out to her. “Step on the stump and jump and I’ll pull you up and over. Or I can cast a levicorpus if you prefer.

Hermione shook her head. “No, I’ll jump.”

Five minutes later Hermione was tucked in front of Lucius, her back cradled to his front. They made their way down an obvious well-used path towards some woods. The stallion moved at a leisurely pace and Hermione spotted Mony on their heels, following his best friend Zeus along the trail.

Lucius noticed her watching the pony. “He always does this. If I’m going on a longer ride or plan to jump any fences, I’ll make him stay behind. But he likes to follow.”

After another minute, he asked, “Are you comfortable?”

“Yes, this is very nice. Thank you.” She meant it. It was a gorgeous day and it felt delicious to breathe the fresh air. For a few moments, Hermione closed her eyes and just listened. The patter of large and small hoofs on the trail along with the light breeze through the trees and the soft expiratory huffs out of the horse’s nostrils were very calming and, after a little while, Hermione felt herself truly relax.

Despite the tranquility, Hermione’s thoughts drifted back to breakfast. “Lucius?” she said lightly.

“Hmm?” he asked in a breathy and relaxed tenor.

“What was Draco talking about at breakfast? What did he mean when he said, ‘until the Muggleborns are dealt with?’”

She felt Lucius shift behind her. “I don’t want you to get upset, Hermione.”

“Just tell me. Please,” she asked resignedly, realizing it would likely be something horrible.

“A few months ago, the Dark Lord began exploring a different approach to…handling Muggleborns. He realized that in order to appeal to the masses, he would need a more palatable approach to the issue.”

He stopped speaking for a moment as though to gather his thoughts. Hermione turned her head and kissed his right arm in reassurance to continue.
“He held a meeting with a select few of us to discuss options. One of them, the one he and the rest of us felt was the most humane of the suggestions, was given the go-ahead.” He paused for a moment and then instructed her with trepidation, “Hermione, do not yell and do not startle the horse. Do you understand?”

She rolled her eyes and responded in a loud whisper, “Yes, of course. For Godric’s sake, just tell me!”

“As Headmaster, Severus has access to Mud – Muggleborns’ names and locations as their magic manifests. A potioneer in Bangkok has developed an elixir that will wipe out a child's magic completely. They would simply be visited by a witch or wizard and forced to consume the potion. Afterwards, the child, as well as all involved Muggles, would be obliviated of all memory of any magic.”

Hermione didn’t say anything as the words sunk in.

“The child would never enter the magical world and therefore the influence of outsiders in our world would cease. There would be no torture and no killing. The children would live out their lives as Muggles, the way nature intended.”

Hermione felt sick. “The way nature intended?”

He didn’t seem to hear her. “Of course, now that he has announced a breeding program, I don’t know how this will all work.”

“Lucius, I’m going to be sick. Stop.” Her words were soft and low but abrupt.

Lucius pulled the reins and halted the horse before sliding off and assisting Hermione. The minute her feet hit the soft ground she retched, although nothing came up.

“Are you alright?”

Hermione righted herself and took the handkerchief Lucius handed her. “Did you agree with this plan?”

Lucius stared at her without expression.

She said nothing in return, but her somber eyes screamed their rebuke.

Lucius threw his hands in the air. “It’s far more kind than the other options, let me assure you!”

Hermione stared at him in total dismay. “Did you even stop to consider what you would be doing to those children? Did you think about the ramifications? Magical children and non-magical children have slightly different DNA, Lucius. Muggleborns are protected by their magic from a young age. It wards away diseases that they would otherwise be prone to. You can’t just take that away and leave them vulnerable!! There is more to being born magical than simply being able to cast spells! It’s an integral part of who they are! It’s why squibs still have to be treated by medi-witches and -wizards. Muggle medicine doesn’t work on them! They might not be able to use their magic, but it’s inside of them and they need it to survive! If you take that integral part away from a Muggleborn, you may as well cut out their heart as well!”

Lucius stared at her and then responded tiredly, “Well then what would have us do, Hermione? What is the answer? How do we solve the Muggleborn crisis?”

Tears filled Hermione’s eyes as his words ripped at her heart. She stepped up to him and took his
cheeks into her palms. Her chocolate gaze was pleading and desperate. “Am I a crisis, Lucius? Am I
dangerous to your world? Am I a threat?” Her eyes were blazing. “What is so terrible about me?”
She wanted to rage at him and tell him how wrong he was, but she had convinced herself that was
the wrong way to go. He needed to come to it on his own. So instead she simply kissed his lips and
whispered, “You told me to fight, Lucius. What am I fighting for if even you don’t truly believe in
me?”

His eyes grew misty and his expression was pained. She didn’t understand. This wasn’t about her. It
was about… It was about… Suddenly, Lucius didn’t know. He absentely sat on a large root that came
up out of the ground and stared straight ahead, not seeing anything.

He was so tired of this fight. He had not forgotten their argument and he had not disregarded her
words. It had all been weighing heavy on his mind. He had simply kept the internal battle to himself
as his conclusions flipped from one extreme to the opposite more than once over the past week. She
was right. In his heart, he knew she was. The Dark Lord was a loose cannon. He did not value life.
He did not care about others. He simply craved power and used intimidation, manipulation, and
torture to achieve it.

In truth, Lucius was ashamed, and he didn’t want to admit what was staring him in the face. Only
every time he looked at her – every time he marveled at her magical abilities, her brilliance, her
beauty, and her humor – It was a reminder of how wrong he had been. He couldn’t get away from
the truth if he tried.

It was time he admitted it.

It was time he stopped being a coward.

Lucius watched this little witch who was changing everything. He watched as she stroked Mony
behind his ears. He was so close to telling her the truth.

Hermione knew it was a lost cause, and it was bittersweet when Lucius stepped up behind her and
enveloped her in his arms. He would never come around, she was sure of it now. She would tell
Snape she felt Lucius could not be turned. She would let Theo know that Lucius would not be part
of the solution.

But then he spoke. “It’s a humbling and discouraging thing to discover you’ve been wrong about
something that you prided yourself on. To find out that the terrible things you’ve done in your life
and that you were convinced were justified, were actually senseless and pointless, is more upsetting
than you can possibly imagine, Hermione. I lost my wife and I’ve lost countless friends all for
nothing. To admit I’ve not only been on the wrong side of things, but that I’ve pledged myself to
a…” he swallowed heavily. He had never said this out loud. “…to a madman.” He dropped his arms
and walked away, his back to her. “How do I reconcile that? How do I look in the mirror and face
the man I’ve been?”

Hermione was so surprised by his admission that she fell to her haunches and covered her mouth.
She was overcome with so much hope and relief that she almost couldn’t speak.

“I never considered myself a coward until you came into my life,” he continued in such a quiet and
bereft tone that she almost didn’t hear him.

When he felt her approach, he turned to look at her. “What do I do, Hermione? What do I do with
this? If you and I run, he’ll find us. If I let you go, he’ll…he’ll.” He swallowed and stared at her for
a second before letting out a sigh. His eyes narrowed with determination. “It doesn’t matter what
he’ll do. I’m going to help you, Hermione. Somehow. I promise.”
Hermione stared up at him with so much affection she thought her heart might burst. She wanted to tell him. She wanted to confess about Snape and Theo. He needed to know he wasn’t alone. But those weren’t her secrets to share. She would talk to Snape. She would let the Headmaster know and soon…soon Lucius would realize that there was hope.

In two quick steps she had her arms wrapped around him. “You aren’t a coward, Lucius.” She pulled back and met his eye. “A coward wouldn’t send the wrong MPS results to Voldemort. That took a tremendous amount of courage and I’m so grateful to you. You have done what you could to protect me. You have…”

“No,” he interrupted. “I haven’t! The abuse you’ve endured,” he swallowed, “your father!”

“Sshh, you protected me the best you knew how at the time. We are both alive and there is no guarantee that had you acted differently that that would be the case. My father was killed by Voldemort, not you. If I had run, Draco probably would have gone after them anyway. He would have used them as bait. Both of them might be dead now if we had run.”

He was looking at her with pained eyes.

“We can’t change the past. But knowing that you are on my side…Lucius, that means so much to me. You give me hope and right now there is no greater gift anyone can bestow.”

His eyes remained soft as the back of his right hand moved up to stroke her cheek. Hermione tilted her head into his touch as his eyes moved to her lips and back as though asking permission. She lifted her chin and stared at his mouth.

When his lips touched hers, they were tentative and delicate. His arms wrapped around her and pulled her close. “What have you done to me?” He asked in an almost anguished voice as his sinuous fingers lifted the bottom of her shirt and grazed along the tender and soft skin of her abdomen. One hand smoothed up to the underside of her bra clad breast and made quick work of pulling the cup down while the other slipped up her back and unlatched her strap with ease.

His breath was heavy as his mouth claimed hers and his teeth gripped her bottom lip. “I’ve never felt this way.”

Her breaths were short pants of air.

“I didn’t know I could feel this way,” he continued in a raw whisper.

She was unable to stop the keen of want that escaped her lips when he plucked her nipple roughly as the hand on her back languidly stroked her skin.

Hermione wanted nothing more than to have this man inside of her right here and right now. She nibbled affectionately along his jaw as her hands began unbuttoning his shirt. When she could wait no longer, she pulled hard causing the buttons to fly in all directions as her hot and wet mouth latched onto his right nipple.

A raspy growl met her ears. “What you do to me… if this isn’t the most powerful kind of witchcraft, I don’t know what is.”

Hermione smiled as she continued to lave and feast on his nipples as her hands explored down his happy trail to the buttons on his jeans. Button fly? she thought to herself in exasperation when she found the impossible to maneuver obstacles.

“Take them off. I want to wrap my mouth around you.”
“Yes!” He choked. His hands grabbed his wand and with a whispered vanishing spell their clothes were sent into the abyss of who knew where.

Hermione fell to her knees only to find the ground soft from a cushioning charm. She felt his hands grasp fistfuls of her wild locks as her mouth plunged over his hardened length. Her tongue ravished his cock as she marveled at how something could be as hard as steel and covered in such soft silk. Hermione felt like she was starving for this wizard as a voracious need to dominate him and show him her desire for him consumed her.

“Fuck,” the blond towering over her whispered. “Hermione, please. I don’t want to come in your mouth.”

Hermione didn’t want that either, only because she longed to have him inside her. “Lay on your back.” she commanded.

Lucius’ eyes flicked from her mouth to find her vixen gaze intense. Her lips were plump and wet, and her cheeks were flushed with desire. It was absolutely the sexiest thing he had ever seen. Never. Never in his life had a woman told him what to do during sex. He thought he was going to explode his seed like a sixteen-year-old virgin. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

“Now, Lucius!” she demanded.

Lucius fell to ground beside her and lay down with wonder in his eyes as he allowed the witch to take control. She draped her leg over him and teased his length with her sopping slit. “I could get used to this,” she whispered avariciously.

“I’m not complaining,” he responded breathlessly as she sank down onto his length.

Nirvana.

Utopia.

Eden.

No. They weren’t quite right. This was better than that. Better than all of those combined. Euphoria. Yes. Lucius felt tears of pleasure as she began to drive herself up and down at a ravenous pace. He could feel her grind her mons against his pubic bone with each plundering stroke. He looked up to find her head thrown back in ecstasy as her long curls fell back over his thighs. She was a nymph. A Goddess. He was close. Too close. When he reached his hand between them and stroked her hardened nub, a rapturous groan escaped her mouth as her walls clamped down on him. “Oh, God. Lucius,” she cried.

Lucius’ body tensed as he growled out his own depraved wail of pleasure. Neither moved or spoke as they caught their breaths. When at last Hermione looked down at him, Lucius knew she was it. She was the one. He would never want another witch the way he wanted her.

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When they returned to the manor, Tinny greeted them with a knowing smirk. Lucius told her she could continue her day without her collar on, as Draco was gone. The look in his eyes caused her to shiver, and she wondered if the elf sensed the change in her elder master.

They separated for a time. Lucius to do his work; Hermione to take a swim before moving to the library to find some more reading material. When they met again for dinner, Hermione was shocked to find that his magic, and hers as well, positively sizzled at the sight of each other. It caused the tiny
hairs at the back of her neck to stand on end.

They went through the motions of the evening – conversation over drinks, dinner, and their quiet reading time sitting close together on the davenport in front of the fire in their room. Or that was what had been intended, anyway.

It started with his fingers in her hair and her head moving to rest in the hollow of his shoulder, both still pretending to read. It ended with him thrusting up into her mouth and him instructing her how to handle his bollocks.

It continued to the shower, where he fucked her up against the shower wall until she screamed his name incoherently.

It ended in his bed. His hands were everywhere; his mouth taking her to untold heights. She came again and again under his ministrations, crying out his name with every crest of her climax. Her pussy was so swollen, and his cock was so engorged with blood that she’d orgasmed as he finally thrust inside of her – even though she had fallen off the cliff only a few moments before.

He had growled in her ear, his voice thick with lust and raspy with desire. He told her how beautiful and sexy she was as he laced his fingers into wild curls that were damp from the combined effort of the aborted shower and their exertions. He held her head in place, drugging her with heady, deep kisses while fucking her slowly. Each pivot of his hips jerked her body, making her gasp and groan into his mouth as he bottomed out in her body again and again.

The movements were as sensuously delicious as they were dizzyingly overwhelming. Everything had changed – *everything had changed*.

She was elated. Her hopes had risen to impossible heights. She was intoxicated by him to the tips of her toes. He was on her side! She had helped him see the right of things! No longer were they respectful enemies making the best of a bad situation, they were allies now! They were on the same side. They were lovers. The thought had her spiraling towards another release.

“I’m going to come again!” she whispered urgently against his lips. The declaration was rewarded with a deep groan of encouragement as he continued kissing her barmy. She ripped her mouth from his as she hissed, “Lucius, I’m going to come again!”

“Yes!” he told her, moving his kisses to the line of her jaw before sliding a hot tongue down the tendons of her neck. “Come, come. Fall apart for me.”

“Lucius, Lucius, Lucius…” she cried out. Her eyes rolled back in her head as she crested another wave of pleasure. Her body was wound so impossibly tight that when the string snapped, she made inarticulate noises while in the deep recesses of her mind, her sentence continued …*I love you!*

Snarling noises erupted from the man towering over her as he fucked her hard and fast through her orgasm before claiming his own, jerking into her while each string of his essence coated her insides.

She didn’t remember the aftermath or falling asleep.

The dreams, however…oh the dreams…

Those she remembered.

Heat and fire.

Touches that burned and scorched and consumed her alive.
All while being watched by a pair of molten mercury eyes that set fire to her very heart.

She woke suddenly and fully but did not jerk or jolt. Her throat was dry, and her center was pulsing with need. They had adjusted in their sleep, currently Lucius faced away from her and she was curled into his back. The blankets were at the foot of the over-large bed.

She needed a glass of water. Hell – she needed a whole river of water. How in the world was it that she was aroused again? He had to have made her come at least eight times that day.

She rolled carefully out of bed, trying not to disturb the man. Now that she was fully awake and not mindless with passion, she could more carefully examine her feelings apart from the emotional turmoil of the day.

She remembered thinking that so much had changed as she used the loo, cleaning away the evidence of their lovemaking – and it really had. She had held affection for Lucius, she had held respect for him. Even though she didn’t understand how he continued to believe the rot about Muggleborns, she had not faulted him his opinion and upbringing. Despite the fact he had been taught to loath her, he had made sure she was safe and fed, clothed and warm. He had been kind to her and his kindness had grown the longer he had her in his care.

As she washed her hands, she continued her train of thought. She had come to realize he held an affection for her. That he had grown to care for her. For the first time, however, she wondered if what he was feeling could truly be more. Tinny had told her that Lucius loved her. Hermione had denied it at the time, there had been no indication that it could have been true. He had promised her only care and kindness to the best of his ability as long as she behaved. Now she wondered if Tinny had been right. Did Lucius love her? She felt her cheeks heat and realized the feelings would not be unwelcome. Did she love Lucius? She felt the answer to that question was yes.

They had both kept their ends of the bargain and their care for each other had definitely grown and changed. He had essentially told her today that he would die for her and, in turn, she had refused to let him. If that didn’t equal love – what did?

Nothing in their initial agreement had said that he had to come to see her side of things. Yet…he had. He had told her today that he agreed with her. That he saw her side of things. He had called Voldemort a madman. Her body tingled with the thrill. She couldn’t wait to see Snape on the morrow, so she could tell him what she thought. After today, she truly felt Lucius could be turned.

As she dried her hands, her mind continued to skim through her memories of Lucius throughout the last weeks. She realized she would never be able to get back to sleep while her brain was so riled and her body buzzed with so much energy.

Hermione quietly crossed the bedroom and took her dressing gown from the hook at the foot of the bed. Stepping into her slippers as she pulled it on, she turned to look at the hard planes of Lucius back before she flicked her fingers. Her magic, unsuppressed because Lucius had allowed her to sleep without her collar, caused the bedding to straighten and gently drape itself over his sleeping form. She smiled affectionately before leaving the room.

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Narcissa watched the girl carefully as she situated herself at the piano and played some warm-up scales. The portraited matriarch was aware of Lucius in the hallway, waiting to see what Hermione would play. She had retrieved him as she always did when the girl played in the middle of the night. Granted, he almost always followed her to the parlor. Although, ever since the session where the girl had played for her dead father, he typically just sat in the parlor with her while she played.
Something was different today, however.

Something had happened.

She was determined to figure out what.

Narcissa didn’t recognize the rolling introduction but admired the way Hermione’s fingers slid quickly and efficiently over the keys. She was even more delighted when Hermione started singing.

The girl didn’t sing often, this was only the third time. It seemed that it took something of significance to make the girl vocal in her emotional playing. She turned her head, better to hear the words. In a breathy voice, Hermione sang,

“The world was on fire
And no one could save me but you.
It’s strange what desire
Will make foolish people do.

“I never dreamed that I’d meet somebody like you.
I never dreamed that I’d like somebody like you.”

Narcissa felt her eyes widen slightly at the words slipping from the young witch’s lips. She quickly searched the other portraits to find Willow Malfoy staring at the girl with slightly parted lips and a look of surprise. Both painted witch’s gasped as she continued…

“No, I don’t wanna fall in love…
No, I don’t wanna fall in love…
…with you.”

Love?! Oh…Lucius! Narcissa was half horrified, and half utterly elated. The Granger girl was a seriously impressive woman. A talented witch. She had a fiery temper and would be a wonderful match for him…but…she was a Mudblood. A Mudblood slave. Lucius, Lucius…what have you done? she thought as she watched wide-eyed.

“What a wicked game to play,
To make me feel this way.
What a wicked thing to do,
To let me dream of you.

What a wicked thing to say,
‘You never felt this way.’
What a wicked thing to do,
To make me dream of you.”

“No, I … wanna fall in love
No, I … wanna fall in love…
…with you.

Wicked games…how completely perfect. It’s what it was, wasn’t it? A wicked game. If she loved him…if he loved her…the games they would have to play…

“The world was on fire
And no one could save me but you…
It’s strange what desire
Will make foolish people do.

“I never dreamed that I’d meet somebody like you…
I never dreamed that I’d love somebody like you.”

Narcissa almost felt bad for the girl, but she knew exactly how wicked Lucius’ love could be and how hard it was to resist him. She only hoped that if what she thought was happening…to both Hermione Granger and Lucius Malfoy…that they would be strong enough to survive it.

A world on fire, indeed…
Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter by LissaDream

BETA love: RaynePeonix2

The doors of the dining room crashing open caused all five people around the table to jump with surprise. The dinner had barely started, Lucius had just called for starters. The evening had already been much more subdued with Draco present, but the sudden arrival of Lord Voldemort dimmed the mood all the more.

“My Lord!” Lucius exclaimed as he rose to his feet before giving a shallow bow as the other four people at the table also stood. “Welcome. Will you be joining us for dinner?”

“Yes, actually,” Voldemort sneered, crossing the room with robes billowing behind him.

There was commotion as Lucius called for Bilby to reset the table and the seating was rearranged. When everyone was settled in, Voldemort now at the head of the table, Lucius signaled for the starters. The smoked duck breast with wheat berry salad and verbena cream sat untouched by all parties for a few moments before Voldemort spoke.

“Please, let us eat,” he gestured to their plates. Draco started his meal with no more prompting, but the other four were more hesitant as they picked up their cutlery. Voldemort, as usual, only sipped on his glass of wine. The meal moved to a roasted oxtail broth with chorizo sausage before the caprese salad with a balsamic dressing was served. Only when the main dish – a citrus-maple glazed Scottish salmon with black rice, savory cabbage, and a coconut-lime cream sauce was served, did Voldemort start talking.

“Gentlemen,” he began. “I have spent many hours over the last couple of weeks trying to figure out just who to pair the powerful Miss Granger with.” Lucius dared to dart a glance at the girl to his left and therefore saw her face literally drain of all color, even her lips went white.

“I have many, many options as numerous of my followers tested powerfully. She – however – tested more powerfully then any of my followers save you – ” here he turned to Severus “ – and Lucius, yours and Miss Grangers globes were stunningly similar in color, but I daresay hers may be just a shade darker.”

Lucius wanted to smirk but kept his face smooth and impassive. He had done that on purpose, not sure if it would work. He had held just a bit of his power back. He couldn’t be certain, of course, without holding the second globe directly next to his first but he had hoped. Turns out hoping wasn’t always fruitless. He couldn’t help but to think Dolohov’s MPS spell was a bit flawed since he could manipulate his result; even if it was just a small amount. The true miracle of the whole thing was that Lucius had gotten away with switching out Hermione’s results. If the Dark Lord were enlightened to her true magical strength? He couldn’t help but to breathe a small sigh of relief.

“Draco, of course, tested well. High potency. Other high potency Death Eaters include Rowle, Nott Sr., Dolohov, and Rabastan Lestrange. All have expressed interest in breeding with Potter’s Mudblood.”

Hermione flinched beside him, and Lucius carefully moved his hand to her thigh, trying to keep her calm. He was surprised when she covered his hand with her own and squeezed tightly.
“I’m sure whatever you decide will be perfect, My Lord,” Lucius said calmly.

“I think…well, if I’m being completely honest…Severus, I think you would be the best match with Miss Granger.”

Across the table, Ginny Weasley’s mouth fell open in horror. A pang of dread slid like ice through his chest. If he hadn’t been employing such fierce Occlumency at the moment, Lucius was sure his face would mirror the redhead’s. Furthermore, Snape’s lips tightened imperceptibly. He knew his friend shared his thoughts. Next to him, Hermione whimpered.

Voldemort burst into laughter at Ginny’s expression, startling the table at large with the exception of Draco, who was twirling his wine glass by the stem a gleeful expression on his face. Lucius followed his son’s line of sight to see the Weasley girls’ eyes were filled with tears. *Hold yourself together, young lady!* he thought desperately. *We will get this figured out.*

No one had had the chance to speak when Voldemort suddenly drummed his long, pointed nails on the table. “It appears your slave has actual feelings for you, Severus. And perhaps…no.” A perceptible look of revulsion crossed his snake like face. “No, that surely wouldn’t do. We don’t want a Mudblood in such a prominent and prestigious place of honor. The Headmaster’s wife? A Mudblood? How our people would talk! No.” There was a momentary pause where Draco chuckled lightly before the despot continued, “Severus?”

“My Lord?”

“How do you feel about the Weasley girl? I have the need to reward you. You have been a marvelous asset to my cause for many, many years. Your bonding potion is a thing of beauty. Alas, you are only a Half-blood –”

*And so are you, you disgusting bastard!* Lucius felt his anger rise and fought to keep his composure and his Occlumency shields in place.

“– and blood traitor though she is, Miss Weasley is a Pureblood who tested well magically.”

“I mean no disrespect, My Lord, but I thought the marriages were only for those of Pureblood and Mudblood descent.” Snape’s voice was void of all emotion, though Lucius knew the man must be terrified. He knew very well that his friend never meant to marry and definitely had no intention of being a father.

“Ah yes, but you see, Severus, you tested more powerfully then anyone with the exception of myself.” The room was silent as that fact was absorbed. “You must understand – your offspring will be very powerful magically. I expect my next generation of Death Eaters to be…spectacular. You will not be the only Death Eater matched to breed with a non-Mudblood.”

“I understand, My Lord,” Snape said.

“Good. Wed her soon. Today. Impregnate her immediately.” The commands were succinct and left no room for argument. Lucius watched Ginny’s face pale as much as Hermione’s did, causing her freckles to stand out in sharp relief.

“Yes, My Lord,” Snape said.

“Good. Back to marrying off Miss Granger. Do you have thoughts, gentlemen?”

“*My Lord,*” Draco began before Voldemort waved a hand at him.
“I know of the sadistic pleasure you would gain marrying the girl – but I need you to focus. Who
would be the best magical companion for her? Who would result in the most magically powerful
children?”

Underneath the table, Hermione’s grip on Lucius’ hands tightened to the point that she was almost
crushing his hand. She had started trembling.

“Dolohov would be good for her,” Lucius answered in a cool tone. “You know how desperately
boring I find the girl, my Lord. Her temper can be an issue, but I think our passionate Russian would
appreciate her fire.” He saw Hermione turn to face him in his peripherals. He knew she must be
surprised, but he had to play his part.

“Hmm…very good point, Lucius. Draco?” Voldemort chuckled at the scowl on Draco’s face.
“Come now, Draco. You wish to continue to please me, yes?”

“I know my uncle wants the Mudblood desperately,” Draco said somewhat petulantly.

“That’s the spirit!” Voldemort chortled at his own joke before his face instantly smoothed and his
lipless mouth pulled into a frown. “However…Bast is a bit…crazy. And Dolohov…well, I wasn’t
planning on giving him a wife. He kills women more often than not. I don’t know if his lack of
patience and her temper would be the best mix…

“No…I think it’s probably best she stays in the care of one of you. Let’s keep the Malfoy magic
where it deserves to be: the front of the pack.” Voldemort’s eyes rested on the stoic face of Lucius
and the gleeful expression of Draco’s. “I see I have pleased you, Draco. Thoughts on who it should
be to marry her?”

Hermione’s fingernails were leaving crescent shaped indents on his skin and she was shaking so
uncontrollably that her curls were quivering. “My Lord?” Lucius said in a quiet voice.

“Yes Lucius.”

“I will marry the Mudblood.”

Voldemort sat back in his chair, eyes wide with wonder. “And why, Lucius, would you offer to do
such a thing?”

“So my son is free to marry Miss Parkinson and keep our line Pure.” He forced himself to continue
to breathe evenly in order to not let on that he was full of panic. He hoped his reason was believable.

“My Lord, you’ve already said that’s not necessary,” Draco burst in. “I can get a few Half-bloods
out of our little Mudblood whore here, and then we can put her out of her misery. After that, I would
be free to marry Pansy and sire my heir.”

Tears splashed down Hermione’s face and it took every ounce of strength inside him not pull her into
his arms. He knew she was utterly terrified.

“It is, of course, My Lords decision,” he said confidently. “I only hoped that my grandchildren
would be Pureblood.”

“How fun! Severus!” Voldemort turned towards the Headmaster. “They’re fighting over the
Mudblood.”

“No My Lord,” Lucius said. “That is not it –”
“Be quiet, Lucius,” Voldemort snapped. “What are your thoughts, Severus?”

“I think she must be quite the fuck, to have two powerful, Pureblood men fighting over her,” Snape answered baldly. Voldemort threw back his head with his mirth.

“Well said, dear Severus!” The snake-man leaned back in his chair. “Perhaps a little healthy competition?” Dread pooled in Lucius’ belly.

“What do you have in mind, My Lord?” Draco sat forward in his chair, his eyes gleaming excitedly.

“How about…whomever knocks her up gets to marry her?”

Suddenly, Lucius’ hand was free as Hermione raised both of her own to cover her face as a sob broke out of her.

“Oh my, my,” Voldemort soothed, reaching to pet Hermione’s head. The girl flinched away and sunk as deeply into her chair as she could as Lucius’ stomach clenched with anger. “Did we upset you, pet?”

“Answer the Dark Lord truthfully, Mudblood,” Draco commanded.

“Yes sir.” Hermione’s voice was muffled behind her hands.

“I would apologize, my dear,” Voldemort said in an acidic tone of voice, “but I really would not mean it. I need your children, you see. I wish to grow my army.”

Hermione did not uncover her face and she did not respond, she just continued to cry.

“Now that a final decision has been made, I’m pleased to inform you that I will marry the other of you to a Pureblood witch that has a strong ancestry of the Sight in her family.”

He sighed dramatically, like they were supposed to take that as a compliment and had disappointed him. “I will take my leave. However – Lucius,” here Voldemort paused before a knowing look was passed between his son and the megalomaniac. “I have a mission for you. You will come and see me in the morning, before sunrise, to receive your orders. Pack to be gone for at least a week.” Everyone heard Hermione’s whimper of panic, but no one acknowledged it.

“Yes, My Lord.” Lucius responded as Draco chuckled darkly.

Voldemort nodded and stood, causing the occupants of the table to stand as well – even Hermione, who’s eyes were puffy as she continued to snuffle. When Voldemort was gone, the room was deathly silent.

“Well…” Draco started. “I’m going to get a good night’s sleep. I have a witch to impregnate tomorrow.” He stood and tossed his napkin down. “Be prepared Granger – I have plans for you.” He left the room without saying goodnight to anyone.

At this point, Hermione was sobbing full force. Lucius looked around the room and cursed when he found Abraxas lurking in the frame near the sideboard. He slid his hand onto her thigh again and squeezed gently.

“Lucius,” Severus said quietly. “Miss Weasley and I are going to take our leave – we apparently have a bonding to attend to.”

Lucius locked eyes with his friend and silently communicated his sympathy. Severus looked away,
his gaze falling on Ginny who was twisting a napkin in her lap. “Come,” he told Ginny.

Lucius felt it in his soul when Ginny looked up at Severus with large, dark eyes brimming with tears. “Hey,” the man murmured to her so quietly Lucius was sure the portraits could not hear, “it’s going to be okay. I will take care of you – I swear.” His body language belied his kind words as he pulled Ginny to her feet a little roughly before taking one of her elbows in a firm grasp.

“Goodnight, Lucius.”

“Goodnight, Severus.”

“Hermione,” Lucius was trying his best to keep his horror under control. “Hermione, you need to calm down.”

Unbeknownst to Hermione, she was hyperventilating herself into a right state. Was she having a panic attack? She didn’t know. She felt like she was suffocating, though. She ripped at her gown to pull the tight material away from her neck. The choker-style halter tore easily, and she fumbled with the side zipper to loosen the tight bodice. The moment the fabric separated, she burst into gasping sobs. She clawed at her hair as if she were completely certifiable while her dress slipped to her waist, showing off a strapless brassier.

“This isn’t happening!” she panted. “This isn’t happening.” Lucius watched her with wide, grief-filled eyes. Her break down was a combination of stunning and heartbreaking.

Then she whirled on him. “It has to be you!” she exclaimed as she grasped the front of his robes. Crazed golden eyes locked to grey. “It has to be you! I cannot – I cannot marry… I cannot marry Draco – Oh my god! I cannot have a baby with Draco! Lucius, it has to be you! It has to be you or you must kill me. I can’t!” She broke again into inconsolable tears.

The moment she declared that she wanted him to kill her, Lucius snapped. He pulled her firmly into his chest. Hermione’s arms instantly locked around him; her short nails dug painfully into the planes of muscles that were tight with stress in his back. She continued to ramble. Asking him how this could be happening. Begging him to fix it. Questioning him as to what they were going to do if he was going to be sent away the very next day. Everything inside him screamed for him to take her and run – but they would be found. He bore the Mark.

Lucius continued to hold her to him tightly, using one hand to smooth her hair while the other made random patterns over the bare skin of her back. Finally, when she had been quiet for a long minute, he spoke what he knew the only alternative to be. “There is nothing I can do but help you escape, Hermione. I can figure out how to get you and your mother out of here. It will be dangerous, but I am willing to do it.”

She tensed in his grasp before very slowly pulling back from him. “Wh-what?”

“I will help you escape.” His eyes roamed over her face, taking in expression as it went from surprise, to wonder, to elation before flickering and darkening as a frown pulled at her lips.

“No,” she answered.

“No?” It was his turn to be shocked. “What do you mean, ‘no’?”

“I won’t leave you here to die for me.” It was a statement of fact, one that brooked no argument. It wasn’t the beginning of a quarrel; she wasn’t trying to bait him. She was simply telling him that she would not go. It filled him with such a warmth that he felt on fire. Moisture gather in his eyes as she
continued so softly, he had to lean in to hear the words. He was fascinated by the pink tinge that was rising to her cheeks. “I care about you too much.”

Lucius’ heart clenched, and nothing could have prevented him from pulling the girl snugly back into his arms. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head while he spoke. “Severus sent me a potion that will void your weekly birth control after the graduation party. We had our suspicions. You will take it now, followed by a fertility potion – we will be intimate tonight, and again before I leave in the morning. Then all we can do is hope for the best, princess.”

He felt her nod against him and then, after a few more moments of just holding her, he took her hand in his and led her into the bathroom. Silently, he handed her first the contraceptive reversal, then the fertility potion. She downed them in turn before fixing him with large, terrified eyes. “Lucius, I don’t want to bring a child into this madness,” she whispered, tears distorting her voice.

“I know, Hermione,” he answered in as soothing of a tone as possible. “I know.” He reached out and took the vials from her fingers and gently lay them on the counter before framing her face with both his hands. He tipped her chin up and bent to gently press a kiss to her lips. They tasted of her tears. His mouth moved to one cheek as he continued to whisper. “Let us not think about what we are attempting to do tonight, pet,” he implored her while letting his hands trail down her arms and encircle her upper back. He plucked at the clasp of her bra, undoing it with practiced ease while trailing a hot tongue down the length of her jaw before suckling at the pulse point in her neck. “Let us just focus on each other…on pleasure.”

His lips moved lower before capturing one nipple in his mouth, drawing it into the hot, silky cavern. She gave a whimpered moan of consent and her hands came up to tangle in his hair and use it as leverage to arch against him. “Yes!” It was a mixed exaltation of passion and agreement.

He did not warn her before sweeping her up into his arms bridal style and returning them to the bedroom. He glanced around at the portraits. When he found his father leering at them, blood began to boil in his veins. “I respectfully request privacy from the portraits of Malfoy Manor this night,” Lucius stated through clenched teeth. He could tell that Hermione was watching him, but did not meet her gaze.

Instead, he watched as two other portrait’s occupants vacated the room, but Abraxas Malfoy stayed put. There was a sadistic gleam in the man’s eyes, and Lucius could not help the pounding of his heart. He and his father had never gotten along, not when the man had instilled such fear. Even in death “Father.”

“Lucius.”

Hermione jumped in his arms at the sound of the unfamiliar voice and Lucius crossed the room to set her on the bed. She sat on the edge and turned her luminous eyes to the portrait.

“I asked you to leave,” Lucius said, trying to keep his voice neutral.

“I’m telling you no.” Abraxas challenged, Lucius’ eyes narrowed.

“I will force you to leave.” The portrait’s eyebrows raised in surprise.

“Lucius,” Hermione whispered. Immediately, his attention returned to the half-naked witch in his bed. “Ignore him. You do realize that what is happening – you being sent away? – it’s most likely from his reports. Don’t allow him to hurt us further.”

He stared at her with mild surprise. She was probably right; his father’s reports had likely caused
Voldemort to be suspicious of Lucius’ care of Hermione. It was obvious to both of them that Lucius being sent away was punishment. Voldemort wanted to reduce his chance of impregnating Hermione. “I’m sorry,” he murmured. His forehead settled against hers and he closed his eyes as her hands moved to smooth over his cheekbones.

“It’s not your fault. Let’s just focus on each other,” she returned is words to him just before angling her head and pressing her mouth lightly to the corner of his lips. “Let’s just be together.”

Was he trembling? Or was she? He didn’t know. The emotion in the room had changed so drastically in such a short amount of time. From hysterical and anguished to this sweet, peaceful … love. He shifted and caught her lips in a chaste, sweet kiss.

He would ignore his father’s portrait. He wouldn’t let him put a damper on his affections for the young woman in his arms. He wouldn’t let Abraxas stop him from protecting Hermione to the best of his ability. Right now that protection called for him to put a babe in her belly – and he would try his damnedest.
The gate to Hogwarts opened for Lucius the minute he touched it. The Headmaster was expecting him, after all. It was still dark and his *Lumos* charm only provided enough light to see a few feet ahead, but his stride was purposeful as he walked along the much traveled and worn path. He could see his breath as he pulled his robes tighter to fight off the early morning chill.

He had just left the Dark Lord’s presence where he had been given his mission. He tried to contain his absolute fury at being sent away at such a time. While it was clear the Dark Lord wanted Draco to impregnate Hermione, he didn’t understand why the bastard couldn’t just say so. Why play this ridiculous game? It was maddening. If only he still had the male contraceptive potion he used to imbibe when with his mistresses. He would have poured it into all of Draco’s favorite liquors. He would have directed Tinny to drop it into Draco’s morning tea, as well.

All he could do was hope Hermione had already conceived. He had taken her once before sleep and twice during the night. The last time, as he was leaving this morning, was for good measure. It had to have worked. The fertility potion was very strong. If she were to become pregnant by Draco, Lucius didn’t know what he would do.

When he approached the main doors, they opened with a loud screech as the caretaker, Argus Filch, greeted him with a scowl. “Awfully early for a visitor, Malfoy. Some of us would like to get our sleep.”

“Awfully early to get fired, Argus. Some of us are on the Board of Governors.”

Filch’s yellowed and crooked teeth made a brief appearance. “Aye, you always were a pompous arse.”

Lucius laughed. “Don’t ever change, Filch.”

“Why would I go and do a thing like that? Mrs. Norris loves me just as I am.”

Lucius started towards the headmaster’s tower. “That mangy old cat still alive?”

“You be careful, Malfoy. The missus don’t take too well to insults.”

“Still don’t know how you’ve kept her a secret all this time.” Lucius paused and looked back at Filch. “All kidding aside, Argus. How is it going? Any progress?”

Argus crinkled his nose. “Naw. It’s been over fifty years, I’m afraid she’s gonna be stuck this way forever.”

Lucius reached out and patted the man’s arm. “I am sorry, Argus.”

Filch shrugged. “We’ve accepted our lot in this life. We make do.”

“Well. If there is anything I can –”

Filch waved him off. “You’ve done enough, Lucius. The financial help you’ve provided afforded us
the best experts in the field of animagi. We are grateful and we are content. We like it here at Hogwarts.”

Lucius nodded at Filch in understanding.

“I’ve chores to get to. I’ll be seeing you, Malfoy.”

“Filch,” Lucius offered in reply, watching as the caretaker limped off.

There is a man who has been dealt terrible cards. To have been born a squib and, despite that misfortune, to have a beautiful witch fall in love with him, only to have her suffer a terrible transformation accident on their wedding night leaving her stuck in her Animagus form forever…it’s unconscionable.

“There is always someone who is worse off than you,” he mumbled to himself as he approached the gargoyles.

When he entered Severus’ office it was to find the wizard exhausted and sitting behind his large desk.

Lucius nodded in greeting and sat in the chair across from his friend.

Severus waved his wand, levitating a package across his desk. Lucius took it and tucked it into his pocket. “Thank you, Severus.”

Severus nodded. “You should be well covered for most emergencies as long as you can Apparate back and get more help if needed.” He rubbed his eyes. “Lucky for you I was awake when the owl arrived this morning. I’m usually not up this early. Interesting timing for such a quest. It won’t be easy and will require a great deal of finesse.”

Lucius was well aware it was a dangerous mission. Forging a truce between the Vampires and the Veela could get a wizard killed. There had long been bad blood between the two and neither would commit to the Dark Lord while the other was amongst his ranks. Therefore, the despot had none of either and he didn’t want to choose. He wanted them both.

The Veela were masters at espionage and gaining intel. Their powers of seduction were legendary and unmatched.

The Vampires, on the other hand, empowered some of the most ancient and powerful magic; magic that mere wizards could not achieve. At least that is what legend said. They kept amongst themselves and didn’t share easily. Voldemort wanted their secrets and he wanted their knowledge for obvious reasons. He believed the strongest of his wizards could tap into this secret magic that the vampires guarded so diligently.

This secrecy of the Vampires riled up the Veela, who found that their powers of seduction fell flat on the blood suckers. The vampires resented the Veela’s light and beauty and mistrusted them for their attempted seductions.

It had been hundreds of years’ worth of animosity building and now Lucius was supposed to go smooth it all over? Bloody hell in a teacup.

“There are extra vials of blood replenishing potion should you be required to make an offering. There are vials of clarifying draught to help you keep a clear head around the Veela. Of course, don’t let them know you are taking it. You must appear charmed and enthralled in their presence or they won’t trust you.”
Lucius nodded in understanding of his friend’s valuable advice.

Neither said anything for a moment. “You’ll keep any eye on her while I’m away?”

Severus reassured his friend. “I will visit her daily, more than once if needed. If Draco gets particularly brutal, I’ll lure him to Hogwarts under guise of needing his help with a task of some sort. I’ll tell him it will gain favor with our Lord.”

“I’ve instructed Tinny to come to you if…needed.”

“That is fine. I will be available.”

“Good, good,” Lucius responded distractedly. After a moment, Lucius looked up at Severus. “It was fortunate the Dark Lord assigned you Miss Weasley.”

Severus nodded solemnly. “Yes, thank Salazar.” His eyes twinkled with mirth when he added, “No offense, Lucy, but if he had assigned me Granger? I think I might have Avada’d myself.”

Lucius laughed. “She’s a handful, that one.”

Severus decided it was time to play a hand. His words came out cautiously. “The Dark Lord seems to be leading us down an unwanted path.”

Lucius’ eyes instantly shot up to Severus’ onyx ones at the traitorous words. Not once had Severus ever said a disparaging or contrary comment in regard to their Lord.

Lucius swallowed and his mouth grew dry. His heart was pounding. “Yes, it seems his focus has shifted…over the years,” he added quietly and on guard. It wasn’t exactly a criticism.

“Indeed,” Severus responded. After a beat he added, “I would not be surprised if many began to question and squirm.” His eyes were narrow and piercing and Lucius’ were wide with surprise at what he thought his friend was implying.

Lucius responded warily, “Squirming would be fruitless. There are no avenues of escape. There are no options.”

Severus’ right brow cocked. “My dear Lucius. There are always options.”

Suddenly, Lucius felt overwhelmed. This was dangerous. This conversation, if overheard, could get them both killed. It was not the words, it was the intent behind the words. He needed to go. The sooner he left, the sooner he would be back. Back in the arms of his witch.

Lucius stood. “Thank you, Severus. For the potions and for…”

Snape held up his hand. “Say no more. Thanks aren’t necessary. We are brothers, are we not?”

Lucius smiled despite himself. “Yes, Severus. I suppose we are.”

“Then brother, be safe and come back to us soon.”

Lucius drew in a large breath of air. “Yes. Yes. I shall return as soon as I am able.”

The men shook hands, perhaps a hair’s breadth longer than necessary. It was almost as though they had made a pact. Although, what pact Lucius wasn’t sure. He was anxious to return so that he could find out.
Hermione stared at her plate. Sitting in the dining room without Lucius felt wrong. It was her first meal without him, and his absence was glaring.

“Eat all of your breakfast, Mudblood,” Draco commanded with a menacing glare from across the table.

Hermione wasn’t the least bit hungry, but she dared not talk back. She dared not fight him. She had promised Lucius she would not antagonize the little fucker. Not that he had needed to warn her, but resisting the young Malfoy only made him more hateful. She had learned over the past couple of weeks that occluding herself into the recesses of her mind was key. It caused Draco to grow bored and it kept her detached.

She picked up her fork and took bite after bite of the food that tasted like ash in her mouth. She ate it as quickly as she could without getting sick, just wanting to be done with breakfast. She felt like screaming when Draco called for Bilby and ordered seconds for her.

The extra helping of eggs, beans, and toast mocked her.

“You’ll need your strength if your weak little eggs are going to be fertilized by my sperm. My super sperm,” he taunted teasingly.

Hermione wanted to laugh. The idiot was serious. He truly believed his spunk was something special. Super sperm indeed. When visions of little sperms in super hero suits with capes on their backs and M’s on their chests popped into her head, Hermione couldn’t help the snort that escaped her throat.

His face drew up in disgust. “Sperm that has to be wasted on a snorting, ugly buffoon of a Mudblood.” He looked at her plate. “Eat up, whore.”

Hermione ate in silence and when the last morsel was swallowed, Draco stood and walked around to her side of the table. He took a vial out of his pocket and picked up her glass of pumpkin juice. He smiled maliciously at her as he emptied the contents into her cup. He held it out to her. “Drink. All of it.”

“What is…” The bond had the cup to her lips before the words could finish coming out. Her panicked eyes stared up into his scornful ones as she gulped it down. When she finished, Draco took the cup and placed it on the table.

His eyes roved from hers to her breasts. “Just a little fertility potion to help get you up the duff.”

Hermione could feel her magic flare as it pulsed and raced throughout her nerve endings as though searching for an outlet that it would not find. Not as long as she had on the dreaded collar.

Draco took a step back as though he could sense her power trying to unleash itself. His eyes were wide and cautious for a second before they softened with confidence. He grinned as he stepped closer. “It’s a beautiful thing to have you so weak and at my mercy. At the mercy of my cock.”

He cracked his neck and relaxed his shoulders. “Stand up, lift your skirt, and bend over the table.”

Hermione did as instructed. As soon as she was in position, she allowed her mind to drift off into a memory. A recollection of Hogwarts this time. The first time she, Harry, and Ron ate a meal together as friends. After the troll incident. It was a wonderful memory. She hadn’t really had friends before that, and she had never had anyone want to eat with her before. It was as they devoured the
sandwiches and laughed about their adventure that Hermione realized she was going to make it at Hogwarts after all. It was a wonderful time of innocence. Before hate. Before war. Before she had ever heard the word *Mudblood*.

Hermione was vaguely aware of Draco fastening his trousers and ordering her to stay there and not move. Something about not wasting his gift by letting it run down her thighs.

The day progressed much as it had begun. Draco took endless joy in taunting and belittling her and then took even more pleasure in fucking her six ways from Sunday. He fucked her in the den, and then in the study. He dragged her to his room and took her twice more. He made a point to tell her he was having to take potions to get it up as she was such a lousy lay and that he couldn’t manage without it.

Gah, he was such a juvenile. Truly. The bastard had been fucking her without potions for weeks. Now he was going to lay blame on her that he couldn’t get an erection? Hah. He couldn’t get an erection because his thing was going to curl up and die from over use.

If it wasn’t for Tinny sneaking her balms and potions, Hermione would be so raw she wouldn’t be able to move. The elf stayed close and out of sight, however, and the minute Draco would step away for a minute, her little friend would bring her exactly what she needed.

It was mid-afternoon when Severus paid them his first visit. It was just after dinner when he showed up the second time. Lucius had said the Headmaster would be stopping by frequently and Hermione couldn’t help but be tremendously grateful. If nothing else, Severus’ visits pulled Draco’s focus away from her and she felt indebted for the reprieve.

The second day Lucius was gone was much more trying than the first. It was becoming ridiculous how much sex Draco was forcing upon her. He had made her sleep on the floor in his room all night and had woken her up periodically to take her. He had had her twice before breakfast, and three times between breakfast and lunch.

His torment wasn’t limited to only sex, though. After lunch he had decided on a needed chore and had the elves bring all the silver in the house to one of the guest suites. He set her up with polish and cloths and instructed her to clean every piece brought to her. She was only allowed to break to go to the bathroom. It was a completely pointless task that was obviously meant to torment her, especially because the silver was already clean. The problem was there was tons of it, literally hundreds of pieces; cutlery and dishes, frames and urns, jewelry and lamps, as well as silver combs and brushes. How one house could have so much silver was mind boggling.

Of course, her polishing duties were not limited to the silver as he so crudely pointed out. “Your cunt needs to do some polishing as well, whore,” he had mocked as he instructed her to keep cleaning the silver while he rammed her from behind. The good thing was Hermione had used the situation as an opportunity to hone her Occlumency skills. This was the first time she had been tasked with doing something while having sex. It had taken her a minute to detach when the bond forced her to focus on cleaning the silver as well. By the time Draco was finished, she had figured it out. Her hands mindlessly cleaned as her thoughts were years back to her first visit at the Burrow.

By day three, Hermione was exhausted. It was a minor miracle when Severus showed up and convinced Draco he needed help at Hogwarts. Something about a new potion. Draco had been one of the best potion’s students in their year and even Hermione conceded it had nothing to do with being Severus’ Godson.

It was while she was in the tub that Hermione felt the tingle of the wards. Before she could get to her feet, Lucius walked into her en suite looking worse for wear. He had dark circles under his eyes and
puncture marks on his neck, although they were partially covered by his cravat.

Hermione jumped out of the tub and threw herself into his arms. “Lucius!”

The man had barely slept. He had spent the past two nights with the vampires and the past two days with the Veela. He was nowhere near finished with his task, but the bond was pulling him home. That, and he wanted to see her. Desperately. He had missed her more than he felt possible.

He couldn’t believe he had her in his arms. Wet and slippery and warm and… His lips were on hers before that thought carried any further.

His mouth pressed forward when she pulled back only to have his lips met by her index finger. Her eyes were wan. “Lucius,” she whispered. “Draco, he used a fertility potion and he hasn’t stopped. He’s been on me constantly.”

“Fuck,” he whispered. “I’m not surprised.”

“Are you back? Are you here to stay?” Her eyes and words were so hopeful, it hurt him to answer her.

“No, kitten. I have to go back.”

Her words were rushed. “You have to take me. You have to take me with you!” Wild and fiery eyes met his cool and grey. “You have to get me away from him, Lucius!”

Lucius pulled her close and whispered calming words, doing what he could to prevent her from falling into a mild hysteria like the other night. It wasn’t quite as bad as the night before he left, but it was close. He was just so tired he could barely think straight. He could handle nothing until he could close his eyes for a few hours. “Okay. Okay, kitten. Let me think for a minute.”

Hermione swallowed and willed her self-control to reappear. She pulled back and really looked at him. “What happened to you? You look terrible.” Then it hit her. “Oh God, the bond. You need me, don’t you?”

His eyes were drooping with their exhaustion. “Yes, but…”

Hermione fell to her knees and had him released from his placket and in her mouth in seconds. His hands grabbed her head and not to softly guided her back and forth. After a few passes he whispered, “Enough, enough.”

Hermione pushed herself to stand and took his hand to lead him to one of the armchairs in the seating area of her room. She pushed him down and climbed on top, guiding her slit and enveloping him in her moist heat. His head fell back, and he let out a heavy groan of relief. His shoulders slumped and his hands barely moved on her hips as she rode him. It didn’t take long, only a minute before he came. By the time she had slipped off his lap he was already asleep in the chair. Unable to use magic to move him to the bed, she grabbed a blanket and covered him. She found her robe and pulled it on before settling onto the sofa that was next to his chair. She was tired as well and would just close her eyes for a minute. Then they would talk. When he woke, they would talk.

Hermione’s neck ached. That was the first thought that came to mind when she felt her shoulder being shaken. “Wake up, Mudblood.” She opened her eyes to find not Lucius, but Draco standing before her. Her eyes shot to the chair to find it empty and the blanket that she had draped over her lover was covering her instead. She sat up and looked around to see it was dark outside.

“Get up. Time to fuck,” Draco commanded with a scowl.
When he was through with her and said he was going to shower, Hermione was left with her heartbreak. Where had Lucius gone? Why had he left and not waken her? Why didn’t he take her with him? Fresh, hot tears fell down her cheeks when she remembered the bite marks on his neck. Vampires. He was doing something with Vampires. That couldn’t be good. Why had she let him sleep? She should have forced him to talk to her, forced him to tell her what he was doing, and forced him to take her with him. Without her collar on she could be a great help to him. Didn’t he know that?

When she went back to her bathroom to clean her teeth, she noticed it. A small parchment under her hairbrush. She swallowed nervously as she swiped it up and read the short missive:

*It’s not safe for you where I’m going. Less safe than the Manor with Draco. Trust me. I’ll be back as soon as I can. Don’t provoke him!*

As soon as her eyes finished scanning each word, it disappeared.

It was another three days of constant sex and endless house chores that Hermione endured before her wizard returned. Fortunately, Severus had been allowed to have wandless magic sessions with her despite Draco’s grumblings twice in that time. The Headmaster had stretched each lesson out to four hours, pretending the extra time was needed because she was so slow.

Hermione had overheard him bemoan to Draco, “Wandless magic is difficult to achieve. Her bursts were just that – bursts of uncontrolled power. At this rate she will never learn to harness it.”

Draco had enjoyed tormenting her over dinner about how worthless she was and how she would never learn to control her magic. “Maybe you don’t need that collar, after all. You’re probably incapable of any more bursts anyway.” Hermione knew the prat didn’t really believe his words because he left the collar on her all the same.

It was as dessert was served that Lucius arrived. When the tingle of the wards alerted her that he was home, Hermione felt a weight lift off her shoulders. She closed her eyes and said a silent prayer of thanks. He was back.

Draco looked up from his treacle tart, a cloud of irritation shadowing his features. “Father? Back so soon?”

“Six days is more than enough time to solve a simple feud,” Lucius responded nonchalantly as he took his seat at the head of the table.

Hermione tried not to let an ounce of reaction occupy her face when the wizard she was in love with entered the room. Outside she was the picture of bored calm as her insides were doing cartwheels and high fives.

When Lucius nodded her direction and said simply, “Good evening, Miss Granger,” Hermione kept her head down and replied calmly.

“Mr. Malfoy.”

Hermione glanced under her lashes to find Lucius looked better than he had three days ago. The marks on his neck were gone and his color was much improved.

Lucius sat at the table, the picture of calm nobility while on the inside his heart was pounding. He needed her. Three days was almost unbearable, but he would not display weakness to his son. His son who had become his competitor. His son who was in the pocket of Voldemort. Lucius knew he could show no signs of fragility. It was why he went to Hogwarts to shower and glamour the shows
of wear off his body before Apparating to the Manor. Draco could not know how hard this quest had been. He had been successful, but it had been touch and go for a while there. Vampires were nasty beings when enraged, and there was nothing fouler than a pissed off Veela. Lucius would be happy if he never encountered either ever again.

“You must be tired, Father,” Draco drawled.

“I feel quite good, actually.” He countered. “I’m contemplating a swim after dinner.”

Lucius looked leeringly at Hermione as he continued to address his son. “I hope you haven’t worn our little Mudblood out, Draco.” His eyes moved to her breasts and then her lap. “I fear she is in for quite a night.”

When his eyes moved back to hers it was to find them on fire.

“As a matter of fact,” he stood. “Come with me now, Miss Granger.” Lucius looked towards Draco. “Excuse the abrupt exit, son. I’m sure you understand.”

Draco smirked. “Have at it, Father. I find she’s quite a bore these days.”

As Hermione followed Lucius, she heard Draco command from behind her, “Don’t think that just because Father is back that I’ll go any easier on you, Granger. See you tomorrow.”

Hermione didn’t respond. All she cared was that Lucius was back. When they walked into the pool room, Lucius collapsed onto the nearest chair.

She fell to the floor before him. “Are you alright? Are you finally back for good?”

“Yes,” he breathed out lower than a whisper. “Need you.”

“Take off my collar,” she whispered. She inched closer allowing him access to the back of her neck where he easily unlatched it.

The hairs on her body stood on end as her magic raced and searched for an outlet. She met Lucius’ tired eyes with searching ones as she cast a silent and wandless *Finite Incantatem*. Her magic instantly calmed to a purr.

She was up on her knees quickly but stopped herself just shy of touching his pale face. “What happened to you?” Her hands began unbuttoning his shirt collar and when she removed the cravat it was all she could do not to burst into tears. “What did those savages do to you?” she half cried and half scolded.

“Doesn’t matter,” he responded. “It’s done. I was successful. I just…need…”

A tear escaped as she nodded urgently and swallowed her own despair. He needed her, and quickly. She gingerly touched his cheek before unfastening his trousers and releasing him from the confines of his clothing. Hermione then transformed the chair into a lounger, allowing him to spread his legs out before him and lean back. She was on top of him and consuming him in a flash. The minute her hot walls encased him, his eyes fluttered in relief. After a few pumps, his hands found purpose on her skin as he tore at her gown aggressively, shredding the fabric and leaving her breasts bared before him. His eyes watched them as they bounced with her motion for only a moment before he pushed himself up and took a hardened peak into his mouth. His other hand massaged her opposite breast before moving down to her mound. His fingers pushed through her curls to the tender and desperate flesh beneath.
The minute his finger stroked her clit, she pressed and undulated herself against the appendage. It had been six days since she had climaxed. She was too far gone in her own desire to be embarrassed by her own carnal need. A roguish grin took over his features when he whispered, “Come, witch.”

Her head fell back as she wailed a cry of release that, in combination with her pulsating walls, easily pushed him over the edge. She fell forward onto his chest and lay panting, trying to catch her breath. She could feel his pounding heart beneath her breasts meeting her own, rapid beat for rapid beat.

His hands cradled and rubbed her head as they lay in silence, simply existing together in their quiet yet temporary cocoon.

After a moment, she peeked up at him and studied his skin once more. His neck was black and blue and littered with puncture marks. His coloring was still very pale, although it had a flush of pink that had been missing only moments before.

“Vampires. You were with Vampires, weren’t you?”

“And Veela,” he responded without opening his eyes.

“What?” Hermione was horrified when it occurred to her what his mission had likely entailed. For all her frustration about being left with Draco, she understood that no matter what, she would have never been able to convince Lucius to take her with him.

It was not lost on her that the Dark Lord had purposely done this. It was obvious the megalomaniac was hoping Draco would be the one to impregnate her, although she did not understand why. If he had sent Lucius on a simple mission, he could have taken her with and that would have left Draco behind. However, sending Lucius on such a quest not only ensured that he would leave her at the Manor, but also led her to question if Voldemort had hoped Lucius would not return alive. It suddenly occurred to her that the Dark Lord might be wary of Lucius for one reason or another.

“Stop worrying,” the patriarch whispered from above her. “I can practically hear your thoughts.”

“Are you okay?”

He opened his eyes and she was relieved to find them warm and sincere when he responded, “I’m fine. Severus provided me with the potions and ointments I would need to survive. What’s more important is that I succeeded. The Veela Queen and the Father Vampire are both with his Lordship now. It is up to him to seal the deal.”

Hermione swallowed as her fingers reached up to gently touch his neck. “But, you’ve been bitten – multiple times! Does that mean…”

“No, I took a potion that allowed me to offer my blood without being cursed with eternal life.”

Hermione’s jaw fell when it hit her. No, he wouldn’t.

Of course, he would, she countered herself. The man made horcruxes, there is nothing he wouldn’t do. She suddenly felt the need to talk to Snape.
Lucius glanced at Severus as he walked into the large dining hall of LeStrange Villa. The black-haired wizard offered nothing by way of explanation as they took their places. Perhaps his friend was in the dark just as much as he was. He assessed the attendance to find that the elite of the Death Eaters, what many knew as the inner circle, were all present. When Lucius spotted his son already seated, and in a spot more prestigious than his own, he felt a small piece of his heart crumble. This was it. He had lost. Draco was being rewarded with favor. There would be no getting him back now.

Lucius took his seat at the middle of the table as Severus took his to the right of the head. Lucius noted with a small bit of amusement that Bella was no longer in the spot of prominence on the head’s left, Dolohov now occupied that honor. The crazed witch was now seated one spot down, on Dolohov’s left, and the bitch didn’t look happy about it. Draco, on the other hand, had a smug and self-important sneer on his face, clearly pleased with his new spot, to Severus’ right and directly across from his aunt.

When the Dark Lord entered in a dramatic flair of billowing robes, Lucius noticed how small their Lordship seemed. The man looked frail; frailer than at the Graduation party. Something was causing him to weaken but Lucius had no idea what it was. However, just because his physical body appeared diminished, did not mean his magic was. The two were not dependent on each other.

When their leader took his place at the head of the table, the house elves appeared with the covered platters. Lids were lifted to reveal a hearty Welsh Cawl Stew. Warm rolls with butter and assorted wines were provided alongside the traditional fare.

Everyone waited for Voldemort to begin eating before daring to start. After he had taken the first bite, he motioned for the others to proceed and put down his spoon. He sipped his wine and watched his followers as they ate and fell into quiet conversation.

After about five minutes his voice carried over the assembly. “I find myself perplexed as I watch you all eat so easily, as though you don’t have a care in the world.”

Spoons were frozen mid-lift and the whispered conversations ceased immediately.

“Oh, by all means. Indulge in your meal,” he said with a flip of his wrist. “Don’t let me stop you. Don’t let the fact that you have at least one traitor amongst you spoil your appetite.”
The reverberating sound of silver spoons being delicately placed in the fine china bowls echoed loud and ominously. Everyone stared straight ahead or at their Lord. No one dared dart their eyes for fear of being falsely, or rightfully, accused of treachery.

“One of you thinks you are very clever. One of you has fallen for the *filth* you are bonded to and has decided to turn against me.”

A shocked gasp could be heard escaping from Bellatrix’s mouth. Lucius barely comprehended it, however, as his heart was beating so hard, he could hear it in his own ears and feel it in the pulse point of his neck. He continued staring straight ahead as he forced his shields of Occlumency into place.

He turned to watch the Dark Lord with the appropriate amount of unconcerned concern. Yes, it was an oxymoron, but it was a real skill when dealing with their Lord. Showing concern without displaying fear. Showing surprise without looking ill-informed. Showing kindness without looking weak. It was a life of walking on a tightrope and it wasn’t until Lucius had decided to betray it, that he realized how truly exhausted he was with the whole thing. Now that he wanted out, he wanted out *now!* The problem was he had no idea where to begin. If there was any one person he could trust it would be Severus, but that was still a very large gamble.

His thoughts were pulled back to the words of the despot before him. “I fear that when I explained that some of you would be taking Muggleborn and blood traitor spouses, you misunderstood that they were worthy of your regard. Worthy of your protection. Worthy of your…” His face looked repugnant as he spat, “…love.”

“They are, and always will be, scum in the sewer, dirt beneath your shoe, and excrement in the barn.” At that moment the Dark Lord’s red-slit eyes met his platinum grey and Lucius knew he was a dead man. It couldn’t have been a coincidence. After all, they had been in the barn only an hour before his confession to Hermione.

Despite his overwhelming panic, he kept his eyes locked, unflinching and without expression, on his Lord’s. When the madman looked away and continued his pacing, Lucius took a small but relieved breath of air.

“Draco, set up the mirror,” their Lord commanded.

Lucius watched as Draco acknowledged the order reverentially and then stood to leave the room. He quickly reappeared and was levitating a very large, antique mirror that had gold gilding around its edges. Lucius recognized the charmed device and wondered what they would be witnessing.

“Set it there,” the Dark Lord directed. Lucius’ heart thrummed with renewed dread when the mirror was placed almost directly in front of him, which meant facing the center of the table.

Voldemort then nodded at Draco, which signaled the younger Malfoy to wave his wand. A dark room slowly came into focus on the mirror. A small amount of light revealed it to be a cell underneath Hogwarts, in the crypts below the dungeons, if Lucius was correct. His frozen expression of indifference masked his uneasiness when he saw two forms huddled and hugging each other tightly. One was a blonde with long, wavy hair and the other a brunette with frizzy, wild curls.

His heart continued to race, and a subtle trace of sweat was developing on his palms. He couldn’t tell if it was his Miss Granger. He needed to see her face. He felt Theodros tense on his right and, upon a closer look, Lucius realized the blonde was Lavender, the Pure-blooded traitor bonded to the senior Nott.
After a moment, three other figures were tossed into the cell, including the Weasley girl. Lucius wanted to scream in rage when he saw his charge; his precious Hermione. Her face became visible when she turned towards the new arrivals and pulled a frail girl with long, stringy hair into her arms. Snape’s young bride burst into tears as the five held each other in their obvious fright. Lucius wanted to turn to Severus. He wanted the see his friend’s face but there was no point. He knew the man was as panicked as he was.

Lucius watched as Hermione smoothed back the girl’s hair and looked her in the eyes before pulling her into another embrace. He recognized the girl as the one from his cellar who had been rescued with Potter that fateful day at the Manor. Luna. Luna Lovegood was her name.

When his eyes moved back to Hermione, he fought the emotion that was welling up dangerously inside him. He concentrated on his Occlumency and forced himself to shut off the panic. He began to feel almost sleepy with detachment. He realized he had Occluded too hard and relaxed his shields just a hair.

“Confesss,” the monster hissed at the table. “Confessss your weakness now and I might be lenient. I might be graciouss and allow you to live.” He looked back at the mirror. “All of these bonded slavesss have poisoned the mindss and corrupted the soulsss of their captorsss.” The half snake man looked back at Lucius and Theodros and then MacNair and Rowle before looking at Draco and then Severus. Draco seemed a touch startled by the accusatory look and suddenly Lucius realized what this was. A test. It was a test. Voldemort was fishing.

Lucius felt Theodros begin to move and immediately grasped the man’s leg with a crippling grip under the table, preventing the wizard from making a mistake that would make him Nagini’s main course for dinner. Theodros froze and Lucius held his grip until he felt the man relax. Lucius then slipped his hand back into his own lap and maintained his own mild interest on the scene before him.

He watched as a man he didn’t know entered the cell and pulled the black-haired, Asian girl – the only one he didn’t know – to her knees. The man forced the slave to service him as the other captives fell back against the wall and held each other, refusing to watch.

Lucius could feel the eyes of his Lord studying him, looking for any reaction before moving on to another captor.

Despite his Occlumency, it took all of Lucius’s control when Fenrir Greyback entered the cell and pulled Hermione roughly, detaching her from the grasp of her friends, before forcing her to her knees before him. Rage tapped at Lucius’ mental walls as the werewolf looked down on Hermione with a lecherous grin and released his hardened cock from his trousers. He grabbed her hair and forced her face into his crotch. There was a gasp from the table when suddenly Greyback screamed like a wounded animal. Bright red blood was visible on his cock and on Hermione’s face. The other girls pulled Hermione away from the werewolf’s reach after he landed a hard hit on her face.

Lucius felt a mix of pride and raw panic for his girl. His attention was pulled to his right when Voldemort cackled and laughed, clapping his hands in amusement. “Potter’s Mudblood is such a treat to watch. We may have to spare her for entertainment value alone.”

There was nervous laughter around the large, rectangular table as the Death Eaters trepidatiously followed their rulers lead.

The Dark Lord once again scanned the table and the waved his hand dismissively. “Enough, I’ve seen enough.” He looked at Draco. “Take it away.”

Red eyes draped along the table and hovered over Lucius’ own as well as a few others. “Let this be a
warning. You are each of you being watched and any treachery will be dealt with swiftly and promptly. These witches are for fucking and for breeding. Nothing more. Let there be no confusion on the matter.”

With that, the Dark Lord left.

Conversation erupted around him and Lucius took a moment of false boredom as he sipped his wine as though he didn’t have a care in the world. His Lord was probably keeping eye on the room from another charmed mirror or painting. Lucius would offer him nothing for his efforts. He wanted to retrieve Hermione and get her home, but he could display no urgency at this moment. As he sipped his drink, he realized he needed to make a plan. He needed to get her away, out of the country. He just didn’t know if he could let her go. He was a selfish man and would never claim otherwise. Letting her go would be the ultimate act of selflessness as it would likely lead to his, and possibly Draco’s, death.

After most of the Death Eaters had left, Lucius nonchalantly approached Severus who was chatting with Dolohov. Dolohov bid his goodnight, leaving the two of them the last standing. “A night cap, old friend?” Severus offered. “I have a particularly good bottle on my desk at Hogwarts. A gift from a parent.” He smirked conspiratorially, “Who knew there were so many perks to being Headmaster?!”

Lucius offered a chuckle to play along with the façade. “Anything to grant me a reprieve from the crying Mudblood, Severus. I’ll accompany you right away.”

The minute they floo’d into his office, Severus called out, “Kreacher!” The elderly house elf Apparated before them. “I thought I told you to protect Miss Weasley! How is it she was taken from this tower?”

The elf looked confused. “The young Miss is asleep upstairs, Headmaster. She has not left Kreacher’s sight. I just left her.”

“Explain to me, then, how it was I just saw her via an enchanted mirror in the cells below the dungeons?!” His voice was enraged, and Lucius was surprised to realize he had never really heard his friend raise his voice before.

Just then, the girl in question stumbled clumsily down the steps in her half-asleep state. “Wass goin’ on? I heard yelling.”

Severus was on her instantly, tilting her chin up with a concerned and stern look on his face. She seemed undisturbed and merely smiled at him in return. “Master?” she asked.

“Have you at any time left the Headmaster’s tower this evening?”

Ginny yawned as she shook her head, “No, sir. I read the books you left for me, did the Kegel exercises as you instructed, and took a bath. Then I went to bed.” She looked from her captor to Lucius and back again. “Is everything alright?”

Severus turned back to Lucius. “Polyjuice?”

“I’m going to the Manor now. I’ll return via floo if I do not find her there.”

Lucius arrived home to find Hermione sound asleep in his bed. The relief that flooded through his veins made him feel weightless. He stripped out of his clothes and climbed in beside her. As he pulled her close, her arms immediately wrapped around him and her leg draped over his as she nestled into his neck.
He didn’t understand. Had Severus been right? Had Polyjuice been utilized to make it appear their witches had been taken? If so, who were the women in the cell? In hindsight, it would have been very hard for the captives to have been retrieved without consent. The wards on the Manor were such that no one could enter unless one of the Malfoy men was in residence. Considering that Lucius would have felt it if his wards had been breached, it was next to impossible she had been taken. Unless Draco had been involved. Perhaps Theo had allowed entry into the Nott estate.

Curious, Lucius crept out of bed and entered the en suite to find everything in its place. He entered the Mistress suite to find it was in perfect order as well. How would someone have gotten her hair for polyjuice? It dawned on him the hair could have been taken long before she was even given to him.

He had to hand it to the Dark Lord, it had been a believable ruse. The person juiced to look like Hermione had certainly acted like her, even biting Greyback. Lucius suspected Greyback and the other man were not in on the deceit. Fenrir seemed genuinely surprised and enraged when he was bitten. Whoever the polyjuiced person was, she had Lucius’ respect. It took a lot of nerve to bite a werewolf on the penis.

He took a quick shower before climbing back in bed. Why? Why had the Dark Lord done it? Did he really suspect all of them of treachery? And was he correct about all of them? After all, Lucius knew that Snape and Theodros were guilty. Who were the other two girls bonded to? Regardless, he felt like he had a starting point with finding sympathizers. Theodros had almost thrown his life away for the Lavender girl. If that wasn’t someone who could be persuaded to turn, then Lucius didn’t know who was.

Snape knew she was tired, and he knew she was emotionally spent. With Lucius and Draco constantly rutting the girl in an effort to get her pregnant, in addition to the stress from the worry of them actually succeeding, Snape knew she must be in a right state.

He couldn’t blame her. All their lives were being turned upside down. She would need to keep her magical focus despite these physical and mental trials, however. She needed to rise above it all in order to achieve her true potential. They needed her – those that opposed the Dark Lord – if they were going to be successful. Her magical strength was astounding and her wandless control of it was improving daily. Until now that was. Today it was all over the place.

Snape had spent many an evening pondering the Granger girl. While her intellect had always been impressive, he had never found her magic to be anything extraordinary. Until recently. So why the change? What was the impetus?

It was theorized that wizards and witches didn’t meet their true potential until they reached sexual maturity. It was further theorized, although never proven, that the first orgasm triggered the final magical spike. Severus had never held credence to these theories but given what he had witnessed in this amazing young woman, he was becoming a believer. It was well known she had been a virgin when she had been bonded to the Malfoy men. Was it possible she had never climaxed before that night?

Hermione threw up her hands in exasperation. “I don’t understand! I’m not doing anything differently!”

The Headmaster watched her pace back and forth as her fingers continued to rub her forehead in frustration. He glanced about the room one more time to confirm they were alone. This wasn’t an act. The portrait’s frames had been vacant all morning.
“Calm yourself, Miss Granger. You will find that emotional outbursts do nothing to counter the inevitability of an outcome.”

Hermione turned on him and crossed her arms. “I am NOT having an emotional outburst! And you clearly know much less than you think you do, because women are very adept at using their emotions to get what they want...and they do it all the time!”

Severus’ left eye brow cocked in bemusement when she threw her tightly fisted hands down to her sides and resumed her pacing. “And don’t think for one minute that I’m happy about that! It’s all men’s fault. They don’t take women seriously and don’t respect them enough to listen to them. They drive women to the brink of insanity.”

Severus’ thumb and index finger moved to his mouth to pinch his lips so that his amusement wouldn’t show. His right brow joined his left when several glasses and crystal decanters on the liquor sideboard suddenly shattered.

She immediately stopped and stared at the whisky sprayed walls. All her anger left her as her shoulders slumped and she burst into tears. Her accusatory eyes flew from the splattered mess back to the onyx depths of her former Professor’s. “Yes! I’m crying. Deal with it!”

“Mother of Merlin,” he mumbled to himself as he tried to make sense of why her magic was so uncontrolled today. What had changed? Besides her emotional and seemingly hormonal displays and outbursts this morning, that was.

He closed his eyes in resignation when it hit him what the problem was. “Miss Granger, please sit down.”

“I don’t want to sit,” she groused as she walked towards the hearth.

“I believe you are pregnant,” he announced bluntly. “And I believe the fetus’ magical imprint is impacting your own.”

Her hand flew to her mouth and when her unblinking gaze withered into tear filled orbs, he knew that she agreed with him.

She immediately collapsed onto the closest wingback chair and cradled her face in her hands. After a moment, she dropped her hands and threw a desperate and pleading stare at him. He took a subtle step back unconsciously when she whispered, “Kill it. Abort it. Please!”

Snape’s jaw fell in shock as he stared at her in dismay. Never in a million years would he imagine her to request such a thing. He shook his head minutely. “You know that I can’t.”

For the first time he was truly concerned for her mental health. He recalled she had been suicidal not so long ago. He walked over to her and fell to his haunches. He tipped her head up and met her eyes.

“Was that a serious request? Do you really wish terminate your pregnancy?”

Silent tears avalanched down her cheeks as she shook her head from left to right. She looked down and whispered, “No. No, of course not.”

In an uncharacteristic move, that surprised even him, he sighed heavily as he pulled her gently, causing her to slip from the chair and into his arms. She latched onto him immediately and broke into gasping sobs. He simply rubbed her back, and when her crying abated to sniffles, he told her what he had decided. “I’m going to talk to Lucius, Hermione. Based on what you told me as well as my own observations of his behavior, I feel he can be persuaded to the reasonable side of things. You are
carrying either his child or his grandchild in your womb, and he will want to protect you both at all
cost.”

She whipped her head back and met his concerned expression with a look of relief and no small
amount of desperation. “Yes. I agree. It’s time. I can’t live like this any longer, Severus. I’m going to
lose my mind.”

“You are going to have to work very hard to regain control of your magic, Hermione,” he reminded
her.

“Yes, yes. I’ll practice whenever the collar is off. Now that I know what is going on, now that there
is a logical explanation, I think I can adapt.”

“Good. You will need a healer to examine you. Tell Lucius right away so that he will send for one.”

She pulled back and they both stood. She straightened her robes. “Yes. Yes. I’ll tell him as soon as
he is home.”

“Alright, then. I must away, but I will be in touch.”

“Pregnant,” Hermione whispered to herself in dismay. Of course, she had known it was only a
matter of time. She had consumed enough fertility potion to impregnate every female in a small
country, but it didn’t change the shock she felt in this very moment.

Her hands pressed against her lower abdomen as an unexpected swell of protection built within her.
She had been upset and had been hasty with her reaction, but it was no excuse. How could she have
even said the words? How could she have even thought them? It didn’t matter who the father was –
this was her child! Her baby. And even if she hadn’t wanted it to happen, there was no going back
now. A life was growing inside of her and it was hers to protect, with her life if need be.

She quickened her steps, not really thinking about where she was going. Instead, her mind swam
with the desire to form a plan. Snape would talk to Lucius. Maybe, with Snape’s help, they could
find a way to get her out of here. Maybe they could fake her death, maybe she could escape. She
would fight with any resistance that was left. She would do whatever it took. She had to live, and she
had to get away. It was not just her life anymore, but the life of an innocent child as well. A child she
would not allow to be brought up by an abuser and influenced by a madman.

She found herself in the Parlor and began to pace. Too tired to play the piano she fell onto the sofa,
still lost in her thoughts. She easily ignored the various pleas for her to play and the huffs of irritation
when she didn’t.

“Miss Granger, are you unwell?” The now familiar voice of Narcissa asked. Hermione looked at the
portrait and saw the former matriarch’s eyes were on Hermione’s hands which were still on her belly.

Hermione answered simply. “No, not sick.” When Hermione didn’t look away, Narcissa’s eyes grew
wide with comprehension. It was no secret amongst the portraits that Hermione was being forced to
conceive and marry.

“Already?” Narcissa screeched with glee as her hands steepled together before her mouth. “It’s only
been a couple of weeks and you are already with child?” Her eyes welled with tears of joy. “It must
be Draco’s. Let’s at least hope for your sake that it is, because Morgana knows Lucius and I tried
and tried. After the death of our hours-old daughter and several miscarriages, we stopped trying for a
second child. I just don’t think Lucius’ essence has the ability to plant strong seed anymore. The healer told me I was perfectly healthy, and the deficiency wasn’t my own.” She stopped rambling and shook her head with sheer happiness. “A Grandchild! I cannot wait to watch over him.”

Hermione felt bile rise up the back of her throat. “This baby is NOT good news you wretched woman!! How could it be a good thing to be born into this world and into the clutches and control of someone like Voldemort! And you better pray that this child is Lucius’ if you harbor any hope for its happiness. Draco will use the child to gain favor with that thing. The prat doesn’t care about anyone. Not even his own father.”

Narcissa frowned. “I can see why you believe that, Hermione, and you are totally justified in feeling that way. I know my son, however. He’s grieving and he’s hiding behind misguided hate.” Narcissa smiled warmly. “He’s going to snap out of it and turn back into the sweet boy he used to be. It’s only a matter of time. You’ll see.”

Hermione scoffed. “You mean the sweet boy who almost killed Katie Bell? OR do you mean the sweet boy who led Death Eaters into Hogwarts? Perhaps you are referring to the sweet boy who tormented me and called me Mudblood? Or maybe the sweet boy who conspired to have an innocent animal killed and a decent man fired? A sweet boy who became a minion to that cow, Dolores Umbridge? Is that the sweet boy you mean?” Her voice was rising, and the other portraits were whispering amongst themselves. “Because if that is your definition of sweet, then you need to spend far more time in the library!”

Narcissa just watched her, however. Her eyes were starting to droop as Hermione spoke. Every now and then they popped open as though she was trying to stay awake. When Hermione finished her tirade, the blonde turned to Willow’s portrait. “It’s the hormones, don’t you think?” She yawned as she looked back at Hermione. “It will all work out, Hermione. You’ll see. You’ll love my boy when you get to really know him.” Then her eyes closed a final time, and Hermione realized the portrayed witch was sound asleep.

Hermione was furious. How could anyone be so out of touch?! She had to remind herself she was arguing with a portrait. Not a real person. Draco’s mother’s portrait.

She forced herself to calm and pulled at the collar Severus had placed back on her neck. Sometimes Snape would ‘forget’ to put it back on her, but not today. Not with her new uncontrolled flares of magic.

She stomped over to the piano and lifted the fallboard before collapsing onto the bench. Her fingers landed on the keys angrily, but her rage simmered as she stared at the beautiful instrument. Taking a calming breath, she closed her eyes and willed a song to come her. A small smile crept on her face when it did.

The U2 melody elicited from the keys just hit her without conscious thought as her fingers began to move with the ease of a song played many times.

This had been one of her Father’s favorites.

_I want to run, I want to hide I want to tear down the walls that hold me inside I wanna reach out and touch the flame Where the streets have no name_

As she began to relax and get lost in the music, her vocals became louder and more emotional.
I want to feel sunlight on my face I see that dust cloud disappear without a trace I wanna take shelter from the poison rain Where the streets have no name, oh oh

Where the streets have no name Where the streets have no name We're still building then burning down love Burning down love And when I go there, I go there with you It's all I can do

The city's a flood…

“Who gave you permission to play my Grandmother’s piano, Mudblood?”

Hermione startled at the abrupt entry and her hands flew from the keys to her chest as her heart pounded. She didn’t respond and instead closed the fallboard and moved her hands to her lap.

“And you sound like a dying hippogriff. You are not allowed to sing, and you are not allowed to play that piano. As a matter of fact, you shouldn’t be in this room at all. This is the Ladies Parlor, not the whore’s den.”

“Here, here.” A voice could be heard. It stood out against the others that came to her defense.

“Lucius said she could play.”

“She plays beautifully.”

“She sings like an Angel.”

“You aren’t welcome here, boy.”

That last one got Draco’s attention. His eyes shot around the room. “Who said that?”

He stepped over to the portraits that were crowded with double and triple occupancy so they could watch her play. His eyes met theirs. Some cowed into submissive glances down and away, some met
his eyes with curiosity, while a few stared back at him with defiance.

“You’ll watch your attitudes, or I’ll burn every one of you old hags.”

“What’s going on in here?” Lucius demanded as he walked in. “Why are you threatening the portraits, Draco?”

Draco’s face drew into a scowl. “They need to learn respect, Father. The Mudblood was in here playing on Grandmother’s prized piano and polluting the air with her singing. I have rectified it, though, and told her she is banned from this room.”

“And why would you make such a demand?”

Draco laughed without humor, “You can’t be serious? You don’t want her filth polluting this room any more than I do.”

“I fear I am in disagreement, son. I have already instructed that not only is she allowed to play but **required** to play daily.” He gestured about the room. “For the entertainment of our matriarchs and their friends. Mudblood she may be, but for some reason these portraits enjoy her playing and singing. It is for them that I demand our charge use of this room.”

“How long have you played today, girl?” Lucius asked Hermione as he glared down his nose at her.

Hermione looked solemn. “At least an hour.”

“No, less than ten minutes,” a portrait tattled.

Lucius looked from the portrait of his distant aunt back to Hermione. “If you lie to me again, I’ll whip you. You will play for another forty-five minutes and then you will bathe and dress for dinner.” Lucius then looked at Draco. “Come, son. I have work issues to discuss with you.”

Draco followed his father but not before throwing a sinister glare at Hermione. “You heard my father, play!”
Hermione glared at him as she lifted the fallboard once again, her fingers picking up right where they left off earlier.

Twenty minutes later, Lucius reappeared. He stopped in his tracks when he heard the simplistic tapping of keys. It was a tune he recognized. Something from his childhood. *Mary Had A Little Lamb*? Why would she play such a thing? He walked up behind her and placed a hand on her shoulder. “Come. You can stop playing. I have something I want you to do.” He looked around the room and realized he needed to maintain the façade with so many witnesses. He began to walk away and looked back at her. “Quickly. I don’t have all day.”

Hermione stood and followed Lucius into the hall where he grabbed her and spun, Apparating them to the Master Suite.

As soon as they landed, Hermione pushed away from him. She was tired. Tired of the charade.

“I’m sorry he interrupted you. I can tell you are upset,” Lucius offered as he started for his walk-in closet. When he came back out it was to find she hadn’t moved and was staring at a space of blank wall.

“What’s wrong?”

Hermione didn’t move and didn’t answer.

“Hermione, are you alright?” he asked with more urgency as he approached.

This time she looked up and he was surprised to see her eyes sparkling with moisture. His forehead tensed with concern and the command was out of his mouth without conscious thought. “Tell me.”

She glared as the words spilled of their own volition. “I’m pregnant.”

Lucius simply stared at her before coming to his senses and pulling her close. “I’m sorry,” he responded as one hand cupped her head to his shoulder and the other rubbed her back.
Whether he was apologizing for the command or for her physical condition, she didn’t know. Despite his holding her, despite his caress, Hermione never felt more alone than she did in this moment.

As he held her, Hermione could hear his heart rate accelerating in his chest.

After a minute, she whispered, “What am I going to do? How am I going to do this?”

“Tinny,” Lucius called out. When the elf appeared, he gave a swift orders. “Inform Draco that Hermione and I will not be dining in the hall this evening as she is unwell and I have work to do. Please bring tea, sparkling water, assorted sandwiches, and that lemon orzo soup that Narcissa favored. Leave them on the table in front of the fire under a stasis charm. We will eat when we feel like it.”

With a pop the elf was gone.

“Thank you,” Hermione mumbled into his neck as that small gesture already gave her some relief. “I don’t think I could stand having to sit across from him tonight.”

“Why don’t you change into something more comfortable and meet me on the sofa?”

Hermione slowly pushed away and nodded. “Okay.”

She had only been in her suite for less than ten minutes when she walked back in wearing midnight-blue, silk pajamas. How was it that no matter what she wore, she looked beautiful? It was a natural and effortless beauty, as well. Narcissa had been stunning, it was true, but her beauty had required make-up charms and hair spells to reach that level. She had been pretty without them, but not beautiful. Hermione, on the other hand, looked her most beautiful when she was her most natural.

“I love it when you look at me like that,” Hermione whispered.

Lucius held his hand out and when she took it, he pulled her onto his lap. This was becoming one of his favorite pass times, having her wrapped in his arms.

“So, it’s happened. You are pregnant. Are you sure? It’s very fast.”
Hermione explained her session with Severus and that the taciturn wizard felt certain it was the fetus’ magic that was causing hers to be so erratic.

“I’ll arrange for a healer to come in the morning. First thing. There will be maternity potions you will need to take and Tinny will see to proper meals and snacks.” He paused. “Perhaps a paternity test can be performed, although it might be too early in the pregnancy.”

When he felt her body begin to shake from crying, he felt like crying with her. For her to have conceived so quickly, and with his absence, the odds were not in their favor.

He handed her his handkerchief, which she accepted with mumbled words of thanks as she immediately dabbed her eyes.

He was contemplating what he could say to reassure her, what he could say that was true, and found himself baffled at what happened next. He had not expected her to start consoling him. “Narcissa told me, Lucius. She told me about how you lost your daughter.”

He didn’t want to talk about that. He didn’t want to feel it. A flare of panic was welling in his chest.

“It must have been devastating. I’m so sorry you went through that.”

Lucius swallowed and willed the water in his eyes to go away. How could something that happened so long ago still hurt so very much? “It was…difficult,” he said.

Before he realized he was doing it, he began to talk. He talked about the pregnancy and their excitement. He talked about the nursery and about how Draco was jealous of Mummy’s fat belly.

His voice trembled when he recollected that night; that night at dinner. She wasn’t due for two more weeks, but she had been feeling off all day. She had thought the baby might be coming early and there was an air of excitement among the house elves. Lucius had been a bundle of nerves.

But then it had all gone wrong.
She had begun to bleed and when the healer came, she was rushed to St. Mungo’s. She was in
delivery within minutes, but it had been too late. Their little girl was delivered, but she was dying.
Something to do with her lungs. Ironically, it had nothing to do with being delivered early. Lucius
and Narcissa were holding their baby when she drew her last breath, her little fingers wrapped
around Lucius’ pinky.

By the time he had stopped speaking, Hermione was a mass of waterworks. She was holding him so
tight it was a wonder he could breathe.

“We waited about a year before we tried again,” he continued. “She was able to conceive, but not
carry. After several miscarriages, we stopped trying.” He paused. “I went to visit a specialty healer. I
wanted to know if it was me. If there were perhaps a potion or a treatment I could undergo, but I was
told it wasn’t me. Narcissa had a weak cervical neck, whatever that means, as well as some kind of
marker in her blood that made it difficult for her to carry a child to term. I was told Draco was a
miracle and our daughter had been a near miracle.” He laughed without humor.

“It was a fluke that I arrived on the very day they were going to send us an owl. They wanted us
both to come in. After they talked to me, I made them promise to tell her it was my weakness. I
wanted Narcissa to believe the deficiency was mine. It would have devastated her to know the truth.”

“Oh, Lucius,” Hermione whispered. “I’m so sorry.” They were silent for a minute. “I guess I
shouldn’t be angry with your wife.”

Lucius pulled back. “Why would you be angry with her?”

Hermione huffed in irritation. “In my state of shock, I confessed to her portrait that I was pregnant.
Her overjoy at being a likely grandmother directly conflicted with my fury at the likelihood of being
impregnated by her son.” Hermione shook her head in dismay. “Lucius, she is completely out of
touch with reality. If you could have heard her defend Draco… It was like she was in total denial of
what is happening.”

Hermione paused and then added, “I don’t think I can spend time in the Ladies Parlor anymore. Not
if she is going to continue to come to his defense and wax poetic about being a Grandmother.”

Lucius cocked a brow. “It could be mine, you know.”

“Yes, well. She doesn’t believe that for the reasons you just explained.”
Lucius stared into the fire. “I want you to be able to play the piano, Hermione. In peace. If she bothers you again, I will remove her portrait and restrict her entrance to when you are not present.”

Hermione suddenly felt guilty. “Don’t do that, Lucius. She loves it in there. I’ll be ok. It was just fresh news and I was upset. She can’t be faulted for loving and defending her son. She’s a portrait, which is only a representation of her. If Narcissa Malfoy was alive and present, I doubt she would condone his behavior. At least that’s what I would like to believe.”

Lucius would like to believe that as well, but he wasn’t so sure.

It was after Hermione fell asleep that Lucius went to Narcissa. He found her awake in the Ladies Parlor portrait.

“Lucius, good evening. Hermione is not playing tonight, but I will come get you if she does.”

“Actually, Cissa, that is why I am here. I want you to promise not to talk to Hermione about Draco anymore and I want you to not mention her pregnancy unless she brings it up with you specifically.”

“Why would you make such a request, Lucius? She is carrying my grandchild, your grandchild. Are you not excited? Are you not thrilled? At last the patter of little feet we’ve wanted for so long!”

Lucius shook his head. “This baby could not come at a worse time, Narcissa. And if it is Draco’s, the child will receive no nurturing from him, I assure you. If the child is as strong magically as the Dark Lord hopes, Draco will be ecstatic and will hand the child over to him without a second thought or a moment’s regret. This is not the Draco you remember, my flower. He is not the Draco we raised. He is being consumed by the Black family madness. I’ve decided to contact a healer. A healer in Siberia who specializes in these types of ailments of the mind. He might not have a cure, but perhaps he can slow the progression. Perhaps he can bring a little bit of our boy back.”

Narcissa’s face became red with anger. “I told you, Lucius! This is grief! Why won’t you listen to me?” She huffed angrily before continuing, “Fine! Get him treatment if you think it will help, but he needs a mood healer. He needs someone who can talk him through his grief. If you would just –”

“Enough!”
Narcissa froze, her eyes wide and pained.

Suddenly he felt terrible. He had done this to her far too many times. But this time he was correct. “I’m sorry, love. I didn’t mean to snap at you, but…enough. This is not denial. This is not grief. This is not depression. It’s madness. The Black madness. From now on Hermione comes first. Do not upset her. Do not talk to her other than to express simple pleasantries. Do not discuss Draco or her pregnancy. Understand?”

Her eyes were sharp, and her lips were pursed. “Yes, Lucius.”

Lucius exhaled. She was furious with him. He hated it, but it couldn’t be helped. She had been in denial long enough. He offered her a small resigned smile. “Good night, my flower.”

“Goodnight, my thorn,” she responded with a smirk, causing him to laugh. She hadn’t called him that in years.

Narcissa watched as he walked away. She spoke to herself. “You’ll see Lucius. No one knows Draco like I do. Our boy will be back. Mark my words.”

Chapter End Notes

Music credit – U2 “Where the Streets Have No Name” – many beautiful interpretations on You Tube.
Lucius had never been overly fond of frequenting the Muggle world, but when he owled Snape with the need to talk before taking dinner with Hermione in their suite, his friend had sent him an address and bade him dress in the appropriate fashion. This is how Lucius found himself standing outside of a cocktail bar in Muggle-London in dark-wash jeans and a cerulean colored button-down shirt with a collar at nine in the evening. He had left a sleeping Hermione in his bed for this conversation, he hoped it would be worth it.

He let out a sigh after entering the establishment. He immediately spotted his friend in a small booth off one side of the bar. Snape raised his glass and gestured for him to come sit. Once Lucius was seated, Snape muttered a few spells to allow them privacy as an extra precaution, even though their environment was decidedly non-magical.

“I ordered you a cognac.” Snape nodded to the second glass. “It’s good.”

“My thanks,” Lucius said in slightly strangled tone.

“I’m assuming this about Miss Granger’s pregnancy?”

Lucius stared at his friend before answering simply. “Yes.”

“I figured. Feel free to speak your mind. I’ve been here for two hours laying subtle wards. Even if you were followed, they would have suddenly forgotten why they were here and went home.” Lucius gave an indelicate snort. He shouldn’t have been surprised, Snape had been a spy for over twenty years. He took a few moments to collect his thoughts before he spoke.

“I just…” Lucius trained off before swiping a hand down his face. “I just – Severus. I don’t know what I’ll do if it’s not mine.”

Snape looked at him with hard eyes for a brief moment before responding, “You will do what you must to keep her as safe as possible. If the sprog is yours, your worries are little. If it’s Draco’s, you will have to distance yourself emotionally and do your best to keep her as safe as possible without giving yourself away.”

Lucius’ shoulders slumped. In a very uncharacteristic move, he placed his elbows on the table before sliding his fingers in his hair. The silence stretched, both men somewhat lost in their own thoughts.

“Ginny is pregnant as well,” Snape murmured quietly.

Lucius raised his head and grabbed his drink. He took a large swallow before clinking the glass on the table a little more roughly then intended. “At least you know it’s yours,” he said bitterly.

“Agreed.” His tone was ironic. “It doesn’t change the fact that I’ve knocked up a sixteen-year-old girl, though, does it? Of all the things that fell off my moral radar through the years, you’d think there would be little left in this world that would bother me.” He took a pull on his own beverage. “Having a child bride and impregnating her, however…” he sighed deeply.
Lucius started at the Weasley girl’s age. Of course, he had known in the back of his mind that the girl had been a year younger than Draco, but still. A new surge of sympathy rose in him. He wasn’t sure if it was for Snape or Ginny, himself or Hermione. It just…was.

“It is an impossible situation.”

“It is.”

“When does she turn seventeen?” Lucius wasn’t even sure why he asked. Apparently just pure curiosity.

“Couple weeks. Still. She’ll be a seventeen-year-old mother in the twentieth century. I wouldn’t want that for anyone, life is hard enough as it is.”

“Hermione turns nineteen in September.” Lucius piggy-backed off his friend’s statement. “She informed me a few weeks ago that she abused a time-turner for a few years and she’s more like twenty-one. Still too young, in my opinion, but a better scenario than yours.” He smirked before adding a bit playfully, “However…I do have five years on you, young man. I’m even more of a cradle robber than you are.”

Snape gave a low chuckle. “True, you dirty old man.”

They exchanged brief smiles before the mood turned sober again.

“I don’t know how to protect her from him if the child is Draco’s. My bond to her will be severed, and I’ll have no ability to override Draco’s orders. She needs healing almost daily because of how he treats her. If left alone with her, he doesn’t let her sleep and works her like a farm horse.” He looked down at his glass and shook his head lightly. “Magical pregnancies are hard – I know. I watched my wife suffer many of them before insisting we give up.” His pained eyes shot back up to meet his friend’s. “She’ll never survive him. He’ll kill her or she’ll miscarry, which will destroy her. She’s been strong through so much, but I almost lost her once already. I care for her more now than I did then. I feel completely powerless.”

“You don’t even know who the kid belongs to yet.”

“Suffice it to say I’m dwelling on the worst-case scenario.”

Snape looked at him intensely before settling back into the booth. He took another sip from his tumbler before setting it carefully on the drink napkin. Lucius was puzzled, Snape seemed indecisive about something which was unusual. After a few minutes of strained silence, Snape straightened and set both his hands on the table palms down.

“I need a wand oath from you that you will not betray me.” It was the last thing Lucius expected to come out of his friend’s mouth, but he didn’t even hesitate as he shook his wand out of the holster on his sleeve. He held it in his hand under the table.

“I swear on my wand that I will never betray Severus Tobias Snape, so mote it be.” The magic crackled subtly, making the oil lantern on their table gutter before it burned hot again.

“What if I told you I had a way to possibly protect her?”

“What do you mean, exactly?”

The men started at each other before Snape took a deep breath and stated bluntly. “I have been a double agent for the Light since the Dark Lord killed Lily Potter.”
Lucius froze completely in his reach for his glass of cognac. His hand dropped to the table. “Come… again?”

“You heard me, Lucius.”

“Are you serious?”

“I am.”

“So what…you want to defeat the Dark Lord?” Lucius was embarrassed by the harsh, hoarse whisper that had taken place of his normal dulcet tone.

“That, Lucius Malfuy, is exactly what I want,” Snape confirmed. His voice was even and serious, his face smooth. Lucius knew this was no trick.

His heart started pounding erratically in his chest, making him feel light headed. So many questions fired at once, not the least of which was how in the world was his friend still alive?! He knew in that moment that this was what Snape had been eluding to before he went on his thrice damned mission to parley with the Veela and Vampires. This is what Snape had meant when he had said there were always options.

He didn’t wait another second. He had made up his mind that moment on the trail with Hermione. The moment he realized she was the only witch he wanted for the rest of his life. “And if I want to help you?”

He hadn’t realized Snape was tense until his words caused the man to relax. “Then, my dear, old friend, we have a lot to discuss.”

“What the hell is her problem?” Draco asked Lucius. Without waiting for an answer, Draco snapped, “Mudblood – eat your breakfast!”

“Miss Granger, I revoke that command,” Lucius said in a cool tone, not even noting her reaction before turning his attention back to his glaring son. “Miss Granger discovered yesterday that she has conceived. Let her eat what she feels like eating, witches are often unwell the first few months. Especially if the child is strong magically.”

At first Lucius was unsure if Draco had even heard him. Every fiber of the boy’s being seemed to be frozen, even his eyes were wide open. After a brief second, a very easy and malicious grin curled his lips and he turned his eyes back to Hermione.

“That was fast.” Draco’s voice was gleeful, excited even. “Who knew you were such a good little whore, getting it up the duff so very quickly. I’m sure the fertility potions had something to do with it. Still, though, I figured it would take a little longer.”

He laughed before turning back to Lucius. “You must be terribly disappointed, father.”

“Why ever would you say that?” Lucius’ response was too quick, and he silently cursed himself for not keeping his cool.

“You know it’s mine – we all do,” Draco sneered. “You were gone too much.”

Lucius’ heart clenched when Hermione began to snuffle softly. It took much too much effort to put on an indifferent front. “It doesn’t matter, Draco. Either way – she’s a slave tasked with bearing children to add to the Dark Lord’s army. You get one or two more brats on her after this one, and
she’ll be put to death. I only offered to marry her to keep our line Pure.”

His tone was full of disgusted contempt when he spit out, “We are at war, Draco – if you die, our heirs will be Half-blood. Did you ever stop and think about that? No! You just have this vindictive drive to torment her until she snaps mentally. You didn’t think about our line or heritage or about the bigger picture. You’ve really been a selfish little bastard as of late.”

There was silence. Abrupt and deafening. Draco was glowering at him, and Hermione was staring at him with hurt-filled eyes. Lucius wanted to reach out to her. Sometimes he knew he was too good at playing his part. He rubbed his forehead with his fingers. “We don’t know whose child it is. A paternity test cannot be done until later, although I did have it confirmed with a healer early this morning.”

“I sent an owl to our Lord,” Lucius continued. “Draco,” he implored, causing his son’s gaze to rest cool on his own. “You cannot batter her anymore. You have gotten carried away far too many times and a severe beating could cause a miscarriage. It would be extremely unwise to test our Lord’s patience with such an avoidable outcome.”

In his peripherals, he saw Hermione bury her face in her hands as her tears continued once again.

“Fine,” Draco snapped. “There’s nothing saying that I can’t beat her mother, though. That’s almost more fun.”

There was a stuttering in Hermione’s grief and Lucius took pity on her. “Tinny,” the elf appeared with a pop. “Take Miss Granger to visit her mother for an hour and then have her walk in the rose gardens. She needs a female presence and some fresh air would not be remiss.”

Tinny nodded, grasped Hermione’s elbow, and they were gone in a pop, but not before he saw the relief on his little witch’s face.

“It’s always more pleasant to eat a meal without the filth, isn’t it father?”

“Indeed.”

The following few weeks moved more swiftly than Lucius would have cared for. He was a mix of wanting them to fly by and wanting them to crawl past. Before he knew it, he and Hermione were readying themselves for a night they simultaneously dreaded and feared, while hoping and praying for the more positive outcome.

A dinner was being held at Lestrange Villa, and he felt it was a ridiculous farce. The invitation said it was to celebrate the weddings and pregnancies of the initial participants in the trial run of the Mudblood Breeding Program. Granted, one of the couples was actually a Pureblood reward for a Half-blood servant – Snape and Ginny. In conjunction with the invitation, Lucius had received a side note from Voldemort explaining that the four pregnant witches would have a screening to confirm pregnancy and determine gender and paternity as needed. His gut told him that this little gathering was to make a spectacle of the two Malfoy men and Potter’s Mudblood for the amusement of the Dark Lord.

Tonight Lucius would finally discover if he had impregnated the little witch he had come to care so much about, or if the child growing in her womb was his grandson. In which case, he would lose her forever. He didn’t even realize his hands were shaking until she took over knotting his cravat.

“Are you as terrified as I am?” she whispered as sure fingers deftly tightened his neckpiece.
“Terrified?” Lucius scoffed. He couldn’t help it – he was the man. She needed his strength tonight, he would not let her down by giving in to his own fears.

“It’s okay, Lucius,” she said. “It’s okay to be frightened. I know you… I know you care about me and that you want this child to be yours. That…that means more than you can possibly know. I need you –” She broke herself off and began nibbling her painted lips.

Without thinking, Lucius plucked her bottom lip from between her teeth and bent to press a kiss to them. “I am not frightened, Hermione. Apprehensive, perhaps, but not frightened.”

She nodded and he couldn’t help but watch her curiously. She was acting strange. He knew she was nervous, but her behavior seemed beyond mere anxiety. “What is wrong, kitten?” He smoothed a curl over one of her ears.

“All these weeks – Lucius,” she closed her eyes, seemingly gathering courage before she opened them once again, “you have been good to me. I know we had our bumps at first and you felt you had a part to play in the beginning. I appreciate your attempts to treat me fairly and to try and subdue Draco and his actions.”

She turned away from him, ringing her hands together as the gauzy black gown she was wearing flowed behind her along with some sort of spicy perfume that made the muscles in his lower abdomen clench with want.

“Hermione,” he said after a stretch of quiet. “Please tell me what you’re trying to say.”

“No matter how things go tonight,” she turned back to him. He could see the hesitation in her eyes, read the nervousness of her features. “I want you to know that I appreciate all you have done for me. Despite our circumstances and our diverse backgrounds, I have come to… I have come to –” She stopped abruptly and seemed to steel herself. Her eyes met his and he admired their doe-like innocence. He couldn’t believe how vulnerable meeting her gaze made him. Her beautiful eyes had been disarming him from the very start.

“I want you to know that I have come to love you – and I hope that no matter what happens, we can figure it out together.”

He was stunned completely speechless. The moment was frozen before them with surprised grey eyes locked to determined brown. When he gave a very small jerk of his head, preparing to speak even though he had no idea what he was going to say, she held up a hand.

“Don’t,” she whispered. “Don’t overthink it. Don’t say it back. I don’t want you to say it now, even if you would mean it. I needed to say it before I knew what step my life was going to take next. I needed you to believe that no matter what happens tonight, that I love you. I don’t want you to ever think I would say the words because I’m pregnant with your child or because I’m hoping you’ll save me from Draco if I’m pregnant with his. If I wasn’t pregnant, if this horror show of a breeding program wasn’t happening, I would still be saying these words.”

Lucius felt like he was caught in a tangled web of her words and his feelings. She didn’t want him to say it back? Did he want to say it back? He was unsure…and he was certain she knew he was unsure, so she had given him a way out of this overwhelming moment.

“Hermione…” he whispered softly before closing the gap between them and bending to kiss her forehead. He didn’t know what else to say, but then she wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her cheek against his heart. He kissed the top of her head and held her in silence, and it felt…right.
Draco pounding on their door less than a minute later had them drawing warily apart. They looked at each other for a brief moment before he crossed to the davenport and picked up her light wrap. He held it open for her and she twisted into it gracefully. Placing a palm on her low back, he led her from the room.

The evening since leaving the Manor had been dreadful. Full of Death Eaters making snide remarks to her and the other women that would possibly soon be in her same predicament. That was, if the test run yielded magically strong children. Three people had asked if they could fuck her, another had asked for her to meet him in cupboard and suck him off. Bellatrix Lestrange had even mentioned how her lips were so full and pouty that she’d loved for Hermione to lick her out someday.

Hermione had been unable to keep her jaw from dropping at that remark, even as it had made her shudder in horror. Lucius had denied everyone, telling them that he and his son shared with no one but each other. (Which was a whole other form of twisted when one thought about it. She knew, though, if Lucius had his way that he’d share her with no one.)

Dinner had been awful. It had been offensive to her that “pets” had been served obviously smaller portions, not that Hermione felt much like eating. A few of those pets in attendance were pregnant, though, and it seemed counterproductive in her opinion.

She had been especially disinclined to eat with Draco sitting to one side of her, feeling her up under the table as he shoveled food in his mouth like the adolescent boy he was. Once dinner was over, the table was cleared and the gathering was moved to the ballroom where her father had been murdered.

Music played softly from an unmanned quartet in one corner of the room. House elves floated by with beverages and desserts on trays. No one was dancing. Hermione didn’t know this, but after what had happened with Voldemort attempting to flush out Death Eaters who had grown to care about their slave, no one dared to dance.

After a while, Draco left her and Lucius to mingle with other peers in attendance. Only then, did Theodros Nott and Snape seem to feel it was safe to approach them with their own slaves in tow.

Hidden off to the side with their men to block them from view, Hermione and Ginny linked their pinky fingers as they stood as closely together as possible. The men talked mostly about Lucius’ mission with the Vampires and Veela while young women just stared at each other, too cautious to speak, but wanting to give silent support. Hermione could not believe that she and Ginny were both pregnant.

A hush fell over the crowd when Lizzie Williams’ name was called out from the doorway – she was obviously the first to go back. Hermione watched in confusion as Thornfinn Rowle and Amycus Carrow followed the girl out, she had thought the girl was bonded to Rodolphus Lestrange.

Her nerves were starting to increase, Lizzie was one of four pregnant witches. She and Ginny made two and three, she wasn’t sure who the fourth was. She didn’t recognize the woman.

She looked around the ballroom and took in the sights. It seemed as though all bonded slaves were in attendance tonight. There were many faces here that she recognized, people she hadn’t even known were still alive. Cho Chang, for one. She also saw Luna Lovegood and Hannah Abbott, and was that…? Her eyes widened and she turned to Ginny. “Is that George?” she whispered urgently into Ginny’s ear. It seems Ginny didn’t even need to look, she nodded carefully.

“Yes,” she murmured back. “He’s bonded to Alecto Carrow.”
Hermione wanted to ask about Fred – the last she had known, the other Weasley twin had been severely injured. What about Bill and Charlie? She knew Percy and Ron were dead – but what about Molly and Arthur? The conversation could go no further, however, as Lizzie William’s was being led back into the hall looking decidedly relieved on the arm of Thornfinn Rowle. Hermione didn’t blame the girl – if she had to choose between Carrow or Rowle, it would have been Rowle all the way.

Ginny’s name was called out next, and, as Snape was her only partner, he stayed behind as Ginny untangled her finger from Hermione’s and walked across the room with her head held high. Hermione couldn’t help finding and meeting George’s eyes, he gave her a slight nod before returning his attention to his mistress.

Hermione turned back to the men she stood with in just enough time to witness the subtle change in Snape’s eyes as he watched Ginny go. It was obvious to her that he was worried. Lucius must have noticed as well because he asked, “How is your fiery little redhead, Severus? Still as annoying as ever?”

“Actually no,” Severus replied carefully. It was obvious to Hermione he was keeping his tone bored sounding, but his eyes betrayed his concern. “Morning sickness has taken hold, although it is inaptly named. It seems she’s sick at random times all day and night. She has lost weight last week, which is concerning for the child.” She knew that meant that he, himself, was worried for Ginny.

“Well, pregnant witches often deal with more severe sickness then their Muggle counterparts,” Lucius tried to soothe. “The magic of the fetus can wreak havoc.”

Severus gave a jerky nod, but he didn’t relax until Ginny had been returned to them and the next witch’s name was called out. Hermione knew she was next…of course she’d be saved to go last. One knew by just the look on Ginny’s face was she approached them that something was not right. Hermione watched the Headmaster’s jaw clench. “Please tell me why you’re white as a sheet,” he demanded in a very low voice.

“I…” Ginny trailed off, unable to meet anyone’s eyes.

“Ginerva.” Snape’s tone was an interesting mix of warning and urgency and it caused Ginny’s eyes to raise quickly to his before she looked away again.

“Twins,” she whispered.

Hermione’s jaw dropped as a hand flew up to cover her mouth.

“I’m having twin girls,” Ginny continued.

Hermione didn’t think it was possible for Snape to be any paler then he already was, but she was wrong. His face went nearly translucent. Lucius, she saw, looked like he was trying to bite back a laugh.

“Merlin help me,” Snape muttered. “We’re leaving, let us go say goodbye to the Dark Lord, witch.”

“Yes, Master,” she replied.

“I will come to the Manor in about two hours,” Snape informed Lucius. “I’m curious to know your results.” Lucius nodded his understanding.

Ginny didn’t look at Hermione as she followed Snape from their little corner of the ballroom.
Hermione was about to speak to Lucius when her name rang across the space.

“Oh gods!” she squeaked, and was instantly on edge. She moved very slowly towards the double doors, hating the way that Draco was practically skipping across the room to meet them there. She could feel Lucius behind her, but his presence was barely comforting. Dread filled her so full there was no room left for any other emotion.

They were led to a bedchamber where she was told to change into a bathrobe. She sat on the edge of the bed while the pregnancy detection charm was cast and confirmed.

“Do you wish to know the sex of the child?” the female Healer asked.

Two yeses and a no were chorused. Hermione and Lucius locked eyes. She had been the one to say no.

“You’re outvoted – not that this is a democracy,” Draco snapped. “Tell me if I’m having son,” he demanded of the Healer.

“Easy, Draco,” Lucius drawled in a bored tone. “It is just as likely my child in there. You’re not the only one who used a fertility potion, you know.”

The Healer huffed. “Well, let’s hope it’s not multiples. There have been two sets of twins tonight – most likely because of fertility potions.”

Hermione made a horrified noise in her throat as the Healer told her to lay down and part her robe. She moved quickly through the wand motions and in less than a minute a single, blue orb hovered over Hermione’s stomach.

She was to have a son.

One she probably wouldn’t even get to see grow to adolescence. She turned her head away from the other three people in the room, tears leaking from the corner of her eyes.

“I knew it!” Draco crowed and Hermione wanted to lose her temper. He didn’t know that the child was his! Why did he keep insisting it was? Why couldn’t he let her hope?

“Paternity next?” the Healer asked in an oddly detached voice.

“Yes.” Both men answered in unison.

“Right. Okay, gentlemen, you will need to cup your hands in front of you. The spell will settle in the hands of whoever is the father.” Another twist and swirl of the Healer’s wand and Hermione’s low stomach brightened to a pretty amber color before dancing away from her body. Both men raised their hands. The light spun around all four people in the room until marking the baby’s father by resting gently into the palms of his hands before sinking in to make his skin glow.
Chapter Thirty

Chapter by LissaDream

BETA LOVE – RaynePheonix2

The laughter was not hers and it was not her lovers. She felt cold as ice, from her heart to the tips of her toes. She turned horrified eyes on Lucius. Her heart was racing so fast it caused nausea to swirl in her belly. She turned back to Draco just in time to see the golden orb sinking into the palms of his hands, confirming him as the father to her child.

Magic sparked in her, only to be contained by the confounded tanzanite collar. Tears pricked her eyes and her nose as she swallowed hard, trying to contain the vomit that was blossoming up her esophagus. “Gonna be sick!” she sputtered helplessly as she pushed herself into a side sit. Lucius grabbed a near by waste bucket and thrust it at her as her meager dinner made its reappearance.

Draco was talking excitedly to the healer, completely oblivious to her and Lucius’ tortured exchange. He pushed her hair back as she was sick again before he cast an *Evanesco* at the contents of the rubbish bin. He handed her his monogrammed handkerchief, and she realized his hands were shaking terribly. He made a show of pulling her to stand and pulling the robe more tightly around her before he whispered quickly in her ear. “I promise, I will protect you. It will be alright, love.”

That was it. She couldn’t take anymore. She immediately burst into tears, wanting nothing more than to fall into Lucius arms. In that moment, she wished they had attempted to run. Dead would be better then being married to Draco Malfoy.

“There will be no more of that, father.” Draco’s voice was punctuated with a horrible sneer. “I will kindly ask you to remove your hands from my fiancé. We will go to the Dark Lord now, Mudblood. He’s been most anxious for our results and my father has a bond-severing potion to take. I’m so very happy he will no longer be able to interfere on your behalf. Get dressed.”

Hermione tried desperately to control her sobs, but her panic and grief was so absolute she could barely breathe. She didn’t even look at Lucius, she couldn’t. She couldn’t look at the façade of the man she loved. He would be stoic. He would be pretending that he didn’t care, because she knew that he had to. Dealing with his act was not something she felt she could contend with at the moment, though. She was too wrapped up in her own terror.

The child in her womb was Malfoy’s.

*Draco* Malfoy’s.

Not Lucius’. It wasn’t the child of the man she loved – but his *grandson*. Bile filled her throat again and she pitched herself forward to her knees to snatch up the waste basket for the second time.

“Merlin, you are disgusting. I’ve never seen someone vomit so much in my life. You must have the weakest stomach in the world. Pull yourself together, whore! Stop wailing like I murdered your dog!” Draco snapped as he grabbed her arm roughly and hauled her to her feet. Hermione caught the slightly startled, and then pitying, look that the Healer threw in her direction. She pointedly ignored the woman as Draco ripped the dressing gown off her shoulders, leaving her clad in her bra and stockings before shoving her gown in her face. “Put it on. Now. I wish to go home.”

She followed his directions mechanically, keeping her eyes on her task or on the floor. She couldn’t
look at Lucius, if she did, she would start sobbing all over again – the bloody bond be damned. As it was, tears were running silently down her cheeks.

The next thirty minutes of her life was agonizing. Hermione went through the motions. She followed Draco’s directions silently and immediately. Forcing herself to not care, she allowed herself to look at no one. Her eyes were either kept on the floor, or just slightly to the right of someone’s face.

Voldemort congratulated her and Draco and there was a verbal exchange between the two Malfoys and their master, but she remembered none of it. She did, however, vividly remember Lucius tipping back the vial of potion that severed their bond because she was surprised when it caused a ripple to her magic. She cupped her throat, forcibly trying to hold back her mounting fear. Lucius could no longer control her, sure, but he also could no longer override Draco’s commands.

If it weren’t for the life currently growing in her womb, she would want to curl up and die. She couldn’t believe this was happening. Life had already been so very, very cruel. Yet, she had persevered. With Lucius’ help she had made it through to the point where she had even found some solace and happiness and…love.

Now it was being ripped away from her all over again, and she knew that Draco would make her life a living hell. More so than he already had. She could bet there would be no more access to the library. She wasn’t foolish enough to think he’d allow her to continue frequenting the Parlor – not now that he knew about her affinity for the piano. Forget visiting with her mother or walking the grounds with Tinny. She wouldn’t be surprised if she were confined to a bedchamber – or even put back in a dungeon cell. She shivered at the thought, trying to block out the first six weeks of her captivity.

Before she knew it, they were standing in the Apparition Foyer in the Manor.

Lucius stood silently between Draco and Hermione, glaring furiously at his son. There was no flicker of anything he recognized on the boy’s face. Just a dark, menacing glower that made Lucius want to reach out and strangle him.

“I know you’ve been protecting her.” Draco started the conversation with an accusatory snarl. “You won’t anymore. You no longer have any control over her bond, therefore you have no control over what I do to her – or with her. Your sympathy for her has been ridiculous. You were the one to teach me that Mudbloods deserved no place in our society, yet you’ve been treating her like some sort of princess for the better part of her time with us. It ends now.”

Lucius knew his face was contorting with his anger at every word Draco spoke. He couldn’t believe that he and Narcissa had raised such a monster. Once again, he found himself not understanding what had happened to his boy. “I may have taught you that Mudbloods deserve no place in our society, Draco, but I also taught you that women deserve respect. That no real man slaps a woman.”

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“You have subjected her to beatings and degradation that make me sick with the fact that you’re my child. Your mother, were she here, would be horrified with how you’ve behaved,” Lucius roared the last sentence, causing both Hermione and Draco to jump.

“You have subjected her to beatings and degradation that make me sick with the fact that you’re my child. Your mother, were she here, would be horrified with how you’ve behaved,” Lucius roared the last sentence, causing both Hermione and Draco to jump.

“Mother is dead. What she would have thought no longer matters,” Draco returned harshly. “Granger!” Draco shifted himself so he could see the girl. “You will go to my chambers at my command. A cot has been set up for you and all your necessary items have been moved into my suite. You will no longer share my father’s bed. You no longer have free reign of the Manor. You must ask permission before you go anywhere. Get used to being denied. Do you understand?”
Lucius turned to find Hermione staring over Draco’s right shoulder, a single tear trailing down her cheek as she murmured, “Yes, sir.”

“You may leave now.”

His heart clenched and his stomach rolled. He could do nothing. He was utterly impotent. He had told her he would protect her, but there was nothing he could do other than outright kill his son and flee with her. He knew that neither of them would survive running, though. *Look at me!* he begged silently.

At the same time he was willing his little witch to look at him, Draco commanded the girl to leave. She didn’t glance in his direction and he was forced to watch her curly mop of hair disappear around the corner without him. He felt like he had been stabbed in the gut.

When he looked back at his son, it was to find Draco watching him closely. “I can’t believe I have to ask this, father,” Draco said in a low voice. “Have you developed feelings for the chit?”

Lucius’ voice did not betray him, and he was sad to see that his son seemed completely unaffected by the words that came out of his mouth next. “No, Draco. Suddenly, though, I see that you are every ounce your grandfather’s double. He did to my mother what you have been doing to Miss Granger. May the gods keep you, because you will pay your penance in hell.” With those words, he turned and left Draco without another word.

He stalked to his study, occasionally slamming his cane on the floor in anger and grief. Once he was sure he was alone, he ripped off his cravat and robes and poured himself a generous helping of firewhisky. He threw it back like it was water and he had just spent the day in the desert without. Then he poured himself another, followed by another.

He wasn’t sure how many glasses of the smoking, amber liquid he downed, but found himself in a chair before a roaring fire when Narcissa spoke to him, breaking his solitude. “Lucius, it will be alright.” Her voice was gentle.

“You are wrong,” he told the portrait gloomily. “It will not be alright. Even if that girl and that child survive the pregnancy, I will always have to fear for their lives. Draco is sadistic and cruel. He gleans massive amounts of pleasure from torturing her and humiliating her.”

“Draco will come around –”

“HE WILL NOT, NARCISSA!” Lucius roared as he stood abruptly and turned to face her fully. “Draco – the Draco you knew? – he is DEAD. Something has snapped in his mind! He is MAD! Our son died the minute the madness began to consume him, and he will not ever be back! And I willingly let that girl … I willingly let *Hermione* … go with him tonight. I let the woman I am *in love with* go to bed with a *monster*, because I am incapable of preventing it without one or both of us dying.”

He was ranting and he didn’t even care. He poured and sucked down another glass of firewhisky, not even realizing that Narcissa was staring at him with sad, wounded eyes or that a pair of black orbs were watching him from the door of his study.

“You love her?” Narcissa’s voice was a hesitant whisper as she glanced around the room, she was relieved to find the other portraits empty.

Lucius again dropped heavily into the chair before the fire before tilting back yet another full glass of whiskey. He watched Narcissa’s painted face betray her hurt at being yelled at; at having her son be
called a monster by the man who had sired him.

“I do,” he said heavily when he had finished. He slumped back as if he had been wholly defeated by the admission. “Merlin help me, I do.”

The sound of someone sitting in the chair next to him only caused Lucius to roll his head and peek open one eye. “Oh, it’sss you,” he told Snape dismissively before closing his eye again.

Snape let out a huff before he began speaking. “Yes, it’s me. I take it the sprog is Draco’s?”

“Exssellent deducshion, my fwend.” Lucius realized at that moment he was slurring his words.

“Oh, for fucks sake,” Snape snarled before reaching into his breast pocket. “Drink this.” He handed a vial out to Lucius, who drank it without even asking what it was. Severus turned to Narcissa’s portrait.

“Privacy if you please, Cissy.” The beautiful witch nodded her head and edged out of the portrait, leaving the room entirely.

“It was total shite of you to give me a sober-up, Snape,” Lucius snapped, pitching the glass vial into the fireplace a few seconds later. “I quite wanted to be drunk, you know.”

Snape snorted a laugh before a serious look took over his features. “I am still commanded to teach her wandless magic Lucius,” he said. “And you are still Draco’s father. Give him a full-time job at ME – keep him gone as much as you can. Between your demands and the demands of the Dark Lord, we can keep him away from her.”

Lucius was contemplative for a moment before agreeing. “Have you spoken to your contacts with the Order and resistance? Will they allow me to assist them?”

“They want proof that you’re on their side.”

“How the hell can I give them that?”

“You just did.”

Lucius turned a confused glance on his friend. “What do you mean?”

Snape gave him a small smile. “I have a memory of a very drunk Lucius Malfoy screaming at his dead wife’s portrait that his son is a monster and that he’s in love with a Mudblood girl who is pregnant with his grandson. I’m pretty sure it will convince the powers that be.”

“You’re a fucking arsehole, Snape.” Lucius closed his eyes again and rested his head back against the chair.

“I’m aware.”

Lucius snorted. “Something else that I find disconcerting?”

“What’s that?”

“I was told I am engaged to wed Sybill Trelawney tonight – I’m not even sure I know who that is, although her name does sound familiar.”

Snape sucked in a breath of air at the admission and Lucius turned in just enough time to see the man throw back his head and burst into laughter
Lucius entered the dining room a little later the next morning than he’d intended to. Even so, he was surprised to find Draco and Hermione already there. Hermione was sitting ramrod straight, her eyes focused above Draco’s head, and there was a glass of water in front of her. His son was lounging in his chair with the Daily Prophet spread open in front of him and a cup of steaming tea in one hand.

“Good morning,” Lucius said briskly as he took his seat at the head of the table.

Simultaneously, both young adults said their greetings. The moment he was seated, silver topped plates appeared in front of them, along with his own tea. Lucius frowned momentarily. He was well aware that Hermione loved tea, and he wondered where hers was.

It was only when the covers were removed that Lucius understood what was going on. Both he and Draco had full English breakfasts in front of them. Hermione, on the other hand, was presented with a bowl of porridge and a sliced apple on a small platter next to it. There wasn’t even any cream or sugar present for her make the hot cereal more palatable.

He had to bite the insides of his lips when she let out a small sigh before picking up her spoon and starting to eat methodically. He turned his attention to Draco. “You do realize that she’s feeding your son as well as herself, correct Draco?” he asked in a bored tone. “Limiting her food intake might not be very wise.”

“I’ll not be limiting her food intake.” Draco didn’t even put his paper down. “She can eat as much as she wants of what she is given. I have a balanced meal plan structured for her with the kitchen elves. She will just not be afforded the same luxuries as those of a higher station, however. There will be no unnecessary fillers for her. No sweets, less expensive meats, etcetera.”

“I see.” Lucius was unsure of what else to say in response to that proclamation. He realized Draco could be much worse in this regard and decided he’d need to pick and choose his battles. He could always have Tinny sneak the girl some treats here and there.

“Do you have plans today, Draco?” It was a Friday. Lucius was unsure what Draco’s schedule was like most days but starting Monday morning he would be taking the lad with him to work Monday through Friday from nine to five. Snape was planning Tuesday and Thursday training sessions for two hours in the evenings, and Saturday afternoon sessions for four hours. That kept the girl out of his sadistic son’s hands for almost fifty hours a week. He had instructed Healer Jacobs to tell Draco that he must let the girl sleep eight hours a night for the health of the child, which would hopefully reduce her torment by another fifty hours a week. It was the absolute best he could do.

“I do. Blaise, Theo, and I are going to the Club and then I have to stop by Pansy’s to let her know she’ll have to wait until this one here—” he motioned towards Hermione—“is done popping out kids before I can marry her.”

“If Pansy will even wait for you,” Lucius murmured quietly.

“She’ll wait. All that girl wants is the Malfoy name and fortune,” Draco dismissed his father’s concern. “She knows I’m doing my Lord’s bidding.”

“If you think so,” Lucius answered. They ate for a few moments before Lucius brought up his plan. “Draco, now that you will be married and have a child on the way, it’s time for you to take up a job with Malfoy Enterprises. I have owled Bernadette, she will be making arrangements for you to start shadowing my assistant directors. You’ll spend one month with each – there are six of them. At that time, you will take over the assistant Vice-President position that was vacated by Silvester Selwyn two years ago. In five years, you’ll start shadowing me, so I can retire when you are thirty-five.”
By the end of Lucius’ declaration, Draco was glaring at him. “You didn’t start with ME until you were twenty-five,” his son said, obviously trying to control his anger. “You only relieved grandfather of the presidency because he died so young.”

“You point?” Lucius made sure his voice was bored. He didn’t even spare Hermione a glance, though he was certain he would find her eyes on him.

“What are you playing at, father?” Draco threw his paper down as he stood furiously.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Draco,” Lucius answered calmly. “You are the one who so desperately wanted to impregnate the Mudblood so you could claim her. You have gotten a child on her, and you will be marrying her. It is of my opinion that you chose this path. With a wife and child comes adulthood and responsibilities. Part of those responsibilities includes a job. Your job is Monday through Friday from nine to five at Malfoy Enterprises. You start Monday, or I will disinherit you. You forget, son. I will be taking a wife as well – I can have more heirs.”

Lucius returned his attention back to his breakfast. Inside he was silently rejoicing. He knew Draco would never, ever do anything to jeopardize his inheritance, and his trust from the Black family was inactive until he was twenty-five. Unless he was disinherited, in which case even the money from his mother’s family would be forfeit.

It didn’t surprise him when he heard quickly moving feet followed by a door slamming. The moment Draco was gone, Lucius scanned the portraits. His father was watching him with a curious expression. “Miss Granger, when you are through with your porridge, I will Apparate you to the barn. Apparently, I have upset Draco so much that he did not think to assign you any tasks today. You’ll clean out all the stalls and brush and feed all the horses.”

“Yes, Mr. Malfoy.”

“Tinny!” The elf popped up immediately. “Miss Granger tell Tinny what you like in your oatmeal. I wouldn’t feed that slop to the pigs, I’m certainly not going to make the chit carrying my grandson eat it without seasoning it to her liking.”

“Berries and cream please, Tinny,” Hermione answered kindly.

They finished their breakfast in silence. Once the table was clean and Hermione had finished a hot cup of mint tea, Lucius stood and held out his arm to her. She stood as well and looked up at him before taking his arm. For the first time that morning, he got a good look at her face only to realize she had the imprint of a hand across her left cheek. He grit his teeth and Apparated them out without saying anything.

The minute they popped into existence in the barn, he gathered her close by literally lifting her off her feet and burying his face in her neck while apologizing over and over. “My darling, I am sorry. I am so very, very sorry,” he whispered as her arms wrapped tightly around his neck. He continued to express his regrets as he carried her to the nearest stack of hay bales and sat with her in his lap. After a long moment, she carefully pulled away from him.

“This is not your fault, Lucius,” she said gently, smoothing a bit of hair off his forehead before lifting her chin to press a kiss to his jaw. “Thank you for being so quick thinking and figuring out a way to keep Draco gone during the week. You have no idea how much that will help.”

“I will do more,” he promised. One hand came up to trace the swelling on her face. “What happened here?”
“I took too long in the loo,” she brushed off his hand and ducked her head, but he stopped her with gentle fingers to her chin.

“I’m sorry, Hermione.”

“I know,” she whispered and settled herself against his chest. He held her while rocking his body gently from side to side.

“Hermione?” he murmured a time later.

“Hmm?” She sounded sleepy.

“I do love you, you know that right?” She stiffened in his arms before carefully pushing away so she could see him. He couldn’t help but brush a gentle kiss to her lips before resting his forehead against hers. “The confirmation that this child is not mine does not change anything for me, either. Do you understand?”

Her face crumpled when she read the sincerity in his expression and she nodded before kissing him again, more deeply.
Chapter Thirty-One

Wednesday Afternoon

Lucius was in his study when Draco entered the room with a smug look on his face. It was all the Malfoy patriarch could do to keep from rolling his eyes. *What now?!

“Father, I fear you shall be without my company for dinner this evening.”

Lucius ignored the gloating tone of his son’s voice as he continued to quill checks for the month’s estate expenses. His eyes remained focused on his task as he responded tiredly, “Very well. I shall let Bilby know.” Lucius knew Draco wanted him to be curious. He wanted Lucius to ask questions, so he deliberately did not.

“I have a meeting with the Dark Lord. It seems he requires my audience at least once a week nowadays.”

Lucius continued to write on his ledger without looking at his son. He could see Draco step closer to his desk in his peripheral vision but ignored the boy. Instead he picked up a blank cheque preparing to pay the next account on his stack. After a moment he said dismissively, “Was there something else, Draco?”

Draco responded with false pity. “No, I just realize you must be missing the Mudblood, and find I feel a bit sorry for you.”

“Why on earth would you come to such a conclusion?”

“Come now, Father. There is no need to deny it. I know you enjoyed fucking her. It’s why you were so ridiculously lenient with her. The Dark Lord saw it as much as I did. I think it’s why he wanted me to succeed in impregnating her and sent you off on a dangerous chore instead.”

Lucius laughed and looked up at his son, shaking his head with amusement. “You have so very much to learn, Draco. You really need to figure out how to play the game.” Lucius leaned back in his chair, his eyes assessing his son astutely. “We both knew from the beginning our Lord was considering burdening one of us with her as a wife.” Lucius made a face of disgust.

Draco’s brow crinkled in curiosity.

Lucius stood and walked towards the sideboard, preparing himself a drink. “By showing her kindness, by displaying a desire to keep her, by volunteering to rescue you from such a disastrous fate, I all but assured you would be the one stuck having to marry her.” He added ice to his glass. “And you played your part so brilliantly by being so abusive and showing so much hate all these weeks. You all but guaranteed her as your wife without my assistance.”

He sipped his drink and walked back to his desk. He tried not to laugh at the look of incredulity on his son’s face.
“Don’t look so stricken, my boy. At least one of us will be granted a Pure-blood witch to sire more acceptable descendants.” He sat down and pulled in his chair. “It was sweet of you to worry about my lack of a bonded slave to fuck. I assure you, I’m quite pleased to be released from the compulsion to touch such a disgusting thing.”

He looked down at his ledger once again. “So, by all means, continue with your brutality and your hate. You are merely laying the foundation to be stuck with her forever. It’s not until he senses that you want to keep her, that he will command her to another.” After a second, he glanced back up into his son’s contemplative stare. “In fairness, I did try to dissuade you from your abusive behavior, Draco. It was, and continues to be, most unbecoming of a Malfoy.”

The silence was deafening as Draco comprehended the lesson with a scornful stare.

Lucius didn’t know if what he had said was true or not. He really didn’t know why Lord fuck head had set him up to lose Hermione to his son. Lucius had tried to not let his regard for the girl show but, in hindsight, perhaps he had made some mistakes. Whatever the reason, his pride demanded Draco now believe Lucius was the winner in this situation. He was also helping Hermione in the process.

After a heavy sigh, Lucius picked up his quill. “Is that all, Draco? I have work to do.” He could see the wheels spinning in his son’s brain as the boy attempted to look nonplussed. He almost felt guilty for this manipulation.

A Malfoy through and through, Draco drew his shoulders back and retorted, desperate to show why Lucius was wrong. “By siring powerful children for the Dark Lord’s use, I am guaranteeing myself a place of respect amongst his ranks.”

Lucius looked at his son seriously as he leaned back in chair. His earlier lesson’s purpose had been to take the brat down a notch, but these words were meant as a true warning of his son’s inevitable future. “Enjoy his favor now, Draco. It blows like the wind. Once your children are born, he will dictate how they are to be raised and how they are to live. As they grow, if they are powerful, they will be favored and you will be forgotten. You are only valuable in the moment you deliver.” He rubbed his eyes tiredly as he sat up straight again and looked back down at his papers. Almost under his breath, he added, “And Salazar help you if your offspring are anything shy of what he is hoping for.”

Just then a tapping was heard from the window. Both wizard’s eyes shot to the source and spotted the vulture owl on the sill.

Draco smoothed down his robes. “A message from the Dark Lord.” He started towards the window. “It’s probably for me.”

Lucius could tell Draco was trying to conceal his disappointment when he conceded, “It appears to be for you, Father.”

Draco walked the missive over and handed it to Lucius who opened it and read it silently and without expression. He folded the note when he was finished and tossed it into the fire.

He cocked a brow when he glanced up to see Draco’s expectant look. Lucius gave himself an internal high five when he said, “If that’s all, Draco, I have work to do.”

He contemplated the note. Looks like I’ll be attending the dinner after all.

Lucius almost felt sorry for his son when the boy entered the dinner gathering at Lestrange Villa to
find his seat had been moved further down the table. Lucius himself was now sitting in Draco’s spot from their last meeting. It was a good lesson for Draco to learn and spoke directly to what Lucius had told him only hours ago. Favor was fleeting.

Lucius really wasn’t pleased to be seated so prominently tonight. The further he was off the despot’s map the better. His mission had been successful however, and the agreement made between the Veela and the Vampires was a thing of much discussion. In short, Lucius was a bit of a celebrity – much to his chagrin. He lifted his own spirits by reminding himself the seat of honor would be replaced with someone else in no time. It was just, right now, he would much rather be at the Manor sneaking time with Hermione while Draco was off attending these loathsome and tedious dinners.

Everyone stood when the Dark Lord entered and it wasn’t until their leader was seated, and everything around him placed just so, that he gestured for all to sit.

Tonight’s dinner was revealed to be beef roast with Yorkshire pudding, gravy, roasted potatoes, and a vegetable medley. Per usual, it wasn’t until Voldemort took his first bite that the others started their own meal. The dinner progressed without interruption and when the plates were cleared, and the after-dinner brandies were poured, the purpose of the meeting was finally revealed.

The first order of business had been to announce officially that the Veela and Vampires had agreed to a temporary truce and were entertaining visits with Voldemort to hear his ideas for reform. While neither group had vowed support, it was only a matter of time in the Dard Lord’s eyes. It was with a not so subtle look at Macnair and then Bellatrix that Voldemort added, “We have plans in place to assure cooperation. If they are still hesitant, well…they really don’t have a place in our world anymore then, do they?”

The comment drew whispers and mumbles and Voldemort seemed to glow under the awe and surprise of his followers.

Lucius, however, was the only one at the table who knew the truth.

He was the one who had met with them, after all.

He was the one who had subtly shown them how the Dark Lord had used the Giants for his battle at Hogwarts, only to leave them bleeding and cursed from the cross fire. Through memories and not words – for Lucius’ occlumency skills seemed to have left him completely in the presence of the Vampire Father and then the Veela Queen – Lucius showed them the horrors Voldemort was capable of; the betrayal, the manipulation, and the madness. Lucius had accidentally shown them the world that Voldemort envisioned; a world where all beings and all races, magical or not, were subservient and subjugated to the Dark Lord and his will.

Yes, Lucius had succeeded in his mission to bring the Veela and the Vampires together. Ironically, the driving impetus was not their desire to serve the megalomaniac, it was their joint desire to destroy him.

Lucius would have to warn the Vampire Father, Bonifacio, and the Veela Queen, Ravana, that Macnair and Bellatrix would be the despot’s vessels for their destruction when the time came. It was Lucius’ hope that the plan he and Severus were plotting would put an end to that threat long before the Dark Lord knew their true intentions, however.

His focus was pulled back to the table when Corbin Yaxley stood to make a toast. Corbin was in disfavor at the moment, and it was an obvious and desperate attempt to ingratiate himself with not only the Dark Lord, but his fellow Death Eaters as well.
“To Lucius for his grit, determination, loyalty to our Lord, and keen sense of self-preservation!”

Lucius nodded, displaying the typical Malfoy pomp and pride the other followers had come to expect when the toast was made in his honor. There were low chuckles and guffaws at the self-preservation part of the comment, but only Lucius knew how very true those words were.

Unfortunately for Corbin, the laughter would not earn him any esteem. Until the Dark Lord publicly showed forgiveness or favor to the man, his fellow Death Eaters would not risk their own necks by doing any more than coexisting alongside him.

“Yesss, yesss. Lucius proved his political skills of persuasion are still intact.” When the Dark Lord sipped in approval of the toast, the others followed.

A creepy smile slithered into place on Voldemort’s face and his red eyes glowed when he announced the second reason for their gathering.

“It is important we do not grow complacent with our successess.” His piercing gaze took no mercy as it met every set of eyes at the table. “We have gained control of the Ministry and we are slowly pulling the masses into compliance, but we still have enemiesss. There are still those who oppose us.”

Eyes from the table were drawn to the head of the massive snake, Nagini, when she slithered up beside her master and rested her head upon his shoulder. A spidery, pale hand with claw like nails began to stroke the maneaters head very tenderly and Lucius began to suspect his dinner might make a reappearance.

He closed his eyes briefly and listened to the lunatic before him continue his speech. “There are rumors of Order survivors. Keep your eyes open. Kill them on sight. It only takes one. One rodent can spread plague that could poison all of our hard work. Their offensive propaganda can destroy everything we believe and hold dear.”

Lucius felt Severus shift in the seat next to him. As far as he knew, Severus was unaware of these rumors. This was something they would certainly need to discuss.

The meeting wrapped up quickly at that point. Lucius froze from his departure when he heard their sadistic lord call for Draco to remain for a moment. Under the pretext of politeness, Lucius waited for his son. He could just overhear their conversation.

“Draco, Dolohov has need of Potter’s Mudblood. Just for a night, before she growssss heavy with child. He wants to play with her, and I owe him a reward for his MPS charm. Hermione is one of a few captives he wishes to sample.”

Lucius stiffened as his mind searched for a way to run interference. He watched as Draco tried to hide the surprise on his face.

The same skeletal hand that had stroked Nagini, reached up and patted Draco on the head, leaving his finely groomed coif messy. “Don’t worry young Malfoy. Dolohov knows the spawn in her belly is potentially more valuable than his very life. The fetus will come to no harm. Bring her to him Friday evening at seven and you can retrieve her the following morning before breakfast. She’ll be right as rain for the gathering Saturday night.”

“Yes, Master,” Draco responded before nodding at Dolohov, who was standing to Voldemort’s left.

When Draco and Lucius arrived at the Manor, Lucius felt he had to say something. “I couldn’t help hear your conversation. It seems you will have to share the Mudblood, after all.” He pulled off his
outer robes and handed them to Bilby. “You must be thrilled. You’ve been trying to loan her to your friends ever since she arrived.”

Draco scowled as he met his father’s eyes. “Dolohov is not Blaise or Theo.”

“What? You don’t like that plan?”

Draco didn’t respond as he stormed up the main staircase and headed towards his suite.

Lucius knew Draco was unhappy. Now that Hermione was officially to be Draco’s wife, Lucius knew the boy would not want to share her. Draco was Lucius’s son after all – and Malfoy men didn’t share their wives. Regardless, Lucius would be damned if that Russian bastard was going to touch his witch. He would have Bilby deliver what was needed to Draco’s room. Draco would know what to do.

Hermione sighed as she stared at her reflection. Another party. Another gathering that meant nothing to her. And yet it meant everything. It meant she was actually going to have to marry Draco Malfoy. A smile crept over her face as she remembered the night before, when she had been contemplating appropriate nicknames for her fiancé.

She had just finished brushing her teeth and was looking at her reflection when Tinny had appeared to assist her.

“She has a depraved demonic dickhead,” she had whispered to herself after she spit out the mouthwash.

“Despicable diabolical devil,” she said aloud as she patted her mouth dry with the towel Tinny handed her.

“She has a depraved deadbeat dickface,” she added as she contemplated the newest bruise on her arm.

“Dookie delinquent dickfuck?”

Hermione looked down into the wide eyes of her friend with shock. It had not even occurred to her that Tinny was paying attention or knew what she was talking about. So, when the elf came up with the best insult of them all, she couldn’t help but to fall into a fit of laughter. And the name had stuck. He was Draco no more.

Back in the present, she thought about what else was bothering her. Not only was she being forced to marry DDD, but the party was for Lucius as well. The man she loved who was being forced to wed another witch. Sybill Trelawney - an eccentric, closet drinking, fake seer, and cuckoo bird in Hermione’s book. She almost felt bad for Lucius. Almost.

Tinny was looking up at Hermione with warm eyes of adoration as she snapped her fingers and the diamond tiara the elf had told Hermione about suddenly nestled onto her head. Hermione had to admit she had never looked more beautiful. Her hair was tucked back from her face but left long in the back, charmed into soft waves of compliance.

Layers of opaque, Acromantula spun silk was dyed to a wintery silver-grey with clear reflective crystals sown throughout. The plunging neck line dipped below her breasts where the fabric hugged her trim waist before cradling her hips. At mid-thigh, more layers gathered and draped to the floor. A fine silver chain across her neck held the cape that draped behind her and led to a magnificent train. It was made of matching fabric but of only two layers which left it light and flowing. Coordinating
opera gloves came up to her mid upper arms. She felt she truly looked like a princess. She noticed the ring fingers of each glove had detachable sleeves. She supposed there was a time when a proper witch did not go out without gloves and this was how her beau could slip a ring on her finger.

She startled when Draco barged into her room and assessed her. His scrutinizing gaze moved up and down her form before he said resignedly, “Well at least you aren’t fat yet. C’mon. Don’t dawdle.”

She felt the tingle of the stabilizing and cushioning shoe charms Tinny placed as she followed Dookie Delinquent Dickfuck out the door. She reminded herself she had to be cautious about calling him that or she would say it out loud and he would likely kill her.

In another wing, on the opposite side of the Manor, Lucius was tidying his cravat and delaying the inevitable. Voldemort had explained to Lucius that Sybill Trelawney had made several prophecies, not the least of which was the one about Harry Potter and the Dark Lord himself. Because of this, he felt it likely one or more of her children or grandchildren would harbor the gift as well. Lucius was magically strong which the Dark Lord felt would enhance the likelihood of the pairing being a success. He had tried to soften the blow by pointing out that Sybill was a Pureblood and would provide him more heirs.

Lucius had tried to remain hopeful that perhaps she would be a companion he could become friends with. He held no hope for more than that. He was in love with Hermione and no other woman would ever make him happy. He knew that for certain. Still, he had agreed to meet with Ms. Trelawney for the first time the night before last.

After meeting with her, he immediately went to Snape and demanded the man kill him there on the spot. He could not deny the inevitable – he would go mad if he had to spend time with that woman. Much less marry her and have children with her. Salazar help him, this war needed to end. And now. He wanted his freedom and he wanted his witch. As he grabbed his cane and patted Jupiter on the head, he consoled himself that there was a plan in the works.

When he arrived in the study, Draco was seated in one of the fireside wingback chairs and Hermione was holding a tray which held Draco’s drink.

Lucius sighed heavily as he walked to the sideboard to prepare his own firewhisky. “No, Father, let the Mudblood do that. I have informed her she is to play hostess tonight and instructed the elves to leave us be until dinner is served.

Lucius cut his eyes her direction and saw the blank look on her face. She was already self-occluding, which was probably for the best.

“No, Draco. I am the Master of this house and I will not have a Mudblood serve our guests. Have you no couth?!” He closed his eyes as he faced the wall tapestry before him and let out a sigh. He felt sick having said the words, but Hermione knew he had a role to play. “Janky!” When the house elf appeared, he instructed the elf of the updated instructions.

It was only a moment or two before Snape arrived with Ginny at exactly six-thirty. The party then moved to the living room, given the formality of the event. Sybill would be joining them any minute and at seven-thirty the other guests would be arriving. It would not be a large gathering, only another nine people – and the Dark Lord, of course. Fortunately, their Lord did not usually stay long at these types of events. Lucius doubted he would even stay for dessert.
Lucius tried his best not to stare at Hermione. She was stunning. How did Draco not see it? How had his son not figured out that she was warm and kind and beautiful?

He was dreading the arrival of his intended and was already getting a headache. Severus wasn’t helping. The sodding bastard had been thoroughly enjoying this shit situation.

“Go away, Severus, I’m not in the mood for your teasing tonight.”

“Come now, Lucius. It’s not that bad.”

Lucius rolled his eyes as he sipped his firewhisky and kept an eye on his witch who was now talking to Ginny. Draco was being more lenient since they moved into the living room and was allowing Hermione to sit on the sofa with her friend.

His thoughts were pulled back to Sybill when Severus continued to stroke the embers of his last nerve. “After all, it will be pleasant to have a woman’s touch about the Manor again, will it not? I can imagine how her own signature style will permeate each and every room.”

“You just can’t stop, can you? You absolutely cannot help yourself.” Lucius said wearily.

“I can see it now, scarves draped over every lamp, a crystal ball in every room because one never knows when the ‘inner eye’ will need its vessel.”

Lucius ignored him and pointedly looked anywhere but at his friend.

“I imagine Tarot Cards would be an appreciated wedding gift, or maybe an assortment of patchouli scented candles as I am sure she will be eager to distribute them about the Manor. I wonder what she will get you?” He sighed with false envy. “Well, in truth, she is giving so much already. Her visions, her beauty, her style. What more could you ask for?”

Lucius refused to provide the fucker with any more fodder and would not respond if his life depended on it.

He tried not to fall over in relief when Bilby led his betrothed into the room. The witch had tamed her hair into a loose braid and was wearing a flowy and gauzy plum dress with a floral scarf. He had expected much worse.

Years of habit forced him to be a gracious host and he approached the wide-eyed witch with as much dignity as he could muster. “Sybill, how lovely to see you.”

Her eyes lit up to the size of golf balls, her thick glasses magnifying them to ridiculous proportions. She draped her arms open, accentuating the drape of her scarf. Lucius couldn’t help but imagine she had practiced this very thing in front of the mirror.

“Ah, Lucius, darling,” she responded in a sing-song voice as she held her hand out for him as though she expected him to kiss it. He heard a snicker-cough from across the room as he took the offered hand and shook it lightly.

He turned to face the rest of the room and reacquainted her with the others. “You remember my son, Draco, his fiancé Hermione, Severus’ wife, Ginny, and of course you know Severus.”

“Severus,” she responded while batting her lashes. “Of course, delighted to see you,” she continued in airy voice.

“Sybill,” Severus replied stiffly.
She looked about the room and Lucius was surprised when Draco stood and crossed the space to shake her hand with a flirtatious grin. “Mother. You don’t mind if I call you that, do you?”

There was a spray of liquid on Lucius’ arm as Severus snorted his drink out his nose.

Lucius quickly interrupted the inappropriate exchange and glared at his son as he cast an *Evanesco* on his sleeve and made his way to the liquor tray. “What can I offer you, Sybill? Elven wine? Firewhisky?”

“Sherry if you have it, my dear Lucius. I find that anything stronger clouds the inner eye, you know, and it would be a great disservice to the wizarding world if that prevented an important vision.” She began to walk about the room, looking at the shelves and finery about the space. “The Dark Lord has expressed to me the importance of encouraging and nurturing my gifts.”

Lucius heard another muffled snort and looked to see Hermione quickly move her hand to her mouth and stare at the floor.

“Ah well, that would be a…waste…” he sighed “…certainly.”

Seven-thirty arrived quickly, and the other guests arrived right on time; Bellatrix and Rodolphus, Blaise and Daphne, and Theo and Millicent were followed by Rabastan and Dolohov with a despondent looking Pansy Parkinson in tow. Voldemort himself arrived directly after.

Hermione was shocked when Voldemort made brief acknowledgments to everyone before going directly to Sybill Trelawney’s side and engaging the looney bird in conversation. She knew now and without any uncertainty that the Dark Lord was delusional. She exchanged a questioning glance with Lucius who merely shrugged his shoulders in response.

Hermione was relieved that Draco was pretty much ignoring her. Ever since guests had started arriving, he had left her to her own devices for the most part. She made a point of not doing anything to draw attention to herself, although the men in the room did seem to keep staring at her and she began to question Tinny’s choice of attire for her this evening. Ginny looked absolutely stunning in a fitted, forest green gown that flowed to the floor. While simple in design, it made her look radiant.

It was just before they were seated for dinner that Dolohov came over and whispered, “You were *delicious* last night. I can still taste you and feel your mouth on me. I loved how my whip made you scream.” His green eyes glanced across her shoulders. “I see you’ve glamoured the marks I left. Such a shame. They looked so lovely on your skin.” He wiggled his brows playfully. “I will be requesting another night of your charms.” His hand slid over her bum and instantly Draco was at her side.

“Dolohov, you forget yourself. The Mudblood is *mine*, not yours to fondle.”

Dolohov chuckled as his eyes draped leeringly on Hermione’s chest. “Don’t be such a poor sport. You can certainly spare her for another night.”

“Just the one, Antonin. That was all, and it’s done. So, keep your grimy paws off my fiancé.”

Hermione was beyond confused. What were they talking about? And since when did Draco care if anyone touched her?

Dolohov made a show of looking bored and walked over to Snape who was conversing with Rabastan. Hermione noticed Lucius was talking with Theo. Not wanting to push her luck on his halfway decent treatment of her, Hermione cautiously asked, “Sir, what was Dolohov talking about?”
Draco looked at her with obvious irritation. “I’ll answer only because you need to play along and pretend you remember.”

Hermione’s eyes grew wide.

“The Dark Lord commanded you be gifted to Antonin for a night. Last night. From Seven in the evening until breakfast this morning.”

She felt lightheaded as her breath left her with a whispered, “What?”

“I polyjuiced an alley whore and imperiused her to take whatever he dished out and to keep him happy.”

“So, he thinks…and he’s seen…and…ohh…That poor woman!” She fell onto the chair beside her.

“Stop being so fucking melodramatic. I saved you from a night of hell. Stand the fuck up.”

She stood immediately. “I see. You don’t want me abused except by your hand.”

He glared down at her. “Pretty much. Now, shut up or I’ll put that mouth of yours to better use.”

The dining room was decorated with silver and crystal accents and once again Hermione was sure this was due to her dress. She would have to ask Tinny if this was something they had been taught to do. She also dreaded the possibility that Draco would have her polishing the silver again since it was being used.

Dinner was a blanket of quiet conversations about the table. The sound of cutlery on the plates as everyone ate their Beef Wellington echoed throughout the large room.

Hermione was seated on the opposite end of the table from Lucius and was left with Rodolphus for conversation on one side and Snape for conversation on the other. Draco was seated on the opposite side of the table, but down a couple seats and was talking quietly and with a look of irritation to a very gloomy Pansy. Theo was seated directly across from her and would shoot her an occasional encouraging glance. Voldemort sat at the head of the table with Trelawney on one side and Bellatrix on the other. None of the couples were sitting next to each other and Hermione assumed this was by design.

All in all, the evening was going much better than she had anticipated. The worst part at this point was the knowing glances Dolohov kept throwing her way. It made her feel violated far more than she would have imagined. It was not knowing what he had done to her and what he had seen of her. She imagined there was no part of her he wasn’t intimately acquainted with and while she was grateful on the one hand that she had been spared, she felt guilty that another witch had been abused in her place.

It was as the plates were cleared that Draco stood and tapped his silver spoon against his crystal goblet. Everyone grew silent in anticipation of what Draco would say. “My most esteemed Master, dear friends, and slaves; tonight we celebrate an endeavor to scrape what little worth there is out of the Mudblood, Hermione Granger. By making her mine and procreating with her, we will hopefully raise powerful wizards to assist our Lord in his undying quest for the betterment of Wizard-kind.”

His focus moved from Lucius to Sybill. “And to my Father’s engagement to a woman of unsurpassed grace, charm, dignity, and innate gifts. I wish undying happiness and a long, long, long life together.” His eyes shifted back to Hermione and the malicious gleam in them could not be missed. “I have a little gift for my bride to be.”

Hermione’s face fell. This could not be good. She watched with trepidation as Draco walked around
the table and stood beside her. “Stand up, Mudblood and give me your left hand.”

Hermione immediately complied and watched as Draco tugged the finger sleeve off her ring finger.

“Just a little ring, to mark our engagement. Something to make you think of me and to let everyone know what you are to me.”

He slipped the band on her finger and she noticed it had a flat surface on top with the engraving, ‘Property of Draco Malfoy.’ The others couldn’t see the insult and only saw that he had placed a ring on her hand. Ginny jumped up despite herself as did Sybill. Hermione noticed Pansy was jumpy in her seat. Probably desperate to see what she felt should have been hers but trying not to show she cared.

When the two witches got a look at the ring, Ginny offered Hermione a small, encouraging smile before retaking her seat.

Sybill blushed a furious red and went up a tiny notch in Hermione’s book when she tried to make a bad situation a tiny bit less mortifying. “Such a pretty metal. Is it platinum?”

Draco smirked and then smiled a big, toothy grin. “No, it’s silver. Silver plated. Just so she knows exactly what she’s worth.”

*Dookie Delinquent Dickfuck, indeed!*

Hermione felt a rather large sense of relief when dinner was over and everyone headed back to the living room for assorted pastries, coffee, tea and after dinner drinks. Voldemort made his escape with Bellatrix right on his heels. Rabastan and Rodolphus were not far behind.

There was a perceptible shift in the atmosphere after Voldemort’s and the Lestrange’s exit. Blaise and Daphne, who had barely spoken a single word all evening, had now fallen into easy conversation with Theo and Millicent. Pansy, who had been sulking all night, was all smiles when Draco approached her and seemed to be flirting with her from what Hermione could tell. She would consider herself lucky if Draco would go home with the other witch.

She felt a headache fast approaching and wanted nothing more than for this never-ending evening to draw to a close. She watched as Lucius escorted Sybill to a wingback chair and brought her a pastry and a cup of tea. She tried to contain the swell of jealousy that was forcing bile up the back of her throat. She knew Lucius was only being polite. He was only doing what he had to. It still hurt, though. He was hers, dammit.

She also watched as Severus escorted Ginny to the sofa and, with a flick of his hand, a pillow landed behind the young witch’s lower back. In truth, Ginny was very thin, but her pregnancy was already starting to show just a tiny bit. Carrying twins, the girl would be huge in no time. Hermione felt she was intruding on a tender moment between the two, yet couldn’t pull her eyes away from the exchange as Severus whispered something to Ginny which made her blush magnificently before he turned away and walked towards Lucius. Meanwhile, Hermione sat alone in her chair and couldn’t help the ping of self-pity that sometimes threatened to overcome her.

Fortunately, Blaise, Daphne, Theo, and Millicent left shortly after finishing their desserts. At this point, all the guests had left except for Severus, Ginny, and Pansy. The latter was clearly holding out hope that Draco’s attentions would continue.
The night would be over soon, and Hermione would hopefully be allowed to sleep. The past two
days, Draco had been slightly less nasty towards her and, while he still used her body, he hadn’t
been as abusive. He had even allowed her to sleep on her cot instead of on the carpet beside his bed.

Ginny had just approached her when there was the clatter of a shattered tea cup on the floor.
Suddenly, a voice only slightly familiar chanted out in a monotone:

“A girl of tainted blood and a virgin no more shall spawn a sacrifice for love. Within her lies the
power to end it all.”

Everyone’s eyes whipped to the speaker to see Sybill Trelawney with eyes rolling up and into the
back of her head as she chanted out one more time:

“A girl of tainted blood and a virgin no more shall spawn a sacrifice for love. Within her lies the
power to end it all.”

The room was silent, and Snape was at Lucius’ side and next to Trelawney in a flash.

“What was that nonsense?” Draco drawled as he slowly sauntered over and looked down his nose at
the witch who was now twitching with convulsive little movements and had drool dripping out the
side of her mouth.

“Sybill. Miss Trelawney,” Lucius urgently prodded as he leaned over and shook her shoulder. He
looked up at Severus who was staring down at the witch with a contemplative and serious
expression. “I should call for Healer Jacobs.”

Severus did not take his eyes off Trelawney as he responded just above a whisper, “That’s not
necessary. Just give her a minute. She has done this before.”

Lucius righted himself and continued to watch his betrothed with a wary expression.

Hermione stepped over and looked at the witch with distrusting eyes. “Was that for real? Or was she
faking it?”

Draco scowled at Hermione. “Go back over there. Don’t hover. We will handle this.” Hermione
turned and rolled her eyes so that no one could see but Ginny who offered a small, sympathetic grin.

Severus rubbed his forehead lightly with the fingertips from his right hand as though he were also
getting a headache. His attention was instantly back on Trelawney when she moved slightly.

Her eyelashes fluttered and then opened to reveal quizzical and magnified, hazel colored irises that
peered concernedly from Lucius to Severus and back again. “Is everything alright?” she questioned,
her voice less airy than usual.

“Yes, it seems so,” Lucius responded, and Hermione couldn’t help but notice the slightest hint of
disappointment in his voice.

“What happened?” Sybill asked. She pushed herself up, so she was sitting straight and no longer
collapsed back into the chair.

Lucius glanced up at Severus to find no answers on the man’s face and looked back at her. “You
appeared to have had a spell of some sort, my dear, and you said some words.”

Her eyes grew wide with excitement as she bolted up out of the chair. “Quickly, a quill! We need a
quill and parchment. We must write it down. It could be very important.” She snapped her right hand
at Lucius. “Quickly!”

Hermione almost burst out in laughter at the completely thrown look on Lucius’ face. The man was not used to being spoken to in such a way, and Hermione knew he wanted nothing more than to escort her bony arse to the floo and never see her again.

Instead he drew his wand and waved it, beckoning parchment and quill which hovered over to the impertinent witch. She then looked up at Lucius and said, “Well? What did I say? I’m sure it was important!”

Lucius looked at Severus who merely had a cocked brow and an amused smirk on his face.

All eyes turned to Draco when he was the one who spoke up. “Oh, Father. My new Mother is amazing. Our first family dinner and she is already making prophesies.”

Trelawney’s eyes glittered with excitement at Draco’s praise, completely lost on the fact that he was mocking her and teasing his father. It was clear to Hermione that Draco held no more stock in the woman’s gifts than Hermione did.

Draco looked at Sybill in all seriousness as he said, “I remember it clearly. You said, ‘If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it’s a duck’.”

Hermione had to give Draco credit for keeping a straight face. Trelawney, on the other hand, had a very serious look on her face as she wrote it down.

Severus rolled his eyes and stalked away as Lucius stood and offered Hermione a small grin.

Pansy who clearly didn’t get the joke. “That’s not what she said, silly,” she corrected Draco teasingly as she walked over to her former teacher.

Trelawney looked with perplexed eyes from Draco back to Pansy.

“‘A girl of tainted blood and a virgin no more shall spawn a sacrifice for love. Within her lies the power to end it all.’”

Trelawney’s jaw dropped as she nodded at Pansy. “Yes, yes. Tell me again.”

Draco rolled his eyes dramatically as his girlfriend/ex-girlfriend or whatever the hell she was, recited the words over and over until the eccentric woman had it written down.

Trelawney repeated it to herself as she clearly was trying to figure it out.

“Oh Rasputin!” She exclaimed dramatically as she once again fell back into her chair. “It is as I always suspected. My call to greatness has finally come!” She stood and began to pace.

Lucius’ brow crinkled as he looked back at the woman and Severus’ brows practically hit his hairline.

“Do explain, Professor,” Severus enquired as he approached and stood next to Lucius before taking a sip of his tea.

“Well, ‘A girl with tainted blood’. I, you see, had a muggle mother and am about…”

Lucius’s eyes were as wide as saucers. “You’re a half-blood?”

“Yes, yes. It’s not common knowledge. I only mention it now as we are to be family,” she replied
dissmissively with a wave of her hand.

No one said anything. Hermione could see the wheels turning on Lucius’ face. He was promised a pure-blood wife and she couldn’t help but wonder how much this really bothered him.

Lucius was stunned. A *Half-blood*. He would take any excuse he could muster to get out of this farce of a wedding. Perhaps if he went to the Dark Lord with… his thoughts were interrupted when his fiancé resumed speaking.

“But that’s not all,” Trelawney continued. “Now that I am to be wed, I will no longer be a virgin…” Her words were drowned out by the second loud snort and spray of liquid from the Headmaster’s nose, this time on Lucius’ opposite sleeve from earlier… “and my gifts of the sight are *clearly my* power within.”

Lucius couldn’t take anymore and collapsed onto a chair, his hands rubbing his head.

"Of course, I don’t really know what that part about *sacrifice* refers to and I don’t know what *end it all* means.” She sighed heavily. “I am sorry. I must leave. I need to get back to my tower and consult my sphere. Then I should to inform the Dark Lord. He will want to know the role I am to play in… well…something important, I’m sure!”

Lucius just wanted her to leave. “Of course, I’ll escort you to the floo.”

“Allow me,” Severus said cordially, surprising Lucius.

“Good night all, it has been a pleasure. I am sorry to rob you of my company so early,” she announced dramatically. She turned to Draco. “Oh, and Draco, my dear. I do think you should have your hearing checked. I see now that the vision I had yesterday of a young man in a medi-witch’s office was clearly meant to be you.”

Lucius stood tiredly and offered her a noncommittal smile. She stood still except for the slight turn of her cheek as though she expected him to kiss it.

Lucius ignored the hint and merely took her hand and squeezed it. He headed for the sideboard to grab another brandy as Severus walked her out.

“Well, on that note, I shall retire. Pansy? Would you like to come upstairs for a little while? I can show you my collection of antique brooms I was telling you about.”

Lucius was surprised when the girl actually accepted his son’s not so subtle invite for sex.

Draco smiled and held his hand out to her as he said over his shoulder to Hermione, “Come along, Mudblood. The night is done.”

Hermione turned to Ginny. “Goodnight, Ginny. Please tell the Headmaster I said goodnight as well.”

Lucius swallowed longingly when her cognac eyes landed on him. “Good night Mr. Malfoy.”

“Goodnight, Miss Granger.” The trio departed.

When Severus walked back into the room, Lucius asked, “You obliviated her?”

“Of course,” his friend responded. “It is late Lucius, and I need to get Ginevra to bed. We *do* need to discuss this, however. I don’t think what she said can be ignored.”

Lucius nodded. “Yes, I immediately thought the same. Let’s talk tomorrow.” Lucius then bid a
goodnight to Ginny and watched as they left.
Hermione couldn’t believe it when the minute they were back in Draco’s room he had his tongue down Pansy’s throat. He completely acted as though Hermione wasn’t there, so Hermione played along. She changed into her nightgown and climbed into her cot which was on the opposite side of the room.

She could hear the sound of sloppy kisses and heavy breathing and then Pansy’s whispered question. “Draco, should we be doing this in front of her?”

Draco responded in true Dookie Delinquent Dickfuck fashion, “Pansy, she means nothing. She is less than a house elf and I can do whatever I want. You are the one I really want, and you know that I’m forced to fuck her. It’s you who I want to make love to.” Hermione wanted to gag into her pillow. Pansy was truly deserving of the manipulation the prat bestowed on her.

Hermione was surprised when Pansy’s tone became sharper and her resistance more vehement. “Draco, make her leave or I’m leaving! We are not having sex in front of her!”

Hermione dreaded what he would do next. She was certain he would not just politely tell her to leave the room. There would be pain and hexing involved for sure.

Draco surprised Hermione when, instead, he gave in to his girlfriend’s wishes. “Okay, love. I’ll cast a silencing charm and draw curtains around the bed. She won’t see or hear us.”

“I don’t know. This is all so messed up,” Pansy whinged.

Draco took his wand and waved it as he whispered an incantation Hermione couldn’t hear. He whispered another and curtains suddenly appeared around the large four poster bed.

“There, it’s like she isn’t even here.”

“She can’t hear us?”

“No,” he responded soothingly as he pulled her up onto the bed with him. Hermione wanted to interrupt and let them know she could still hear them, but she stopped herself. If she could still hear them then it was intentional. Draco really was an asshole.

Hermione pulled the pillow over her head when she heard Draco coax the witch into giving him head. She waited what she hoped was an appropriate amount of time before moving it, only to hear the sounds of slapping flesh on flesh and soft female pants accompanied by words such as, “Oh Drakey, yes!” Then there was a, “You fuck me so good!” Which was not to be outdone by, “You’re sooooo big!”

For his part, Draco didn’t respond and just continued pounding away into the witch. Hermione could hear him grunt his completion which was followed within seconds by his soft snores.

The next morning Hermione woke to Draco’s harsh command, “Get the fuck up, Mudblood. It’s
time for you to wash me.”

The bond had her up and following him into the bathroom. Per the routine Draco had developed, Hermione undressed and started the shower, adjusting it to Draco’s preferred temperature while he emptied his bladder and brushed his teeth.

She was kneeling under the spray, the water hitting her in the face as it always did, as she started to feel the melancholy that had threatened her last night begin to take hold again.

Draco stepped into the shower and grasped her hair roughly, forcing her a couple inches closer to the wall. Without being told, she soaped up the flannel and the minute he said, “Begin,” she stood and started with his back.

Her mind wandered to the night before and how handsome Lucius had been. She had wanted nothing more than to rush over to him and jump into the warmth and security of his arms. Instead, she had been forced to endure his attempts at chivalry and interest in another witch.

Hermione could admit to feeling relieved that Sybill Trelawney was not the most beautiful of women and was rather ridiculous. She couldn’t deny that knowing Lucius didn’t want to marry the woman made the blow softer. For once in her life, she refused to feel guilty for taking joy in someone else’s misfortune. She had always rooted for the underdog and always tried to rise above jealousy and pettiness. This was one time she would allow herself to be small. She would appreciate the fact that Lucius’ betrothed was everything he did not want. He would be miserable in his marriage to the woman and Hermione refused to feel guilty for taking solace in that fact. Perhaps she would feel regret for him in the future, but not now.

“Pay attention!”

Hermione blinked her eyes in confusion. She was on her knees and was washing the tops of his feet.

“You’ve covered my feet already. Merlin, you’re worthless. Wash my balls and my arse.” He looked down maliciously as he added, “With your tongue.”

It was Sunday. Draco was off with his friends somewhere and Lucius said he had business with Snape, although he didn’t clarify what it was. Hermione had not been allowed to be alone with Lucius in days and given that Lucius and Draco exchanged very few words, Hermione knew very little about what was going on with the man she loved. Severus had said he was going to talk to Lucius, but she didn’t know if that had happened yet. Her wandless magic lessons with Snape had been monitored by either Abraxas or Ediva, which meant not only had the lessons been false and worthless, but it also meant they hadn’t been able to talk.

Her frustration led her to where it always did, the Lady’s Parlor. She looked around as the morose realization that Sybill would be the Mistress of this room before long hit home. She fell onto the sofa and kicked off her shoes before pulling one of the silk embroidered pillows to her stomach.

“What’s wrong, witch?” one of the portraits yelled out.

“Aren’t you going to play?” called another.

Hermione felt the many pairs of acrylic eyes on her as she simply shook her head no.

“What could possibly have you so depressed?” another asked with irritation.

“I agree. You are engaged to a Malfoy and are carrying an heir in that belly of yours. You are
blessed and should be thrilled!”

Multiple voices expressing the same sentiments rang out at the same time.

Hermione stared up at the ceiling and bellowed, “STOP!”

She jumped up, the lines on her forehead marking her fury. “In what way am I blessed? I’ve been forced into a pregnancy I didn’t want and have to marry a sadist who takes great joy in raping, brutalizing, and terrorizing me.” Her eyes scanned the room and met the unsympathetic ones in the portraits.

“He’s young. He’ll outgrow the behavior and will become sexually bored with you in time.”

“You’re overreacting. This is about what is best for the baby! A Malfoy name and a Gringotts accounts to go with it!”

“The abuse isn’t that bad! You look perfectly fine! What’s most important is that you will be here and can play the piano and can raise your children in this magnificent Manor.”

“The abuse you receive today is an easy price for the rewards of your child’s future.”

Hermione looked defeated. “I can’t expect any of you to understand. You are portraits and clearly have no way of comprehending what I am going through. You only see me as a vessel to bring you entertainment and a child to amuse you.”

The soft voice Hermione recognized as Willow Malfoy was only a whisper, yet it stood out over the others. “I understand, Hermione. They don’t, but I do.”

Hermione walked around the sofa and leaned against it as she studied the portrait of Lucius’ mother.

“Yes, I suppose you might.”

“It is a miracle Lucius hasn’t become abusive yet,” Willow added. “I’ve been waiting for it, you see.”

Hermione shook her head. “Lucius is nothing like his father. He has a temper, yes. And he has done terrible things, but he was forced into it to survive and to protect his family. You should be proud of him.”

Willow looked at her skeptically. “I love my son, Hermione. That doesn’t change the fact that he is his father’s son. He crucio’d you, did he not?!”

Hermione was stunned by the question and felt her automatic defense of her attacker swell. “He thought I had attempted to kill his son!” Hermione’s eyes were beginning to well. “He stopped himself, though. He stopped and he listened to me and he has never harmed me since.”

Hermione glanced around to be sure Ediva hadn’t popped in and was relieved to see only benign visitors. “You know, your son loves you, Willow.” Willow didn’t say anything. “Narcissa told me how much it broke his heart when you died and how much you have continued to break his heart by ignoring him.”

Willow looked away. “It’s not because I don’t love him and it’s not because I don’t wish to speak to him. Abraxas…he…he told me if I had anything to do with Lucius or Draco or any other Malfoy, he would have my portrait burned. I don’t want to be sent into nothingness. I like it here. I like being able to watch over my son and grandson. At least, I used to enjoy watching over Draco. He was very
“I don’t want to talk about that sadist, Willow.” She paused. “Lucius, on the other hand. Did it ever occur to you that perhaps if you engaged with him and talked to him and showed interest in him it might have helped him make better choices throughout his life?”

Willow’s angry response caused the other portraits to startle. “Of course it did, you silly, silly girl! I told you! My husband threatened to burn my portrait!”

“Abraxas has been dead for many years, Willow. That can’t be your only excuse!”

“Just because he is only a portrait now doesn’t mean he holds no power over me. A few choice words to Voldemort or Draco would see me burned in no time.”

Hermione shook her head in dismay. “Lucius would protect you. I’m sorry, Willow. I like you and appreciate your piano instruction. I feel terrible for the abuse you endured, but I think you are selfish to have neglected your son. And I think you are weak to allow your husband to force you. You are only like this because you allow Abraxas that power over you. I think you need to fight back.”

Hermione tossed the pillow onto the sofa and slipped on her shoes. “I’m going to the library.”

Lucius arrived home from Hogwarts very late and well past dinner. Soon it would all be over. One way or another, win or lose, this false life would end. As he stared about his lonely suite and found himself mourning for the company of the girl he loved, he was stunned to see his mother occupying the portrait frame Narcissa frequented.

He began to take off his shoes as he mumbled, “Hello, Mother.”

The shoe in his hand fell to the floor with a loud clank when she responded, “Hello, son. I’m glad you are sitting, I have much to say to you.”

Lucius was so stunned his mother was talking that he didn’t respond for a full minute. He placed his other shoe on the floor and stood before cautiously approaching her portrait, as though he might scare her off. His voice was soft. “Mother, I have always wanted to hear what you have to say.”

“I don’t really know where to begin,” she responded regretfully.

“I do. Just tell me, Mother. Tell me the truth, because I’ve always suspected and never knew – Did Father push you down those stairs? Did he murder you?”

Hermione awoke to the panicked yell of Narcissa from one of the portraits over the hearth in Draco’s suite. “Wake up, wake up! FIRE!! Fire!”

Hermione jumped out of her cot and was disappointed to see Draco up and pulling on his robe. If the Manor was on fire, nothing would make her happier than to leave him to burn inside it.

“Where is the fire?” Hermione asked.

“Downstairs! In Lucius’ study.” Narcissa’s crazed voice responded.

Draco sighed. “C’mon, then. I’m sure the elves will have it out in no time.”

When they arrived downstairs, it was to find a disheveled and slightly soot covered Lucius. He was panting as though out of breath. “It’s fine. A candle tipped onto the liquor sideboard where there
must have been traces of spilled alcohol. I believe there was some on the wall as well as it all went up very fast. Thankfully, I was down here before it got too far out of hand.”

Hermione recalled when she had lost control of her magic with Severus and had shattered the liquor decanters. It had sprayed on the walls.

“How bad is the damage?” Draco asked through a yawn.

Lucius shook his head in despair. “Father…Abraxas. His portrait was destroyed. I couldn’t get to it in time.”

Draco shrugged. “I’m going back to bed. Come along, Mudblood. A lot of hoopla over nothing.”

Hermione couldn’t help but lock gazes with Lucius over her shoulder as the bond forced her to follow Draco. She could see in his eyes that Lucius held no more remorse over that portrait than Draco did. She also could put two and two together. Lucius had destroyed that portrait on purpose, and that meant Willow had finally spoken to her son. She would sleep easier tonight knowing that maybe she played a small part in that reunion.

“I received an owl from Godfather yesterday evening, Granger,” Draco said. Hermione was surprised to find his tone was more neutral than it had been all morning. He usually only spoke to her with utter annoyance and disdain, unless he was ordering her about or fucking her.

“Sir?” she prompted when he had been quiet too long.

“He requested that I send you to Hogwarts this morning for your wandless magic session instead of him coming this afternoon,” he sighed. “Something about some tools the Room of Requirement can provide. You’ll go by floo after breakfast.”

“Yes sir.” Hermione couldn’t help the leap of excitement in her stomach. She hadn’t been to Hogwarts since its defeat, and it would be wonderful to leave Malfoy Manor. She never went anywhere except the couple of times she had been dragged to Lestrange Villa. She glanced at Lucius. They’d had little opportunity for interactions over the last week. The only time they had spent together recently was the farce of an engagement party they had been forced to endure.

He had been kind to Sybill Trelawny even if he’d been somewhat aloof and obviously not enamored with her. In her mind, Hermione knew that Lucius loved her – she knew that he was playing a part. However, her heart had something else to say. His indifference to her while giving his fiancé polite attention had made her incredibly jealous.

She missed him almost desperately. She felt lost without the heat of his body next to her in bed and the heaviness of his arm around her as they slept. She missed talking to someone who treated her kindly and with respect. She longed for his tender kisses and heated glances. Being so close and yet so far from him was devastatingly difficult and enduring the harshness of Draco was even harder without the tenderness of Lucius.

She shook her head in attempts to steal her thoughts but trying to disassociate herself these days was becoming harder and harder. Something – anything – needed to give. She couldn’t live like this. She couldn’t live with Draco’s constant cruelness without the comfort of Lucius’ kindness.

“I will accompany Miss Granger to Hogwarts, Draco. I have business there as well.” Hermione’s heart stuttered in her chest and she forced herself to maintain her focus on her breakfast of dry toast and mixed berries even when she wanted to meet Lucius’ eyes and search his face for even a hint of affection.
“Fine.” Draco’s answer was abrupt. “Being I won’t have to deal with her this morning, I’m going to go see Blaise.” There was the sound of a heavy chair scrapping against the stone floors as Draco rose to leave. “Good day, Father.”

The silence that followed was absolute. Hermione hesitantly looked up through her eyelashes to find his eyes on her. “Your bruises are gone?” he asked.

Her lips parted with surprise that this was the first thing he commented on. “He had Tinny heal me last night. I wondered why at the time, now I think it’s because he knew I was going to Hogwarts this morning. Or maybe because he decided he didn’t like them anymore. Who knows with him?”

She kept her tone flat before glancing around the room. The portraits were oddly empty.

“If you are looking for Ediva, she is mourning the loss of Abraxas in the study this morning. It’s unfortunate she wasn’t there last night as well.”

Hermione had felt a tad more at ease as she ate this morning and it now occurred to her why. Without the oppressive stares of the two spying ancestors they would be able to drop the façade at meals when Draco wasn’t around. If only Ediva’s absence could be permanent as well.

Lucius stood. Obviously, he had no intention of explaining himself further. “Come, we should go. Severus was hoping we’d arrive by eight.”

A few minutes later, she stood in the Headmaster’s office for the first time in almost two years. Lucius called out a greeting before steering her to the set of chairs before the large desk.

At that moment, however, Ginny appeared at the top of the stairs that led to the Headmaster’s private quarters. “Good morning!” She smiled at them before descending and embracing Hermione who met her at the bottom. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m alright.” Hermione instantly realized her friend was talking about her pregnancy. “A bit of sickness, but nothing unmanageable at this time.” She felt the heat of Lucius at her back and resisted the urge to lean back against him.

“Lucky!” Ginny smirked and Hermione realized she looked thinner and her face was pale.

“Well, I’m not the one carrying the twins of a man who tested almost as powerful as Voldemort,” Hermione quipped. This caused Ginny to snicker.

“Ginevra?” Snape’s voice came up from their quarters.

“I’m down here, sir,” Ginny called up.

“You’re supposed to be in bed,” the man said sternly as he reached them. Ginny apparently had no hesitation in her affections for Severus, because she turned and wrapped her arms around his waist.

“I want to be here today. For this. Please?” She looked up at him with big eyes and Hermione had to look away at the look of tenderness Severus gave Ginny.

“I’ll agree if you sit as much as possible,” he compromised.

“Deal.”

She felt the gentle pressure of Lucius’ hand on her lower back and allowed herself to be guided back to the chairs. She was feeling a bit of trepidation. What was going on? Lucius and Snape were acting…odd. Ginny wanted to stay for what?
Snape requested the portraits to leave them, but after they were gone, there was no preamble. Snape just started talking. “Lucius came to me the night we discovered your pregnancy and informed me that he wanted to help me take down the Dark Lord.”

Hermione could not help her gasp. It was almost as if she sucked all the air out of the room with the noise. The was a tick of absolute silence as the sound stuck in her chest and her shoulders froze with surprised tension. What happened next was completely out of her control; it was pure instinct.

A shriek of elation burst out of her throat as she launched herself at her lover. She wrapped her arms around his neck as she climbed into his lap. Completely unabashed by his surprise or their company, she sealed her lips to his over and over again as she tangled her hands in his hair. “Thank you,” she whispered between heated kisses. He stilled her gently after some more frenzied exchanges by holding her hip both hands and setting his forehead against hers.

They stared at each other for a brief moment before he moved his forehead to her temple and whispered in her ear, “I love you.”

A sob broke from her chest. “I love you, too,” she murmured the words back to him before tilting her head and pressing another sweet kiss to his lips.

“Are you quite finished?” Snape asked after another moment of thick silence.

Hermione felt her face flush as Ginny hissed, “Severus! Let them have their moment!”

Ginny Weasley scolding Severus Snape snapped the tension in the room like a rubber band stretched too tight. Lucius and Hermione exchanged a look before they both started laughing. He helped her crawl out of his lap and she resettled in the chair next to him but kept one hand firmly entwined with one of his.

“I’m sorry,” she said, trying to calm her laughter as she took in Ginny’s amused and Snape’s annoyed looks.

“You should be,” Snape growled before wiping a hand down his face. “Do you have control of yourself?”

“Yes,” she replied while she crossed her legs and straightened her spine. Lucius gave a small snort at her prim and proper answer and she couldn’t help but grin. Happiness – real, pure, unadulterated happiness – flooded her. There was no way she’d stop smiling any time soon.

“We spoke at length that night.” Severus started to explain everything they had discussed, leaving out no details. Then he told her something that made her heart all but stop.

“This next bit of information you will have to forgive me from keeping from you, Miss Granger. You see, first I had to make sure your Occlumency skills were utterly impenetrable. After that, I had to find out if Lucius would be willing to side with us.” Hermione couldn’t help sending another elated smile at Lucius. He didn’t return it, but his eyes were shining with his own private happiness at her approval.

“And finally, I had to vet Lucius. It didn’t take as long as I expected. I was able to obtain a memory of him the night you found out the paternity of your child. This memory gave me proof of his dedication to work for the resistance.” He paused and Hermione was certain it was for dramatic effect, she felt on the edge of her seat. “The memory allowed me to gain him entrance to the Order.”

Hermione felt her jaw drop. No. That wasn’t possible. Her teeth clicked when she closed her mouth before she swallowed hard. “What are you playing at?” she whispered, her voice thick with grief.
“Everyone in the Order is dead. If they’re not dead – they’re hiding. There is no Order.”

“And that, Miss Granger, is where you are wrong. Very, very wrong.”

“If this is all true – that had to be one hell of a memory.” Hermione looked between the two men, the question was implied. Snape smirked before turning amused eyes on Lucius, the challenge in his eyes was clear. Every person in the room knew what he was thinking.

_I dare you to tell her._

Hermione turned her focus on Lucius who looked uncomfortable for a moment before he pinched the bridge of his nose and told her quietly, “I may have gotten a bit…drunk…the night of the paternity test. Snape found me arguing with Narcissa’s portrait. I may have told her that I loved you and that the Draco she loved was dead.”

Hermione covered her mouth with her hand and knew her eyes were filling with tears for the umpteenth time that day. Lucius only sort of glanced at her while he spoke, then cleared his throat and looked pointedly away.

“And that was more than enough for the current head of the Order.” Snape stood with this declaration. “Come now.” He motioned for Ginny to lead the way. Trembling with her shock and feeling certain her heart was going to explode from a mix of fierce love for Lucius and excitement for what was to come, Hermione and Lucius quickly followed the other couple down the spiral staircase and into the castle. She knew where they were going before they arrived in front of the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. Her heart was pounding. Who was alive? Who wasn’t?

A moment later a door materialized in front of them. Snape turned to Hermione and gestured for her to go first. She was shocked to find herself in some sort of antechamber. There was a huge steel door in front of her with torches blazing on each side. The large, round knocker in the middle sat directly under an eye slot. She knew what to do without being directed. She reached out, picked up the knocker, and then let it fall with a resounding clang on metal on metal as the door behind them vanished.

It was only seconds before the eye slot slid open. A pair of luminous brown eyes stared at her. “Hermione?” The voice was achingly familiar, and Hermione slapped a hand over her mouth. “Fred?” she asked before letting single sob of relieved surprise out.

“Yeah!” The eyes disappeared and she could hear Fred Weasley yell over his shoulder. “It’s HERMIONE!” An uproar of noise was cut off by the eye slot sliding shut. There was absolute silence, and Hermione turned wide eyes to Ginny, who was grinning broadly at her.

“You knew?” she whispered.

“I’ve only known for a week,” she whispered. “I had to master Occlumency, too.”

Hermione gave a jerky nod and glanced at Snape and Lucius who were talking quietly a few paces behind them. She jumped and her focus moved back to the door as it creaked metallically on its hinges when it was pulled open slowly.

Then Snape was quickly ushering them all inside and people were closing and re-securing the door. She was swept into a desperate hug from Fred before she was passed to Charlie Weasley. She was crying freely now as she clung to these familiar men, elated to find them alive.

Dedalus Diggle and Ernie MacMillan gave her huge smiles when they finished with the entrance.
The small group of people made their way down a long hallway that was dotted with torches. Hermione’s eyes were roaming over their faces, wondering who was in charge while simultaneously taking in the amazingness of the Room.

“We’re still connected to the Hog’s Head – Aberforth has managed to keep his head down and maintain his business. We’re able to Apparate directly into a room that he charmed unplottable and put under the Fidelius. So, except to those who have the secret, it’s untraceable and allows us to get in and out of our new Headquarters. No one can get into the Room of Requirement. They have no idea what they’re looking for. If someone were to get in to the metal door, we would Obliviate them through the eye hole and get them back into the castle,” Fred was explaining as they walked.

“Who else is here?” she asked breathlessly just as they broke into what looked like a large gathering area. There were tables set up for eating. A few people were playing cards, another group was watching a game of Wizarding Chess. There was a small group of wizards working around a large table, behind which a massive bulletin board was set up. It was obviously tactical information. A man with sandy blonde hair and a scared face looked up.

“Hermione!” Remus Lupin let out a shout of pure joy after her name and pitched himself over the table to race towards her. Hermione broke into hysterical sobs of joy. She didn’t notice the other people at the table turn to her, her face was buried in the werewolf’s chest as he squeezed the breath out of her.

He pulled back and held her by the elbows. “You’re okay?” he asked, obviously concerned as she continued to blubber like a child.

“Yes!” she choked out. “Tonks?” she asked. Lupin’s face fell a bit as he gave a slight shake of his head. Her grief was interrupted by another familiar face.

“Hey there, Granger!” Bill Weasley broke in and pulled her into a hug as Fleur raced up behind her husband, obviously about six months pregnant.

“Bill! Fleur! Oh, my god!” She started crying all over again.

She inquired about Molly and Arthur only to have grief strike again. Kingsley was still in jail waiting to be Kissed, as were Augusta Longbottom and Elphias Doge, and few others whose names she didn’t recognize. She was told there was a rescue mission being formed. McGonagall was out on a mission with Dean Thomas, Hestia Jones, and Susan Bones. Filius Flitwick, Aurora Sinistra, and Hagrid were dead.

There were other hallways off the chamber that held rooms and bathrooms. Not only were Order members here, but people hiding as well. Andromeda Tonks’ name stood out when Remus explained she watched Teddy for him most days so he could lead the Order.

Names were whirling in her mind, but so many were captured or dead that her heart felt fragile in its elation. Then Ginny broke through the torrential chatter.

“You guys – she needs to know!” the redhead exclaimed. “Where is he?”

“I’m here.” The words cut through the crowd, silencing everyone.

Hermione stopped breathing.

She felt dizzy with disbelief.

That voice.
She knew that voice…

…but she didn’t believe it.

The crowd parted in front of her and she saw him. Her eyes locked to his and she felt her knees buckle. She barely heard Lucius swear in shock as he prevented her from collapsing to the ground.

“Harry?” she choked.

Brilliant green eyes stared back at her as a small, crooked grin split his features.

“Hi ’Mione.”
“Oh my god! HARRY!”

Hermione tore herself away from Lucius and broke into an immediate sprint. She vaguely registered that Harry didn’t move except to plant his feet firmly as he opened his arms to receive her. She launched herself at him, and her arms and legs wrapped around her best friend as he grasped her back. Renewed tears – this time of absolute joy – poured out of her.

She felt his glasses get knocked off as he buried his face in her hair. Hermione knew he was crying as hard as she was.

Harry!

Harry was here!

Harry was ALIVE!

She didn’t even register them sinking to the floor, she just automatically adjusted her legs to sit in his lap as he held and rocked her as they both cried and squeezed each other so hard it was difficult to breathe.

When she regained some of her senses, she pulled back just enough to cup his face in her hands and wipe his tears as she stared at him unbelievingly. After a moment of studying him, she leaned in and peppered his dear, dear face with kisses. He laughed and kissed her back before using a hand to wipe away the wetness on her own cheeks.

“How?” she choked out before pulling him tight to her again to resume her blubbering. “How?”

He didn’t answer her question for a long time as they continued to just hold each other. Finally, when the weeping subsided, she realized that they had been left relatively alone. She glanced around to see groups of people at a distance occupied with their own things, giving her and Harry privacy without leaving. Her eyes sought out the long blond hair of her lover, and she smiled at him tremulously when he looked at her from where he was conversing with Snape, Lupin, and Bill Weasley. The guarded look on his face confused her. She gave him a tentative smile, but couldn’t help the frown that pulled her lips when he turned away without acknowledging her.

As Harry started talking, Hermione was shoved back in time, reliving it with him.

“You remember Bellatrix seizing Neville after he almost killed Nagini?” Hermione nodded. “You remember the look of murder Voldemort gave Narcissa Malfoy the minute he realized I was still alive?”

“Yes,” she answered, still drinking in his familiar features. He had changed – he looked older and more tired, and his face was more angular – but he was still Harry. Her Harry. She just…couldn’t believe it. Harry was here!

“He did that because Narcissa confirmed that I was dead – even though I wasn’t – after he hit me
with the Killing Curse in the forest.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped. “That’s why she was executed? No one ever told me why.”

“That’s most likely why she was executed,” Harry agreed. “When the fight moved inside, Ron was with me. You got shuffled back with the crowd, I think, because I couldn’t find you…?”

“I did,” she whispered. “I’m so sorry Harry – I tried to catch up, but by the time I got anywhere near you, Ron was dead and the curse was headed right toward you. Someone shoved me and I fell. By the time I got back to my feet, you were down and I was grabbed by a Death Eater and Apparated to a holding cell…I still don’t even know who. I’m so –”

“Don’t!” Harry grabbed her shoulders and sort of shook her, making her focus. “What you’ve been through – what they’ve done to you – I’ll never be able to forgive myself.”

“Stop! Stop! It’s okay Harry! It’s not your fault!” Then they were both crying and hugging again.

A short while later, they had been bundled into a private corner and were sitting on an overstuffed couch with tea and blankets. Harry continued his story.

“We were in the Great Hall when Ron was killed – once that happened, I sort of went mad with rage and grief. I collapsed by him… Everything I remember after that is sort of broken.” Harry took a deep breath before he continued.

“Malfoy sort of helped me pull it together – he grabbed my shoulder and screamed right in my face. He called me Harry for the first time ever and told me he was sorry about Ron – he used Ron’s first name, too. He told me that I was the only one who could end Voldemort and he told me he had my back and to go. So I went, I didn’t really have a choice, did I? I followed the bastard back out to the yard…” Harry’s eyes were far away, like they were watching the past.

Hermione, however, sat stunned for a moment before she whispered. “Lucius Malfoy was with his wife during the entire battle in the Great Hall. Did Narcissa help you more?”

“What?” Her questioned seemed to pull Harry out of his memories. “No – not Lucius – it was Draco.”

Hermione felt her eyes go wide as she choked out. “Draco? As in – Draco Malfoy? He told you he had your back?”

“Yes.”

“No,” she made an inarticulate noise of disbelief combined with disgust. “There’s no way, Harry. Draco is horrendous. Absolutely awful. He’s…inhumane…in his cruelty. It’s … Harry, you must be mistaken. He’s practically as in love with Voldemort as Bellatrix is!”

Harry looked confused for a moment. “I thought the Malfoys were protecting you? Keeping you safe? Aren’t you…” His cheeks turned pink before he was able to spit out, “Aren’t you pregnant with Draco’s child?”

Hermione’s eyes darkened with fury. “Only because he rapes me on a daily basis,” she spat.

All the color drained out of Harry’s face and he raised his hands to his temples in disbelief. “Snape said…” He swallowed hard and she felt bad when tears splashed over his cheeks. “Hermione, Snape said Malfoy was keeping you safe. The way he’s been keeping Ginny safe. That he was doing his best to make sure you weren’t harmed. That you were okay.”
“Lucius.” Her voice was just barely above a whisper. “Lucius Malfoy keeps me as safe as he can, but now that Draco has knocked me up, his control over the situation has reduced dramatically.”

“I’m…sorry, Hermione.” Harry took her tea cup, which was rattling on her saucer, out of her shaking hands and laced his fingers with hers. “I’m sorry for everything you’ve been through. I don’t know what is going on with Draco, but I assure you – he helped me. I would be dead if it weren’t for him. Lupin said was Draco’s stunner that took me out before the AK got me. If Draco hadn’t gotten me first, I’d be dead.”

Hermione felt something in her mind whirl and reach for an answer. It…didn’t make any sense. If what Harry remembered was real – and he seemed so sure that it was – it didn’t make any sense that Draco would treat her like he did. He wasn’t just cruel to her, though, was he? He was a sadistic bastard. Nasty to everyone who had a decent bone in their body – even his dog!

“In the confusion of the aftermath, Lupin and Kingsley transfigured some debris into my dead body and stole me away.” He let out a shaky breath.

“It…it took weeks for me to heal – they weren’t even sure I was going to make it. Too much trauma. Mental and emotional more than physical. The stunner hadn’t been deadly, obviously, but I guess with you missing and Ron dead…so many dead…” He shook his head, trying to rid himself of the faces he’d never see again. “Mentally I tried to give up. The Healers we have working with us think it was grief that made me stay comatose for as long as I did.”

“I don’t believe that. Whatever Draco hit you with was probably what almost killed you,” Hermione scoffed.

“It was a stunner, Hermione. One stunner isn’t deadly. Draco was terrified for his parents. He was helping me!” Harry seemed determined to make her believe it – but how could she? How could she?

She resigned herself to listen to him continue, even through her mental protests.

“When Snape reached out to the Order, we were floored that he was still alive. I had been so sure…he reported that he isn’t sure how he survived, but that Voldemort’s team of healers saved him.”

“I know how he survived,” Hermione offered. “Narcissa Malfoy found him – Lucius petrified him to stop the bleeding.”

Harry seemed to take that bit of information in for a moment before he nodded and continued, “Anyway, when Snape reached out to us, Remus immediately went to meet with him. I had his memories – the ones he gave us in the shack. I knew what side he was really on. At that point I was awake and talking even if I was on bedrest. I think you pretty much know the rest – or at least can guess.”

“What memories?”

Harry looked surprised for a moment before he answered very quietly. “They’re very private, ‘Mione,” his tone was gentle. “I don’t feel comfortable sharing them; they’re not really mine to share.”

Hermione nodded, respecting his decision not to tell her even though she burned with curiosity. They were silent for a time, trying to figure out what to say to each other. “Are you okay?” he asked softly. “I mean, I know you’re not really okay, but are you going to be okay? When we win this, when you’re safe again, are you going to be alright?”

“I’m pregnant.”
“I know.” His answer was soft and he couldn’t look at her. “So’s Ginny – with Snape’s kid. Kids – twins. You know she told me she loves him?” His voice was filled with pain.

He glanced at her then and realized she didn’t look surprised. “You knew that already, didn’t you?”

“I did. It’s hard not to grow attached when he’s the only person who has been there for her. Their intimacy was forced at first, but when she realized how he was protecting her, she couldn’t help herself. It was easy for her to love him. He’s been very good to her.” Hermione sighed and pulled her hand away from his to cover her face. “He loves her, too. I’m sure of it.”

“You sound like you’re speaking from experience…but I thought you said Draco –”

“Not Draco.”

He stared at her confusedly, until it hit him suddenly. His eyes grew almost as round as his spectacles. “Lucius Malfoy?”

“Don’t you know how he was granted entry to the Order?” she asked him, cocking her head to the side.

“They said Snape had a memory that was convincing, but I wasn’t told what. They’re still trying to make me lay low, but I’m really starting to get restless. There are too many people in danger. Too many people dying.” He looked frustrated and Hermione gave him a sad smile. Same old Harry – always raring to go running headlong into the fight.

“Snape gave Remus a memory of Lucius drunk. It was after the paternity test – after we found out that the baby is Draco’s.” She paused and forced herself to look at her first and dearest friend, still barely daring to believe he was really there with her. “Lucius was yelling at Narcissa Malfoy’s portrait – telling her that he loved me and that Draco might as well be dead.”

Harry’s eyes dilated and his lips popped open in surprise. “Lucius Malfoy is in love with you?” he asked incredulously. She gave a small shrug, actually having to suppress a little grin. The thought of Lucius’ telling anyone that he was in love with her made her almost giddy. “Do you love him, Hermione?”

She smiled softly and gave a little nod. “I do.”

Harry averted his gaze, seemingly overwhelmed by the information. When he raised his eyes again, they seemed sad. “You know, I always thought it was going to be you and Ron, and me and Ginny. That we were going to be actual, honest to goodness family. That you’d be my sister, and he’d be my brother.”

Hermione felt her nose tingle with the threat of yet more tears. She coughed lightly to clear the lump in her throat. “I always thought that, too, Harry. It seems like another life, doesn’t it? Another world? So much has changed.”

She reached for him again and didn’t hesitate to help him pull her into his lap. “There’s one thing, though,” she added a few minutes later when they had been sitting comfortably together. Her head was on his shoulder, his chin rested in her curls.

“What’s that?” he murmured, gently rubbing her back with one hand while the other was entwined with her own.

“I always have been and always will be your sister, Harry. I love you.”
The hand rubbing her back stilled before pressing her more firmly to his chest. “I’ve always felt like you were the best big sister anyone could ever ask for.”

“You’re the brother I never had, nothing will ever change that.”

“Hermione?” he whispered into her hair. “I love you, too. I’m so grateful you’re alive.”

“That goes without saying, Harry.”

The jealousy that was clawing in his chest was cloying. Absolutely suffocating, and he didn’t understand it. Narcissa had flirted and toyed with other men while they had been married – and while he would have been upset had he ever discovered an actual affair – he, himself, had had other lovers. Never once, though, did it make him feel like this. Never once had Narcissa ever asked him to stop his affairs, nor did she even mention them bitterly in passing. She simply hadn’t really seemed to care. Especially after they had been told they couldn’t have any more children.

His and Narcissa’s union had been forced, however. They had come to care for each other, they had even loved each other in their own, unique way, but jealousy had never been part of their equation.

He wondered if he felt this way because Hermione was his. He was her first lover, even if the term had to be loosely coined. He was her protector and her confidant. Maybe it was because he was so much older than she? He wasn’t sure.

He did know that his love for her was real, however, and he hated how her affection for the ruddy Boy-Who-Lived-Over-And-Over-Again was rankling him. He felt her eyes on him and glanced at her while listening to the discussion of some tactical plans with Snape and the two heads of the Order of Phoenix, Remus Lupin and Bill Weasley. She smiled at him and he wanted to glower. How could she not realize what she was doing to him while she was hanging off the boy. Hugging and even fucking kissing him?

He snarled mentally and looked pointedly away from her. He needed to pay attention to his new commanding officers. They were discussing their current plans to break into Azkaban, which Lucius felt was a fairly stupid idea. He was resigning to hear them out, however. Once he learned their plan, he kept his opinion to himself. They had it reasonably well planned and had numerous people inside. He felt they had a decent chance at success.

After the break out was discussed, Lucius was asked to go into detail about his workings with the Vampire’s and Veela. It was extremely well received and Lucius found himself filling with an odd sense of pride. It was something he had done even before he had been positive in his alliance with Severus. Something he had done for his witch. Something he had done right, for once in his miserable life.

When they finished with their discussion, Lucius looked back to the spot where Hermione and Potter had been only to find it vacant. The green-eyed monster in his chest growled alarmingly and Lucius immediately scanned the room only to find his witch curled in the Lightening-Bolt-Brat’s lap. They were both sleeping and, even in sleep, they were clinging to each other fiercely.

He pressed his lips together in a hard line and was about to stalk over to them and rip her out of the bloody boy’s lap when a small hand took his wrist. Her turned and met light brown eyes. Ginny Weasley looked up at him through her lashes.

“She doesn’t feel like that about Harry,” Ginny told him softly. “I was always so jealous of her in school because she was with him all the time. It’s not because she’s in love with him, though.” She
paused when he raised his eyebrows as though trying to ask her what the hell she was talking about.

She scoffed at him, making him feel foolish. “She loves him – yes, but as a sister loves a brother. Not as a woman loves a man.”

Lucius felt the rage in his chest pop like the bubbles he used to blow for Draco as a child. He continued to study the earnest face of the young woman in front of him. “How did you get so wise, Madam Snape?”

She smiled wryly at him, but her eyes were sad as she answered. “War.”

“Indeed.”

After that, he was much more calm. Even when many young men passed Hermione around for embraces just before they departed after lunch.

When they left the Room of Requirement, Snape leaned and whispered close to his ear. “Guest wing on the second floor, third door on your left. Password is Dumbledore’s Army. Take some time for you and the girl. There’s a Portkey for your Manor leaving at five o’clock on the nightstand – it’s a Griffin figurine.”

They shook hands and Hermione hugged first Ginny and then Snape – much to his chagrin and Lucius’ amusement.

He found the slightly confused look on her face much more endearing then he ought to ten minutes later as they entered the guest suite.

“Well are we?”

He told her, shedding his outer robes while doing so. When her shoulders slumped with apparent relief, he understood immediately. She had been no where near ready to return to the Manor.

“Come,” he murmured while gesturing to the couch. “Let us just relax together and talk for a bit.”

She followed him and allowed him to pull her down to snuggle into his side. A few minutes later, they were in their favorite positions. Her head in the hollow of shoulder, his hand buried in her hair, gently massaging her scalp. Their free hands were entwined. They didn’t speak for a long time, and her words made him warm with affection when she did.

“I miss you,” she whispered. “Especially at night.”

Lucius’ eyes slid closed and he tilted his face to press a kiss to her forehead. “That is an entirely mutual sentiment,” he assured her in a tender tone. Her fingers tightened around his.

They were silent, just basking in the other’s presence while sitting together, lightly touching. It was a novelty for him, one he felt he’d never grow tired of. Eventually, however, their desires took over.

With a cat-like stretch, Hermione arched her neck and pressed a warm, wet kiss to the underside of his jaw. Her hand, which was resting behind him, slid up to gently tug on his hair to angle his head so she had better access. The action caused him to grunt low in his throat, and he shivered before unlacing their hands in order to catch her chin and force her lips to meet his.

The breath before the kiss let him know that no matter how slowly he wanted to take this, it would be a fierce, fast coupling. It had been over two weeks since he’d had his hands on her body; since his cock had been buried deep in her wet, hot cunt.
He was not wrong, clothes were all but ripped off bodies, and she was on her knees with her hands curled into the back cushions of the davenport, begging him for release as he sunk into her from behind. Her pussy gripped him, squeezing in all the right places, causing him to make guttural sounds completely unbecoming of a man in his station.

She gasped and mewled and continued to beg oh, so prettily. He felt no need to tease and slithered his fingers across her still-flat belly before letting them delve into her slick slit, finding and stimulating the bundle of nerves there perfectly. It was only minutes before she was arching back into him, wrapping her arms around his neck from behind and yanking his lips over hers so he could swallow her cries of completion. He followed much too soon after that.

He didn’t mean for it to happen, he’d had every intention of resetting the portkey to deliver them to the Manor much earlier than five o’clock, but he seemed to have no control over his need to just be with her for a while.

They lay entangled and naked on the couch with Lucius’ cloak draped haphazardly over them and talked like lovers for a while before he initiated a second round of lovemaking. He took his time with her as he had initially wanted to, bringing her to orgasm twice before carrying her to the bed and curling her legs around his waist so he could look in her eyes as he made her come a third time, sobbing his name against his deep, drugging kisses.

They fell asleep for a while, and Lucius was glad he’d had the foresight to set an alarm with the tempus charm, or they would have missed the damn portkey. Just before the griffin statue lit up bright blue, she leaned up to kiss him sweetly. “I love you. Thank you so much for today. It will help me get through these next weeks.

“I love you, Hermione,” he answered before closing her fingers around the figurine. The jerk of a fishhook behind his navel signaled the end of their perfect afternoon.
Hermione was on edge, her body taut with tension. She had been since arriving home with Lucius the night before. Draco had been waiting for them in the dining room with a horrible, dark look on his face. He had said nothing throughout dinner, and Hermione had not missed the anxious glances her afternoon lover kept sending her way. They both knew she was in trouble.

However, it was the next morning already and Draco had yet to punish her. She knew it must be some sort of mental game he was trying to play. It was working fabulously.

They had gone through their normal morning routine of her bathing him, but he had not laid a finger on her in anger or lust. He now had her set up in the dining room, all the silver from their engagement party night spread before her to polish and clean. She predicted this task the night of the engagement celebration, and it was hardly a had punishment in her eyes. After all, she’d polish silver for a week if she could have an afternoon like that with Lucius again. Maybe Draco was finally going soft?

She gasped softly as the knife she was absent mindedly rubbing with a rag left a neat, clean line of blood along her thumb. Instantly, she popped the offending digit in her mouth.

“For fuck’s sake!” Draco roared.

Hermione jumped, she hadn’t even realized he was in the room with her, let alone standing so very close. She ducked her head and kept her eyes down. “I’m sorry, sir. It was an accident.”
“You got blood on my many-times-great-grandmother’s flatware set!” he snapped, grabbing the hand with the bleeding thumb to inspect. “Your dirty, disgusting muddy blood!”

Hermione had no idea what possessed her to do what she did next. With an angry mewl, she used the opposite hand that Draco was holding to snatch his wrist and ripped the first hand away and snatched up the knife she had dropped when she’d cut herself. Before either of them could react to her fast movement, she had made a shallow cut on the top of his forearm and a bright red line of blood bloomed from his skin.

“My blood is the same fucking color as yours, you bloody-fucking-ferret!” she all but shrieked at him. “What the fucking fuck is wrong with you?!” She shoved her bleeding thumb against the cut on his forearm, smearing the crimson liquids together. She felt triumphant when the blood mingled, and you could not tell whose was whose.

She looked up into his eyes, hoping beyond hope that he would finally – finally – come to his senses. When her gaze clashed with his, however, her body stiffened in absolute fear. Lucius is not here! She panicked as his evil, murderous gaze took in her face. What were you thinking? There’s no one here to help you!

She whimpered pitifully when Draco slowly removed her grasp from his arm and took her shoulders between his palms. “You are going to regret that. Even more than you’ll regret not being home at a reasonable hour yesterday, Mudblood.” His voice was deadly calm, and a trickle of terror slid down her spine.

“I’m sorry!” she gasped as tears spilled down her cheeks.

“Save it – you’ll be punished whether or not you apologize,” he snapped in her face. She flinched back but was thrown off kilter as he spun her and shoved her forward. “Walk, you little bitch. Your old room – that’s where you’re going.”

This felt different though – menacingly so. She had crossed some invisible line. Her gut said he cared not one wit about the babe in her belly. He would kill her for her transgressions…or at least beat her to the brink of death, regardless as to whether or not it would cause a miscarriage.

She couldn’t help the gasps of anxiety that were starting as she pushed through the door to her first bedchamber at Malfoy Manor. What she found in the room, however, made her scream and bolt into action.

“Mum! Oh, my gods! Mummy!” she bolted across the room, only to be hit with a tripping jinx that caused her to sprawl on the floor.

She landed on her face and pain unlike she had ever known before sliced through her jaw as it became dislocated.

“There will be no helping Mummy-Mudblood, Granger.” Draco’s voice sounded demonic and Hermione squeaked and rolled, wanting her eyes on him. They couldn’t focus though, the sight of her mother strung from the ceiling by her wrists – naked, bloody, and bruised – kept all her attention.

“No, no, no!” Hermione’s scream came out muffled because of the odd angle of her jaw that caused
the lower teeth on the right side of her mandible to overlap the upper. It was hard to enunciate and get the words out, but she did the best she could. “Please! Please, sir. Let Tinny take her away! She’s done nothing – this was my mistake! I will do whatever you want, submit to whatever you want. Please, sir!”

“What?” Draco started laughing – a terrible, unpleasant guffaw. “What did you say?”

Hermione did the only thing she could think of, she grasped under her chin in both hands and snapped it back into place with a resounding *crack*! of bone on bone. It was so loud and painful sounding that even Draco winced before she could shriek her agony. She repeated her earlier statement, taking a bit of solace in Draco’s wide eyes of surprise that she had reset her own jaw bone.

“No.” It was said simply when she had finished the second time. “I think not. In fact – I think you’ll just be joining her.”

He pointed his wand at her, and her arms shot straight up in the air until she was lifted onto the very tips of her big toes. It pulled her shoulders and she gasped and groaned with the discomfort of it. He flicked his wand, causing her to be dragged across the room so she was only a few paces away from Jane, who was obviously unconscious.

Hermione grit her teeth and ignored the ache in her jaw as Draco flicked his wand yet again, rendering her completely nude and totally at his mercy.

She watched him with wary eyes as he completed another wand movement, this one she knew. He accio’d something from across the room, causing it to sail into the open palm of his non-wand hand. Then he gave her a menacing grin and adjusted an obvious erection. Hermione couldn’t help the gag when her stomach twisted because of the lewd gesture.

He held up a flat wooden paddle that was long and almost looked like a short boat oar. “I think ten with this as a starting point? That will serve as your penance for the little stunt you just pulled in the dining room. Then we’ll really get to the meat and potatoes of this.

“As you can see, I started on your mother much earlier this morning. Her condition is your fault. I don’t know exactly what happened yesterday, but I do know you’ll never be allowed to leave Malfoy Manor again.”

Hermione found herself utterly confused, she felt her brow crinkle even as she attempted to disassociate from the pain in her wrists. “What are you talking about? I did nothing wrong, yesterday!”

That was a lie and, even though it didn’t sound like a lie, they both knew she wasn’t telling the truth.

“Ah-ah-ah, try again, Granger!” The paddle came down on her arse hard. The shock of it reverberated up her spine and down her legs. It stole her breath absolutely and she screamed, never having felt anything like it in her life. The fire that followed the blow caused her to twist and gasp as instant tears flooded her eyes and spilled down her cheeks.

He didn’t let her collect herself as he continued. “You came back from Hogwarts happy yesterday, Mudblood. I want to know why. What on Earth do you have to be happy about? Especially when your misery is all that matters to me.”

Hermione bit her lip, refusing to answer. She braced for the blow the moment she saw his face twist into a disgusted smirk of amusement.
“I can do this all day.” The paddle landed across her arse again and the same pain bloomed, only this time it was a little hotter and a little deeper. She screamed between clenched teeth. The next blow came down harder than the last two and caused her to choke on her own gasping wail, which then made her cough and sputter.

“I can make this easier, I could just order you to tell me!” He landed another blow, and then a fifth. Each elicited more strangled cries to rip out of her. She was sobbing incoherently after the sixth and he seemed to take mercy on her, allowing her to catch her breath. When her breathing slowed, she became aware of him muttering, only she wasn’t able to make out what he was saying over the ringing of adrenalin in her ears.

She gave up trying when a moment later, he got right into her face. When they were nose to nose, he barked, “Why were you so pleased yesterday, Mudblood? Why were you so cocky this morning that you felt you could put your hands on me and draw blood?” Hermione felt panic rise in her throat. She had to protect the Order…he couldn’t know about Harry. He couldn’t.

Desperately she whispered, “Malfoy, don’t do this, you don’t have to do this. I didn’t do anything of any consequence yesterday. It was just a goo–”

“Tell me the truth!!” He was so furious that his eyes bulged, and spittle flew from his mouth. He rounded her and the seventh blow landed across the swell of her flanks, she screamed and screamed, gasped, and screamed again. The agony did not dissipate, it just spread.

“Ohayout the truth!!” He was so furious that his eyes bulged, and spittle flew from his mouth. He rounded her and the seventh blow landed across the swell of her flanks, she screamed and screamed, gasped, and screamed again. The agony did not dissipate, it just spread.

“Okay!” she panted through a sob when she could think again. “Okay! Yes – I was happy yesterday. Your father was with me, he was affectionate. I’ve missed his kindness, and he wanted to fuck me. I let him; it was amazing. He’s a wonderful lover!”

Draco’s eyes blazed with anger and he spun away from her. Hermione found herself confused when she heard him arguing with himself again. It was an obvious quarrel, even if she couldn’t hear the words. She cowered when he turned back to her. His face was pinched and red, and his eyes were unfocused.

“You let another man fuck you? Even though you are mine?” His voice could have frozen fire and Hermione gasped as his hand came up to wrap around her neck, cutting off her air supply.

Mucus and tears were all over her chin and cheeks and her nose and eyes were running. She felt her face go ruddy and knew her eyes were bulging. She hadn’t had a good breath to begin with and her lungs started burning quickly. Finally…finally…he released her. She sputtered and gasped while he scolded her with furious questions.

“You let my father fuck you? I knew he craved you; I knew he lusted after you, but I didn’t know that he would touch you when I specifically told him not to. You will suffer for your sins. He will suffer for his soft spot for you. Let’s continue so he can see what angering me does to you.” He circled her as he monologued before he slammed the paddle into her upper thighs. She continued to blubber and try to breathe.

“Why would you let him touch you?” The blow had landed across new skin and her scream was silent as she writhed yet again. She was sure she was going to suffocate from her own tortured inhalation when her chest finally caved, and she was able to suck in a breath around a strangled scream – or was it a sob? She didn’t even know.

“Why didn’t he just take what he wanted?” Another blow. He hadn’t let her catch her breath that time before he launched into his next question, wielding the paddle again with no warning. It had to have been more than ten by now…trust Draco Malfoy to not even stick to the right count!
“Why didn’t you fight him like you fight me? He doesn’t even have command over you anymore!”

There was a pause and some more unintelligible mutterings before he asked, “Why does he even want you?!”

He didn’t stop. More hits followed, the pain so intense and absolute that Hermione felt consciousness slipping and she hung loose in her bindings. Her breathing was ragged around her shrieks and moans. He didn’t allow for her to even answer the questions he was firing at her.

When he struck her for the last time, she could no longer even pick her head up. Her arse and thighs were one big mass of flesh that felt filleted and on fire and she was bawling without any control.

It seemed like hours later before she had command over her lungs and her thoughts again. When it was finally quiet, with the exception of her hitching breath and the quiet whispered words from Draco that continued to be just out of her hearing, Draco spoke directly to her again.

“I demand you answer my questions.”

She couldn’t have stopped the words from spilling past her lips if she had even tried. And – oh, she tried to stop them. “I didn’t let him – I love him. He didn’t have to take it from me because I gave it to him freely. I don’t have to fight him – I want him. He wants me because he loves me, too!” By the time the forced admission was pulled out of her, Hermione was crying hysterically again. No, no, no! He can’t know this, he can’t! He can’t! He’ll get Lucius killed! In the same breath, however, another voice reasoned with her. Draco knowing about her and Lucius was better than him knowing about Harry and the Order.

She was so weak with pain, and so fatigued from crying, that she couldn’t do anything to try and take it back. The command had been made – her secrets were spilled. At least she had been able to control which secrets she allowed out in the open.

Fuck Occlumency – Draco’s orders were like Veritaserum. If he told her to tell Voldemort every secret she knew, it would be over!

Draco rounded her again and the expression on his face held more murder than she had ever seen in her life – and she had been in a bloody war! “My father loves you? You? You’re a disgusting little, filthy Mudblood!”

Hermione just wept harder, trying to hold her body still as she attempted to keep her feet on the floor just enough to take some pressure off her toes. When it came down to it, though, their discomfort was heavily overshadowed by her poor, broken bottom.

“Answer me!” he roared.

“Yes! He! Loves! Me!” she cried out and startled when her mother’s voice came from beside her.

“Hermione?”

“No, no Mum! Go back to sleep, I’m okay!” The words were bitten out between ragged breaths and puffs of air. She completely missed Draco summoning the next sadistic tool of torture but did hear him muttering to himself again. This time, the words were discernable.

“No, Mother. I won’t use that one.” He came back into her line vision, which was swimming with tears, while shaking his head like he was confused or distracted.

Then she was distracted by the sound of Narcissa’s voice. “Draco, what are you doing?” Hermione’s head lolled to see the woman in a portrait over the vanity, but Draco paid the painting no mind.
“Narcissa, please get help!” Hermione whimpered pitifully. “Please –! Arrrghhh! Oh gods!”

Draco had chosen a whip of some sort. It had a long leather handle and many ropes that spilled out of the end like the streamers from the handles on her childhood bicycle. The first blow stung, and she shirked away from it as Jane started screaming and begging Draco to stop hurting her daughter.

“Shut up, you Muggle bitch, or I’ll just turn my attentions on you – do you need more?” He snarled at Jane, who recoiled, before landing another blow across Hermione’s upper back. She shrieked again, which caused Narcissa to start shouting form her portrait.

“Draco Lucius Malfoy, I command you to stop! That girl is pregnant! For Merlin’s sake – what about the baby?!”

Hermione was starting to lose focus again, the blows came swift and hard, she could feel liquid trickle down her body and knew he must be breaking her skin open. She shrieked and gasped and squirmed with each hit while begging for him to stop. Her words were drowned out by their mothers. Narcissa demanding he think about the baby. Jane was shocked and horrified that there was a baby and wanted her daughter left alone.

Draco continued to mutter incoherently, randomly snapping, “Shut up!” at seemingly no one as he shook his head. A few times he flapped his hands as though he was trying to ward off a swarm of bees.

The strikes became more concentrated on her back and upper arms before he spun her and started landing them across her breast and abdomen. Narcissa’s screams became louder and louder, which seemed to increase the intensity of the hits. It wasn’t long until Hermione was completely limp in her bindings, begging him to stop with breathless gasps every time there was a break between a blow. Blood continued to trickle down her body.

Hermione beseeched and pleaded while Narcissa shouted and yelled and sobbed and Jane screamed obscenities at the man who was abusing her only child. Draco kept pausing to shake his head every few hits. Once he even slammed his fist repeatedly onto his forehead. Jane encouraged this while Narcissa told him to let it go (which confused Hermione all he more) and Hermione tried to drag in a breath or two.

“How is she pregnant? Lucius told me she was protected against pregnancy! Draco, you must stop – you sadistic arse! What is wrong with you?! No person is like this without reason! You must stop! Please stop hurting my daughter!”

Hermione cried for her unborn child, whom she loved regardless of his paternity while her mother fired questions through her own gasps and groans.

“A little harder, a little lower. Yes, My Lord. I will do as you bid. Yes, she deserves it, I understand. I will kill her, as you have instructed!”
Hermione cried because she no longer had use of her muscles. She hung completely limp in her tethers, her feet dragging uselessly on the floor. Blood was thick and spreading down her legs and hips and across her back as sweat poured down her face and neck.

Suddenly, she broke.

In an instant, all her anger was gone, all her fear was gone.

Yes, she was going to die.

Yes, she was going take her child with her.

She had only one try left, so she did the only thing she could think of.

She forced herself to raise her head to capture the eyes of her tormentor. He seemed surprised when his gaze latched to hers, as it stilled all movement. A muscle under his eye twitched and his mouth parted a bit in question. He looked like a deer caught in headlights.

“Please Draco!” she whimpered. It was significant, this pleading. It was the first time she had ever spoken his given name. Yes, she had thought it before. Yes, she had said it to other people before. It was the first time she had ever called him by his name to his face, though, and the sound of it carried over her mother’s sobs and Narcissa’s sharp scolding. “Draco…please.”

She was astonished when the flogger clattered noisily to the ground when both of Draco’s hands moved to his head as if he were in pain. Her gaze was becoming more focused now that the torture had stopped, and she could see he was trembling. When he looked up at her again, his pupils were blown wide open and his face was marred with confusion.

“Granger?” When he acknowledged her in a nonderogatory way, Hermione felt a brief jolt of elation before she could no longer keep her head up. Draco looked from her to Jane, and finally – when Narcissa called for him again – he spun to the portrait.

“Mother?” he asked dazedly, speaking to the painting for the first time ever. “Mother? What…happened?”

With those words, Draco Malfoy collapsed into a heap at her dangling feet.

Tinny popping into the living room of Severus’ home in Spinner’s End made both men freeze with horror. The elf didn’t even need to say anything, all three knew she was under direct orders to only come to him in a life or death situation.

Lucius and Snape barely exchanged glances before they Disapparated one after the other, reappearing moments later in the Apparition Foyer of Malfoy Manor. Wordlessly, Tinny held her hands out to both wizards to took hold immediately. They were outside the bedchamber doors an instant later.

All they heard was Draco’s, “Mother? What…happened?” before they were rushing through the doors. Lucius gaze followed his collapsing son for a moment before he saw his little witch. His heart started slamming into his ribcage at the sight of her dangling from the ceiling, covered in blood. Her head was bent, and she was limp in her bindings.

“Fuck!” he exclaimed, rushing to her as Snape moved to the heap of young man at her feet. Lucius used a severing charm to cut the invisible rope that Hermione dangled from and caught her in his arms before lowering her carefully to the floor. He was sickened by the marks that covered her body
– she had been whipped badly.

She hissed and whimpered as he lay her out, trying not to react to the way her skin was ripped across her breasts and stomach. “Merlin, Hermione!” he gasped, not even able to choke out any real sentiment. He should have never left her. He knew that Draco was upset about how long she had been gone the day before. He should have stayed with her today. “Severus! Please!”

Severus was barking his own orders at Tinny and Bilby, who disappeared with cracks! Before he shifted his attention to Hermione. “Take Mrs. Granger down, Lucius. The gods know how long she’s been strung up like that,” Severus directed as he started inspecting Hermione, whose eyes had fluttered shut and her head rolled to one side as she passed out.

“Miss Granger!” he attempted to rouse Hermione as Lucius cut her mother down and covered her by pulling a throw off the large bed. It appeared Jane Granger wasn’t in any immediate harm; her cuts and bruises were much more superficial than her daughter’s.

Narcissa was screaming at Lucius but he ignored her, too focused on saving Hermione from Draco’s actions to worry about Draco’s own ailments. Moments later, the room was flooded with more beings as the elves returned. Bilby with two healers in tow; Healer Jacobs and a woman he didn’t recognize. Jacobs immediately crossed to Severus, who waved the man to Mrs. Granger instead, while the woman knelt down at his son’s head and began casting diagnostic charms.

“Enervate!” Snape’s voice cut through Lucius’ focus on Draco and he returned his attention back to Hermione, who gasped and attempted to sit up. “Lay down, you silly girl!” Snape snapped and looked up when Tinny popped into the room holding a large medical kit.

Quickly, Snape flicked his wand at the kit which sprung open. Vials of potions danced to him and he tipped the first one into Hermione’s open mouth. “Blood replenisher;” he told her. “You haven’t lost a vital amount, but enough to warrant it,” he explained to her before tilting another to her lips. “Pain potion,” another “healing potion,” another “calming draught.” The list went on until an even half dozen had been imbibed.

“I’m going to clean your skin with my wand, brace yourself for the sting.” Severus muttered a cleaning incantation and Lucius swore loudly when the blood cleared as Hermione gave a small shriek of discomfort. She was littered in small, pea-sized pock marks that continued to ooze.

“Knotted flogger?” Severus asked Hermione, and she glanced around before lifting a trembling finger to point at the offending instrument. Severus summoned it and made a face. “Studded flogger. I’m going to knit the wounds using dittany, Miss Granger.”

It seemed an eternity later when the cuts and abrasions on her front were tended to. Lucius was paying no mind to the fact that Jane was now robed and sitting in a wing back chair by the fire while Tinny served her tea. Nor did he notice that Jacobs and the unknown healer were both muttering nervously over Draco’s inert form. Especially when Severus bade the girl to roll onto her stomach. Both men swore judiciously, which only succeeded in making Hermione start to cry when she had been doing so well at maintaining control. Working as quickly as possible, Severus cleared the blood from the flogger marks before cleaning and closing them. It was her bum and thighs, however, that gave both men pause.

Severus cast more diagnostics. “There is extensive deep tissue bruising and broken blood vessels,” he told Lucius in a gruff voice. Lucius ran a hand down his face, horrified. Her backside was so purple it almost looked black.
Snape pulled his kit closer and rummaged for something a little deeper in the chest. “Here, Miss Granger,” he lifted another vial to her lips and gave a tight smirk when she gagged on it. “I know it’s foul, but you’ll be able to at least sit carefully within an hour or so. I will use external salves and balms as well.”

“Water,” Hermione whispered after choking down the potion. Bilby was at their side within a second, tipping a glass of iced water to her lips. Lucius was relieved when she drank deeply. “Thank you,” she whispered before laying her head back down on folded arms.

It wasn’t long later when Severus spoke to him again, although Lucius was very lost in his own world as he watched the two scenes in front of him. Severus was tending to the wounds of the witch he loved, and the healers who were casting increasingly desperate diagnostics and arguing in hushed voices over his only son. At least Narcissa had grown quiet. She watched silently from the portrait over the vanity.

“Where do you want her, Lucius?” Severus asked quietly as he finally closed his personal medical kit.

Lucius didn’t hesitate. “My suite. Severus...” he grabbed his friend's wrist, "the...child?"

"Heartbeat is strong." It was a simple answer and Lucius gave a tight nod, not sure how he felt.

The moment Snape Disapparated with the girl, both Healers turned to him. It was clear that neither were excited to inform him of what was wrong.

“Just...tell me.” He was surprised with how cool and detached his voice was.

“Mr. Malfoy,” Healer Jacobs said quietly. “The only thing we know for certain is that your son is in a coma.”
The table was quiet, and Hermione was trying her best to be respectful of Lucius' somber mood, but she couldn't help the overwhelming relief she was feeling in this moment. Despite her physical and mental trauma of the day before, her appetite was more than it had been in weeks and her oatmeal with berries and cream never tasted better. She was in a great mood.

The only thing that was dampening her joy was that its impetus was the same as Lucius' despair. Draco had not woken and seemed to be in a coma of some sort. Praise be to Godric, Merlin, Morgana, the North Star, or whatever deity was responsible. It had to have been divine intervention, after all. There was no question that she and her mother had been on the brink of being murdered side by side and in horrific fashion.

She had felt it coming. Draco had been so unusually quiet. It had been an ominous sign, as sure as seeing a grim or breaking a mirror. A calm before the storm. Despite her intuition, despite knowing his wrath would likely come in short order, somehow, she had not allowed herself to imagine it would involve her mother. How did she constantly manage to underestimate the little dickfuck? She took a swallow of her herbal tea and silently prayed the bastard would never wake up.

She shifted in her chair to move the pressure point on her bum. While Snape had healed her filleted skin easily with dittany and pain potions and bruise pastes had helped immensely as well, she was still quite sore. Thinking back on it, Hermione couldn't help but compare herself to a cat who was going through its nine lives very quickly. It was rather a miracle she was even alive this morning, much less sitting in the dining room and having breakfast.

The worst had been her jaw; that had been some of the most horrific pain she had ever felt and looking back on it, she couldn't believe she had corrected her own dislocation. If she had to do it again, she didn't know if she could. It had definitely been a sheer adrenaline reaction. She knew one thing about herself, though; when staring death in the face, she had no qualms giving the bastard a firm FU.

After Severus had delivered Hermione to Lucius' suite and Jane had been settled into the mistress suite, Hermione had promptly joined her mom and crawled into bed with her. Why Lucius had bothered even separating them was beyond the Gryffindor. The two women had just fallen asleep when Snape had brought Healer Jacobs to them to double check the treatments the Headmaster had administered. Hermione had demanded that Healer Jacobs assess Jane first. Fortunately, her mother fared much better than herself. Despite having been strung up for a few hours, her injuries had been more superficial in nature and mainly involved a lot of strain in her arms and shoulders. Hermione had been impressed with how the wizard had been very reassuring to her mum and had explained everything he was doing as he looked her over, in spite of her being a Muggle. Hermione had found herself wondering if he had a Muggle parent given how comfortable he was. She then remembered that Lucius had arranged for Healer Jacobs to treat her mother after that first night, so she knew they had met before.
She was pulled from her memories of the day before by her mother's enquiring voice. "Hermione, why are you only eating oatmeal while Lucius and I are eating full breakfasts?"

Hermione paused mid chew and looked up and into the questioning and now slightly accusatory stare of her mother. A stare that was pointedly not directed at her.

Lucius seemed to almost jolt in his chair, as though he had been a million miles away. "Oh, quite right." He looked at Hermione. "Forgive me." He cleared his throat. "Bilby."

The elf was instantly at his side. "Yes, Mr. Malfoy, sir?"

"From now on, Miss Granger is to receive the same meals as the rest of the table. No more lesser cuts of meats and no more oatmeal. Unless she requests it, that is. She is to be served the same as any Malfoy."

"Yes, sir." The elf then turned to face Hermione. "Is there something in particular I can bring you right now while your breakfast is being prepared?"

Hermione exhaled with relief and smiled, "I'd love a cup of Earl Grey with a touch of milk?"

"Certainly."

When the elf left, Lucius looked at Jane Granger and offered by way of explanation, "I'm afraid that was my son's doing. I apologize for not rectifying it immediately this morning."

For her part, Jane merely nodded in acceptance of the explanation before her eyes moved back to her daughter. She had only discovered Hermione was pregnant the day before. "What did Healer Jacobs say? About the pregnancy, I mean? Is everything okay?"

"He said the fetus appears unharmed and all his diagnostic charms show he's healthy."

Jane watched her daughter and then looked at Lucius again. Her voice was firm and with no small hint of accusation. "My daughter is pregnant, Mr. Malfoy. What do you plan to do differently to prevent harm from coming to her or to my grandchild again?"

Hermione let out a small gasp. "Mum! This was not his fault. You know his situation and you know there is only so much he can do! We have talked about this."

Jane answered Hermione but her narrow eyes stayed on Lucius. "You are in his home which he is the Master of. You can not tell me he did not and does not have options."

"Mummy, please."

"It's alright, Hermione. Your mother has every reason to be upset. You are her daughter, and she loves you every bit as much as I love my son."

"Your son is an absolute menace and belongs in a mental ward," Jane responded.

Hermione closed her eyes and exhaled heavily. "Stop. Now is not the time."

Lucius looked from Jane to Hermione. How could he deny it when what the woman said was true? Draco was mad. There was no denying it. There was not even a sliver of hope.

Lucius stole a quick glance about the room to confirm the absence of Ediva's traitorous spying and, finding her gone, allowed himself to share what he had been fighting, to admit what he had tried to deny.
"Your words are truer that even you realize, Madam Granger." Lucius picked up his cup and took a large swallow of tea for courage. His gaze moved to Hermione's questioning one. "There is a madness that runs in the Black family. It is non-discriminatory and very random in whom it afflicts. It has skipped generations only to come back with a vengeance and reap its destruction on multiple at once." Lucius let out a sigh. It was the first time he had ever confided that long-kept secret to anyone.

Hermione put down the tea Bilby had brought her as she absorbed what Lucius had just confided. After a moment's thought, her eyes grew wide. "Bellatrix!"

Lucius' pewter gaze met hers with silent acquiescence. "Yes, she was the first to be affected in many, many years."

Jane's gaze softened slightly. "And your son?"

Lucius fiddled with his napkin before meeting the beautiful, chocolate orbs he loved that were on the wrong face. "Ever since the battle, he has been different, deteriorating. I think it's possible the death of Narcissa did something to him and it triggered the…illness."

No one said anything as the obviously upset patriarch took another swallow of his tea.

"He didn't use to be like this," Lucius added under his breath. "Opinionated and spoiled, yes. But never abusive like this and never did he harbor so much hate."

Hermione couldn't help the response that escaped her mouth. "Lucius, Draco has always been hateful. I don't think you and Narcissa understand what he was like at Hogwarts."

Lucius shook his head. "To you, yes. He was a bigot and a right little arsehole, I'm sure! I'm ashamed to admit that was my fault. I raised him to believe the same nonsense that I had been raised to believe. He was never violent, though! I'm telling you he lost his reason and has suffered a complete personality change because of it."

"Oh, Lucius. I don't question the madness. You know your son better than I do, but he has been vile ever since I've known him! I don't see this change in him that you do."

Lucius could feel his anger swelling. Why couldn't she understand? Draco had not always been this way. Why wouldn't she see reason and give him some peace? It was important she know that he had not raised such a monster. "Perhaps, but did you ever know him to be physically abusive? Did he ever lay a hand on you before you were presented to us?"

Hermione was shocked at Lucius' denial. "Only because he couldn't have even if he had tried! I would have fought him, and lord knows Harry and Ron would have killed him. He is only as reprehensible as he always was, Lucius. It's just that under the rule of that demonic thing he calls Lord, he now gets to do what he wants. His hate harbors no boundaries and his desired victims have no defense. He is free to unleash his worst self!"

Lucius tossed his napkin on the table, his voice was raised as he snapped back, "I know my son, Miss Granger. As awful and abusive as he has been these past couple months, and as much as he seems to have affinity for this behavior, this is not who he is. Or at least it's not who he used to be. He is sick!"

The room was silent, and Lucius regretted his outburst. He held up his left hand in way of apology and continued in a more controlled voice, "I have thought long and hard about it. I believe it is a madness of obsession. Just as Bella is obsessed with the Dark Lord and terrorizing others on his behalf, Draco is the same. I regret I do not know about how prior ancestors were affected." He
straightened his shoulders and pushed himself up to stand. "Please excuse me, I need to check on him."

Hermione felt a pang of loss when he left without meeting her eye and without a kiss or even a touch. Why had he never told her about Draco's illness?

"Hermione, if what you said yesterday is true? And you love that man? Well, you are in an impossible situation. He basically has to choose between his son and the woman he loves. Don't make it easy by pushing him away when he needs you most. You don't have to agree with him, but don't argue with him."

Hermione recognized the truth of her mother's words. It was nothing she had not contemplated before. Right now, however… right now there was something else that disturbed her. Madness. Madness in the Black genes. Her hand draped over her belly protectively. Did that mean there would be madness in her son?

Hermione turned when she heard Bilby enter and announce, "Healer Jacobs is here."

She did not miss the way the Healer only had eyes for her mother as he walked in.

"I just wanted to check on you both before I attend to the younger Malfoy," he offered in way of explanation.

"Oh, thank you, Barnaby," Jane's soft voice rang out.

Hermione's eyes shot from the Healer to her mother in shock. Barnaby?

"I'm expected upstairs but thought I could attend to you both quickly. You know, just to be sure you aren't in need of medical attention."

"That's very considerate of you. I do still have an ache in my right shoulder that is quite a nuisance."

"Oh, oh. I have just the thing. I was able to procure some of that paste I mentioned before. The one that has the menthol mixed in it for that icy-hot combination."

Hermione leaned back in her chair and watched as Healer Jacobs, aka Barnaby, was on her mother like a bee on honey.

When she noticed a soft look of appreciation and… a twinkle? in her mother's eyes as well, Hermione knew something was up. She felt a flash of frustration. Her father had only been gone a month or so! After a moment, however, she felt that initial reaction fade as she watched them interact and realized how unfair it was of her to feel that way. Her mother had been through hell and back and deserved happiness where she could find it. A small smile couldn't be stopped as she watched how respectful and cautious the two of them were being towards each other. Whatever this was, it was new and fragile.

Lucius was pacing. He knew the healer had arrived, the wards told him so. He was just about to go find the man when he finally entered Draco's suite.

"I apologize, Mr. Malfoy. I quickly tended to the women downstairs before coming up."

"Fine. Fine," Lucius responded wearily as he watched the healer approach Draco and pull several wands out of his satchel.
Healer Jacobs went through his assessment motions slowly and thoroughly and Lucius felt a knot in his throat when the man looked at him with sorrow.

"Your son remains in coma, Mr. Malfoy. I am sorry to say that his condition is beyond my scope of ability to treat."

"Who do I need to consult? Tell me a name. The best in the field. I'll pay whatever it takes."

The healer cleaned his glasses and was about to respond when Lucius felt the wards react to another arrival.

"Excuse me, Healer Jacobs. It seems the Manor has a visitor. Stay with him until I return."

As Lucius made it down the main staircase and into the entrance foyer, he was confused by who was visiting and felt his irritation grow that someone dared to come at such a time of crisis. When he made it to the foyer, it was to find a very attractive couple who were having their cloaks tended to by the elves. The man was tall with broad shoulders and short sandy blond hair. His face bore the five o'clock shadow of a long day. His companion was a curvaceous and slightly younger woman with long, wavy black hair and olive skin.

Janky looked up at his master. "Master Mind Healer, Etan Browne, sir, and his wife and mediwitch, Rose."

Lucius' jaw fell as his memory came back to him like a bludger to the head. He immediately stepped forward to greet the healer he had written weeks ago and begged to come. The man was specialist from Siberia whom he had hoped could help with slowing Draco's illness.

Lucius held out his hand. "Of course, of course. I'm thrilled you could come. Thank you!"

The healer shook the hand in return as he casually glanced about the elaborate entrance foyer. "Well, I must admit that your letter intrigued me, Mr. Malfoy. I was in the middle of tending the crisis of an Arabian sheik however and was only able to leave yesterday."

Lucius extended his hand to Rose and fell into two of the most beautiful blue eyes he had ever seen. "Mrs. Browne. So glad you could join your husband on such a far journey."

"I'm afraid I would be at a loss without her, Mr. Malfoy. My Rose is one of the most knowledgeable mediwitches around when it comes to diseases and plagues of the mind. She is an essential key to our success."

Lucius gestured for them to follow and led them into his study where he was pleased to find the elves had quickly laid out assorted beverages, sandwiches, pastries, and stew.

"Please, have a seat and have something to eat and drink. You must be hungry from your journey. Portkey International travel can be quite tiresome. My son's circumstances have changed since I wrote you and I need to fill you in."

After insisting on Unbreakable Vows to keep it a secret, Lucius proceeded to tell them everything. From the day of the battle to his change in personality. He talked about the strong hate and violence, as well as the verbal and physical abuse. He admitted to what his son had been doing when he collapsed. In short, Lucius held nothing back.

It was less than thirty-minutes later that Lucius led the couple into Draco's suite.
Upon introducing them to Healer Jacobs, the surprised man practically stumbled over his words of praise. "Master Healer Etan Browne! And Mediwitch Browne as well! Forgive my excitement. I have long admired your work. Your essays and study's on Obliviation illness are some of the most groundbreaking I've come across. I would love the opportunity to discuss them with you should you have time. I also enjoyed the recent study you published in "Mind over Matter" on the effects of long-term Cruciatus. I have a couple at St. Mungo's I have been treating for almost twenty years. Any insight you could provide would..." He stopped speaking abruptly and his face turned slightly pink. "Forgive me. Forgive my impertinence, Mr. Malfoy." He met the stern eyes of Lucius and then looked at Draco. He gestured towards the unconscious patient. "This is why you are here." He stepped back and allowed the couple to approach the bedside.

Master Eton spoke without taking his eyes off the patient. "Time of his collapse?"

Lucius moved forward. "Around noon yesterday."

Healer Browne lifted Draco's eyelids as a light from his wand flicked back and forth to assess his pupil response. "And has he regained consciousness at any point?"

Healer Jacobs shook his head. "No, and from what I can tell this is an algarum multi episode and while I don't know how many layers, as I couldn't see past level six, I did sense a dark spell that is virulent with its movements. I believe it is a behavioral charm of some sort, but it is nothing I have ever seen before. In fact, I didn't discover it until this morning despite treating the young man for a concussion several weeks ago, as well as yesterday after he collapsed. It seems rather rooted, however. As though it has been there for some time."

Lucius watched as Healer Browne moved quickly. His wife handed him several rods, some metal in appearance and a few that were wooden. He watched in curiosity as the man laid three of them, each a different color, around Draco's head so that they overlapped. The rods bent easily as though they were made of something pliable. He then took a wand and held it over Draco's head as he chanted words in a language Lucius did not understand, although it sounded Russian.

Suddenly, layers of colors seemed to be pulled from Draco's forehead. Beautiful shades of primaries and pastels that reached for the healer's wand, yet did not break free from Draco. It was as though they were made of rubber bands and as the healer pulled them taught, Lucius feared they would rupture.

A subtle black shadow that moved like smoke wisped amongst the blue and green layers that were closest to the wand and furthest from Draco. "Fascinating," Rose whispered.

"Quite," agreed Etan. "Healer Jacobs, your assessment was quite sound." When the bands seemed to stretch no further, Rose took the wand from Etan and the layers of color faded into nothingness. Without looking away from Draco, the healer asked, "Mr. Malfoy, is your son's Occlumency unique to him or is his skill inherited?"

"How did you...?"

He sighed heavily as he turned back to face Lucius. "It's what I do, Mr. Malfoy. Please, answer the question."

"Draco inherited his Occlumency skill from me, just as I inherited mine from my father and so on. We have always been proficient at keeping others out as well as self-occluding."

"That confirms what I suspected."
"Tell me, please. Will my son be alright? What does Occlusion have to do with his current state?"

Etan looked back at Lucius, wearily. "It would be best if we sit while I explain." He glanced back at his wife. "How many eaters do we have?"

"We still have six. I don't know if the ones at home are mature enough to be used yet."

"Use all six. The way the it's rooted, I worry if even that will be enough."

"Oh, I've heard about these, but never seen them used." Healer Jacobs said excitedly before clearing his throat in embarrassment.

"Eaters?" Lucius asked.

"I think it's best we sit. My wife will get started while I explain."

The three wizards left the Mediwitch to her craft and headed back downstairs to the study. As soon as the three were seated, the Mind Master began to speak.

"Mr. Malfoy forgive my bluntness, but I don't know if I can save your son. He has two separate pathological issues at play. One is self-induced and the other is a curse. An ancient curse I have only encountered one other time in my vast experience."

"A curse? What kind of curse?"

"It actually has a few names because it was so rare that each time it was discovered it was believed to be the first. Infidelitatis, Proditur charm, and Opposita Veritati to name a few."

Healer Jacobs bounced in his seat. "This is very rare indeed."

Master Eton nodded his head in agreement. "I've seen it once, about twenty years ago in Hong Kong. A female sorceress used it on her lover who had grown to despise her and her jealousy after he fell in love with another witch."

"I don't understand. What does this curse do?" Lucius asked as he rubbed his head.

"In short, it causes a person to flip their allegiance or their loyalty towards a living thing. Anyone who was loved is now hated, anyone who was feared, is now revered. Anyone who was mildly liked, is now mildly disliked. The intensity of the emotion or feeling is the same, it's just goes in the opposite direction. It's been used for personal as well as political reasons. Do you have any idea who might have cast this curse on your son?"

Lucius closed his eyes. He was going to kill Bellatrix. If it was the last thing he did. It certainly had to have come from her. "I have an idea." He swallowed heavily. "Can you cure him Master Healer Browne?"

The healer smiled sadly. "First off, call me Etan. To answer your question, I don't know. But we are going to try."

Healer Jacobs asked, "You'll use the eaters?"

"I'm sorry, eaters?" Lucius asked.

"This is why we needed to be sitting. How squeamish are you, Mr. Malfoy?"

"Call me Lucius and I'm not squeamish at all."
"Eaters are the common name of larvae parasites that consume curses. There are different types of parasites that cure many different ailments. Maggots can be used to eat away the dead tissue from a non-healing wound, certain worms can be ingested to cure stomach ailments, and eaters are used for brain spells and curses. They are highly effective against certain ones and not so effective against others. Your son's curse, however, has been deemed incurable for centuries. It is said it's as effective as the killing curse only it moves much slower."

Lucius' ears began to ring with panic. "So, there's no hope? My son is dying?"

"I didn't say there is no hope, Lucius. Others have said it is incurable, not I. Rose and I have been breeding a new type of eater. One that feeds on Dark Magic specifically. There are too many dark curses that plague the mind and it is our hope to find a cure. We have had success. I must confess, however, that the spell corrupting your boy is very complex and strongly rooted. We have not tested the parasites on such a complicated process before.

"But this could be it? This could cure him of the spell and bring him back to the way he used to be?"

"Lucius, I mentioned there were two ailments that needed to be dealt with. The spell is one, the other is of your son's making. He has Occluded himself to the deepest recesses of his mind. You see, the brain has layers and layers of levels of conscious thought which lead to more layers of sub-conscious thought. The colors you observed earlier represent those layers. I can only make an educated guess, but I believe your son was self-Occluding very strongly when the curse was cast. It knocked his self-Occlumency to the deepest level of his subconscious.

"But if he was self-Occluding, how could he have so much hate? Our emotions are dulled when we utilize this skill," Lucius pointed out.

Etan looked at him with patient understanding. "The mind is a very complex thing, Lucius. Draco was cursed to feel emotions at the very same time he was Occluding himself from them. I believe the curse has been influencing his behavior while his Oocclusion has been protecting his subconscious and his sense of self.

"However, something caused that self-Occlusion to crack. When I was examining him, I could see it. It was small but certainly enough for Draco to get a glimpse of what he's been protecting himself from. It was enough to cause his defense mechanisms to slam the door on consciousness. In short, he won't wake up until he is ready to wake up and I have no idea how long that might be."

When the three men reentered the bedroom, it was to see Rose levitating a small bug, no larger than the tip of a quill, from a little container to Draco's nose. She offered by way of explanation, "The nose and ears are the entrance points. The eyes don't work as well, and patients have woken with optic nerve damage. We haven't had any issues using the ears or nose, though."

"Is that the last one?" Etan asked his wife as he stepped close to her side.

"We have one more. I decided to cast another sterilization charm on them before I began."

Etan chuckled. "Always so cautious, my little germophobe."

Lucius was exhausted. The healers were in their guest suite and had asked to eat in private. Lucius didn't blame them and was relieved he would not have to play dinner host after such a long day. Their suite was next to Draco's so that they could check on him as needed. Janky would see to their every need and come to Lucius if his presence was desired at any point.

When he entered his own suite, Hermione was in his bed wearing nothing but a small smile. Her
voice was soft, and her simple words calmed him. "I missed you today."

Lucius approached the bed and when her worried eyes met his own, she climbed towards him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Her small body pressed up against his chest and warmed a chill he hadn’t realize he had been suffering. He exhaled deeply and buried his nose into her soft curls as his hands and arms coiled around her and held her close.

Her words sounded muffled as she pressed her face into the crook of his neck. "I'm sorry that you are hurting, Lucius."

His fingertips trailed lightly up the soft skin of her back and then back down again, but this time along her sides.

She let out a small squeal and grabbed his hands as she proclaimed, "That tickles!"

Unable to resist, he mercilessly wiggled his fingers along her ribs causing the most wonderful sound to erupt from her mouth. Laughter. Loud peels of pure and playful joy rang throughout the room. He didn't think he had ever heard her laugh with such abandon.

"Lucius! Stop!" she yelled out as she fell back upon the mattress, naked and stunning. Her face was radiant, and her eyes were bright.

He slipped onto the bed and grabbed her hands and held them against the mattress as he studied her face.

Her giggling subsided as her bottom lip was sucked into her mouth and pinned down by perfect teeth. Her eyes traced from his mouth to his eyes and he couldn't miss the seductive gaze for what it was. An invitation.

A flick of his wand and soft coils of rope wrapped around her wrists and drew her hands gently over her head. If she tugged on them with any real effort, they would release their hold, but he was relieved when he saw no fear in her eyes. He loved that she trusted him so despite what she had been through.

Lucius had not played this game with her before and made his intentions perfectly clear when he quickly conjured a peacock feather and held it before her.

Her eyes grew wide and she screeched, "Don't you dare!"

Lucius grinned as he stood up and began to undress slowly. The charmed feather started at the tops of her feet and leisurely traced up her legs. He chuckled as she squirmed and writhed, her back arching magnificently when the feather swirled around her navel before continuing its journey to her breasts where it stroked her nipples. "Luciuuuusss," she mewled as her eyes closed and a rosy blush washed over chest and face.

He stepped towards her and lightly kissed the tops of her feet before trailing his tongue along the same path as the feather before him. She slithered about languorously but her gentle restraints left her no options for escape.

When his tongue reached her inner thigh and offered a small swipe on her hardened nub, her hips jolted forward.

"Stop teasing and fuck me you wicked, wicked man."

Not one to disappoint, Lucius slid up her body and nestled between her thighs and kissed her gently.
With a quick thrust he was home. They both froze in relieved bliss and then he began to move. All playfulness gone, his hips thrust in and out.

"Please," she cried with a breathy moan. "I want to touch you."

He ignored her pleas and continued to pound in and out of her as he dropped his head and latched onto her right nipple where he nibbled softly. Immediately she tensed as her pelvic walls clamped down on him and a groan of sheer ecstasy met his ears.

He pushed himself up as he slowed his pace and stared into her heavily lidded gaze. Her eyes flew wide when he abruptly slid out of her and quickly descended down her torso and latched his lips onto her clit.

"Fuck!" she cried out as he then slid two fingers into her passage and proceeded to pump them in and out as he continued to nibble on her. She tensed and liquid nectar gushed around his fingers. He pulled them out and sucked them into his mouth before he dropped his face and pressed into her core. His mouth was feral with its hunger as it feasted on the taste of her.

She was whimpering like a wounded animal as he lifted her calves and draped them over his shoulders. Her eyes looked drugged as he once again showed no mercy and gave her exactly what they both wanted. After a minute of hard pounding, he reached his hand down and stroked her one more time. The minute her walls convulsed for the third time, he allowed himself to succumb to his own bliss.

He fell forward and was careful not to crush her as he fought to catch his breath. He lifted his wand off the mattress and released her soft binds and smiled into her neck when her arms immediately wrapped around him.

"Mmm, love you," she whispered.

Lucius lifted her off the bed and adjusted the covers so he could slide her under them. Once she was nestled in, he placed a light kiss upon her forehead and stroked her hair. She was as asleep in minutes.

Lucius pulled on his robe and after watching her sleep for a while, he moved to his settee where he sat in front of the hearth and stared into the flames. His thoughts went back to his son.

If the curse couldn't be cured, it would be a blessing if Draco never woke. If it could be cured, however. Wow. The thought gave him a swell of hope that was almost painful.

He had wanted to tell Hermione. He had wanted to share the news. He wanted her to hope as much he did for his son to emerge healthy again. He knew how she felt, however. She had made it perfectly clear at breakfast. So, he had kept it to himself.

There was someone who would be happy, however. He glanced at Hermione as he made his way out of his suite and downstairs to the parlor where he knew his flower would be. Narcissa would be elated. They had both been correct. It wasn't the Black madness, but it was an illness. A curse. A curse he would see Bellatrix destroyed for if it was the last thing he did.
Hermione awoke happily cocooned in Lucius’ arms. The prior day had started with their disagreement at breakfast but had ended gloriously lost in each other bodies. She tangled her fingers through his silky white-blond locks as she silently prayed that Draco would continue to linger in his state of unconsciousness. Perhaps Lucius would have him moved to St Mungo’s. The thought that she might not have to marry the sadist made her feel heady.

“What has you stirring so early, pet?” Lucius asked groggily.

“Ahh, he speaks! You were not very loquacious when you came to bed last night,” she teased. “As a matter of fact, you didn’t say one word. You just tickled me and tormented me into submission.”

Lucius grinned playfully as he snaked an arm around her waist and flipped her to her other side before pulling her back so that she was spooned into his chest.

“You know, it’s very rude to just manhandle me like that! It could get you into all sorts of trouble.” She peeked back over her shoulder to find he had one eye open. “You realize I’m not wearing my collar and you could find yourself punished for your bad manners.”

He pulled her tighter and kissed the top of her head. “Hmm, do tell. What sort of punishment shall my offense of snuggling the victim warrant?”

“Don’t forget your feather assault.”

“Ah yes, a brutal attack indeed.”

“It was! Tickling is actually a form of torture you realize.”

“Hmm, I shall notify the Dark Lord at once. I’m sure he’ll want to add it to his repertoire.”

Hermione was about to tease some more when Lucius ended their banter with serious words.

“The special mind healers I contacted a couple weeks ago arrived yesterday. It was a stroke of luck as I had forgotten they were coming.” Lucius could feel her tense in his arms and planted a tender kiss to her temple.

“I assume they assessed him. What did they say?”

“He was cursed. They say it’s a curse that causes one to switch their loyalties and affections. To love who was hated and hate who was loved. The intensity of the emotion corresponds directly to the original…feeling.”

There was a moment of silence as Lucius gave her a chance to absorb what he had just said.
Hermione didn’t think it made sense. Draco had always hated her, and it hadn’t ever changed. Before she could point out this contradiction, he continued.

“I gave it some thought and it makes sense. Just look at how he turned on Jupiter and Mony. Then there is Pansy who, while he was never in love with her, he always treated her with respect. He has refused to acknowledge his mother’s portrait whereas he used to be very protective of her when she was alive.” He rubbed his eyes. “I realize that you are the anomaly. We won’t know for sure until he wakes up.”

“Hmm, I do agree that he has changed towards Pansy. At school it was obvious she was in love with him, but I never saw him be ugly or condescending to her. Of course, I didn’t pay a lot of attention, but in classes he seemed to respect her and treat her kindly.”

Hermione shook her head. “What about Theo and Blaise? Shouldn’t he have not liked them according to the curse?”

Lucius had pondered this as well. “I think Draco was only close to Greg and Vince. Theo and Blaise were in Draco’s circle, but he never really brought them around the Manor much. I’m not sure how he really regarded them.”

Lucius rolled onto his back and Hermione moved onto her side so that she was facing him again. She snuggled up close and threaded her fingers through his random chest hairs.

“So, he’s in a coma because of the curse?” she asked gently.

“No, he is in a coma because his self-Occlumency cracked while he was beating you yesterday and he couldn’t handle it. At least, that is what the healers think.” After a pause he added. “He was self-Occluding to protect himself from his cursed behavior.”

Hermione pushed herself up so that she was looking down at him. “You told the healers he was hurting me?”

Lucius met her eyes with honest conviction. “I told them everything. They will need all the pieces if they are going to put my boy back together again.”

It was four days later when Draco finally began to stir. He wasn’t awake, but he had moved during the night and the healers had heard him mumbling in his sleep. They were very optimistic he would wake soon.

Hermione had no appetite and moved the eggs around on her plate as dread slowly eased into the pit of her stomach. The past five days had been bliss. With Abraxas’ portrait burned and Ediva mainly hanging out in the Lady’s Parlor, Lucius and Hermione had been free to be themselves. With Draco in a coma, she had enjoyed five wonderful days without having his grubby hands on her body or his hateful spite in her ears.

She and her mother had taken advantage of their free reign of the house and spent time exploring the massive dwelling. They also spent part of each day at her father’s gravesite where they laughed and cried through memory after memory. Her collar had become a thing of the past and she had been diligently practicing gaining control of her wandless magic again. She was just getting the hang of the new feel of it and was now able to harness the baby’s magic and add it to her own.

Now all of that would stop, however. Draco would wake any minute and the stupid bond would
have him immediately on her and he would be back to his sadistic behavior. Her life would be hell all over again. She simply held little confidence in what the healers were claiming.

Hermione felt eyes on her and peeked across the table into the knowing gaze of her mother. When she felt another pull, it was to find the mediwitch, Rose, watching her with what seemed like understanding as well. Hermione offered them both a small shrug in response as Lucius and Etan chatted amongst themselves and were oblivious to her discomfort.

Hermione didn’t blame Lucius. How could she? His son was recovering. She could not fault him for being happy and having hope. It was a hope that she wished she shared.

She would endure whatever was coming her way. She had no choice, after all. Maybe the healers were right and Draco’s brutality towards her would lessen. Rose had spoken to her about it at length the day before. She had asked Hermione if there was a chance Draco had harbored feelings for her in the past that she was unaware of. Hermione had vehemently denied that possibility. It was ludicrous.

Hermione liked Rose. They had developed a bit of a friendship over the course of the past few days. While the mediwitch was older by almost fifteen years, they had found they had much in common; a desire to learn and a profound love of Runes, Arithmancy and reading. Rose talked of the many Wizarding libraries she had visited all over the world in her travels – and a few amazing Muggle ones as well.

The most interesting thing about the witch, in Hermione’s opinion, was her education. Rose had attended an exclusive wizarding school in the Netherlands that Hermione had never even heard of. It was for children who knew they wanted to be healers and they had to pass certain aptitude tests before they could even be considered for admission. All their studies were designed around healing. History class was about the evolution of wizarding medicine. Potions class was focused on elixirs that treated symptoms and cured ailments. Even more impressive, when she graduated, she not only took her healing specific NEWTS but had already been apprenticing under Etan for over a year. They had fallen in love almost instantly. It was a life Hermione tried not to envy. Jealousy was an ugly emotion, but it was hard to contain sometimes.

One of the best parts of the past week had easily been when Etan and Rose pulled out the Magic Carpet that the Arabian sheikh had gifted them after they cured two of his wives. Despite her fear of heights, Hermione had enjoyed the adventure. She had been reluctant at first, but after a couple minutes she found herself relaxing into Lucius’ arms and enjoying the breeze on her face as the carpet flew all over the Malfoy Estate. The day flying had held magnificent views but the night flying under the stars had become her favorite. She had been hoping Harry could be disguised or Polyjuiced so that he could come visit and go for a ride as well. He would have loved it.

Now that Draco would be waking soon, however, Hermione realized the fun times were behind her. Her reprieve was over.

Her thoughts were interrupted when the Headmaster walked in with Ginny in tow. Lucius and Etan stood and greeted Severus.

“Did you bring the potion?” Etan asked.

Snape nodded. “Yes, the minute he wakes we will give it to him. It will be unbearable for him otherwise.”

Hermione wondered what they were talking about and it was Rose who walked around and sat beside her to explain as the men left the room.
“It’s an antidote to the bonding potion. So that Draco won’t be in torture when he wakes.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. *Lord forbid DDD have a moment of discomfort.*

Ginny smiled conspiratorially at Hermione, fully comprehending what the witch was thinking.

Rose looked towards the door the men had just exited. “I need to help Etan. The last eater is to be removed this morning and it will be easier if the boy doesn’t wake until after that deed is done.”

Hermione smiled at Rose as she took her leave.

It was Jane Granger who stood to leave next. “I find I am tired this morning. Barnaby was very kind and brought me a couple John Grisham novels to get lost in and I stayed up much too late reading. Please excuse me for a bit.”

Hermione gave Ginny a sad smile when it was down to just the two of them. “Wanna sit outside?” Hermione asked.

Ginny nodded her agreement and the two young witches walked arm in arm down the hall and stepped outside onto the veranda the elves had set up for Hermione’s enjoyment. Cushioned chairs and lounges were sheltered from the summer sun by overhead lattice that had vines of lilac weaving throughout the pattern.

“Wow, it’s really nice out here,” Ginny said as she looked around at the copious rose bushes bordering the slate patio.

Hermione would have agreed with Ginny the day before, but today she saw it for what it was; an extension of her prison disguised as something beautiful. She sat down on one of the lounges and lay back on it without responding.

Hermione’s eyes suddenly brightened when she looked at Ginny and asked, “How is our friend? Is he doing well?”

Ginny smiled. “Our friend is doing well and said to tell you he would see you soon.”

It had been decided that Harry’s name would not be said outside of headquarters. There were too many risks that someone would overhear and the secret that he was alive would be discovered.

Hermione responded despondently. “I doubt that will happen. Now that dickfuck is waking up, I won’t be allowed out of his presence except during the work day and who knows when, or if, he’ll be well enough to even return to work.”

Ginny sighed quietly. “I feel guilty that my circumstances have been so much better than your own. I hate what you have to endure. Severus doesn’t tell me much, but I can tell it bothers him. Sometimes when he gets home from the Manor he just sits in front of the fire and stares. And trying to get him to open up and talk is like trying to get a dragon to play dress up at a tea party.”

Hermione laughed despite herself. “Don’t feel bad for me Ginny. I’m happy you are in a good place and with a good man. If I had ended up with Severus, I highly doubt the outcome would be nearly so palatable. Hogwarts might have burned down by now.” She stared up at the lavender blooms and sighed heavily. “In truth, if it wasn’t for Draco, I would be in the same situation as you. I love Lucius and he loves me.”

Ginny continued to contemplate her friend. “Still, you never did tell me what happened to you, ’Mione. You never said where you were those six weeks before you were given to the Malfoys.”
Hermione looked away.

“Don’t you think it would be good to talk about it? Has Lucius asked you about it?”

Hermione glanced back at her friend and then answered, “No. He’s never asked. I think he doesn’t want to know. I think he feels enough guilt over what I have to endure now. He knows I came to him a virgin, so I wasn’t raped, but there are many types of sexual assault and not all of them involve sex. It’s best he doesn’t know.”

“This is not about what’s best for Lucius Malfoy, Hermione. It’s about what is best for you! Talking things through can be cleansing. I’m here if you want to talk, okay?”

“Thank you, Ginny. Maybe in a little bit. Wanna play cards?”

Lucius, Etan and Severus turned to the door when Rose entered. “How is he?” she asked.

“Still unconscious,” answered Etan.

“And the last eater?”

“I just removed it. All six are accounted for and in the container.”

Rose nodded and walked over to the table beside the bed. She picked up the container and carried it to the fireplace and lifted the lid. A look of disgust clouded her face as a foul odor assaulted her nose. The parasites were sluggish and twice as large as they had been before they were inserted. She flicked her wrist and tossed the eaters into the raging hearth. There was a hiss and sizzle as they began to burn. Wisps of black smoke and rivulets of a dark tar like substance erupted from the dying larvae.

“She hates me, Mother.”

“What are you talking about, Draco? How could anyone hate you?”

“I called her a Mudblood.”

“Well, that wasn’t very nice. Why do you like this Muggleborn girl anyway? Your father will never approve of any sort of friendship with her. Best to maintain your distance. However, there is no need to be cruel. Don’t let me hear about you calling anyone names again.”

He felt like he was spinning. Voices. Was that his father? He sounds upset. He sounds worried. Don’t worry, Father. I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere.

More spinning and flashes of light. Oh, I remember that night.

“Pansy, I’m not staring! She looks like a pixie next to that oaf she’s dancing with is all. Can’t they see how ridiculous they look together?”

“Draco, let’s go! We can sit in the alcove outside of Slytherin and I’ll let you feel under my blouse again.”
“In a minute, Pans.” Where is she? Ah, there she is. Why does she look upset? What did that Weaslebee say to her? He’s such a prick. Why does she spend all her time with such tossers?

Who is that strange voice? Stop touching my face.

“Look, he moved again.”

Was that Godfather’s voice?

“He should be waking soon.”

Who is that talking? It doesn’t matter. I need to find… oh wait! No! I need to protect.

“It’s important Theo, okay? Just make sure the Mudblood stays away from the Room of Requirement tonight. Some stuff is going down and where she goes, her dorky friends follow. Keep them away so they don’t cause everything to go tits up.”

“Sure, Drake. Whatever you need.”

All this spinning, I’m starting to feel sick.

“Open your eyes.”

Father again. No, I don’t want to. Father doesn’t understand. He won’t help. I remember…


(Oh, Merlin. I can’t do this. They’ll kill him and Fenrir will rip her to shreds.)

“I can’t – I can’t be sure.” **

“Draco, if we are the ones to hand Potter over to the Dark Lord, everything will be forgiven.” **

(Yes, Father. I know that!)

“I don’t know.” **

(I need to walk away. I can’t do this. I’ll stand by Mother.)

“Wait…look Draco, isn’t it the Granger girl?” **

(Dammit, Mother! Why did you have to recognize her! Fuck!)

“Maybe, it could be.” **

(I’ve got to get her out of here.)

No more spinning. Please!

“Draco, please open your eyes.”

Father’s voice. That’s father.

Don’t do it, Draco. Stay asleep. It will be bad if you wake. Stay hidden. You’ve done something horrible. It’s best to just hide.
My heart. It’s pounding. I feel sick. Oh, Merlin. I need... I don’t know what I need. But it’s pulling me. It’s her. I need her. I need her, now!

“Hmmio… come… now…”

Wait, did I say that out loud?

“He spoke! Did you hear that? He said something!”

FATHER’S VOICE AGAIN. OKAY, FATHER. FOR YOU, BECAUSE I HATE TO LET YOU DOWN.

Draco’s lids began to flutter as flashes of the past several months met his emerging consciousness. His heart was pounding against his ribcage like an enraged caged animal against its binds. His vision struggled to focus as his eyes met bright and unwelcome light. His breathing was rapid, and his voice was raw from lack of use. As his pupils adjusted, his father’s face came into focus. A face that looked like it had aged a decade. flashes from seconds before morphed into complete memories.

Oh, Merlin. What have I done?! “Fuck!” he bellowed.

“What was that?” asked Ginny.

Hermione put her cards down and looked back through the French doors. “I don’t know. It sounded like a yell.”

They both stayed silent and could hear the distant murmur of frantic voices.

Hermione’s hand moved to her mouth as tears clouded her vision. The pull. It was back. A sense of urgency had her standing immediately. She looked from Ginny to the door and started to move. “No! God, no!” she cried as her legs carried her into the house leaving Ginny behind.

She knew this would happen. He would wake and immediately demand that she come to him. Although she didn’t hear him call her, obviously he must have because her heart was racing with its need to satisfy the command and her feet couldn’t move fast enough.

“Quickly, give him the potion,” Severus demanded.

Lucius took it and attempted to cradle Draco’s head, but it was thrashing from side to side as tears rolled out of the boy’s eyes and trailed down his temples onto the bed linens. “Draco! You must drink this! It will sever the bond.”

Draco looked back at his father, his expression delirious. “I need her. NOW!” He tried to push himself up, but his arms trembled from the strain, and it was obvious he was disoriented.

“Draco, drink this and you will instantly feel better.”

“Just pour it into his mouth,” Rose suggested.

Severus pinched Draco’s nose and the minute he opened his mouth to draw in air, Lucius poured a few drops of the antidote onto his tongue. Draco’s grip was weak as a kitten when it grasped
Severus’ wrist to pull it away fruitlessly.

“Draco, drink!” Lucius demanded once more.

Draco’s eyes were wide but a flash of something like recognition came over them and after a pause he opened his lips and allowed Lucius to pour the potion into his mouth.

The room was dead silent as everyone waited for Draco to comprehend what was going on around him.

Hermione had just made it to the top of the stairs when the pull abruptly stopped. Her heart slowed and her panic ebbed. She froze and stared towards Draco’s room as her mind spun with the possibilities. Was he dead? Did he drink the potion?

She contemplated going back down the steps but instead continued to slowly approach the bedroom suite. She could hear soft mumbling and then a voice that was congested with tears. Lucius’ voice. “Draco, son. It’s going to be alright.”

The minute Hermione peeked into the bedroom, Draco’s eyes flew to hers. Panic was written on his face and when he saw the look of revulsion in her eyes, his new reality assaulted him like ice in his veins. A swell of nausea overwhelmed him, and his hand flew to his mouth as the muffled words escaped from his lips. “No, no. It’s never going to be alright.” He started to stand, not taking his eyes off of her, but his weak legs gave out from under him and he watched in devastation as she turned and ran away.

“Don’t try to stand, you are too weak,” Lucius gently instructed.

Draco didn’t resist. He was stunned. Numb. This had to be a nightmare.

“Is he awake?” the voice of Narcissa could be heard from her portrait in the corner.

“Yes, yes,” Lucius responded as he and Severus assisted Draco back into bed.

The sound of her voice caused his head to whip around. Mummy. “Is that...is that Mother?”

Lucius looked at Severus and then back at Draco. “Draco, you’ve had a shock. Just calm for a minute and we can talk.”

Draco closed his eyes and rested his head on the pillow as it all continued to come back to him. The battle, pushing Hermione out of danger, stunning Harry and then running to his mother. Oh Salazar. I killed her.

“I killed Mother,” he said weakly as his forehead crinkled with anguish and fresh tears fell.

“Rose, a calming draught. Quickly darling,” Etan said in a rushed voice.

Rose grabbed a vial out of the satchel and handed it to her husband promptly.

“Draco, my name is Etan. I’m a healer and you need to drink this.”

Draco remembered. He remembered it all.
Keep calm. Keep calm, Draco chanted to himself. He wanted to rage and yell about the unfairness of it all. The more that came back, the more he hated himself. Why didn’t I just die?

He kept his eyes closed and feigned sleep, but in truth he really wanted a shower. His mouth tasted like something had died in it and he felt like he had a film of funk all over his body. Besides, he needed to think. He needed to be away from all these prying eyes.

His lids still closed, he quietly said, “I can feel you all staring. I know I’m handsome, but please…”

“Ah, my Godson is back to his usual charming self. I shall return to the castle.”

Draco could hear his father escort Severus to the door. The sound of clanking glass vials and then a zipper being pulled was not enough to make him open his eyes.

“Lucius, Rose and I shall be in our room. He will need to be watched. Here is another vial of calming draught. Come get us if you need our assistance.”

Draco swallowed the unwelcome lump in his throat when he heard his father become slightly choked up as he thanked the healer and whoever Rose was.

“I can’t thank you enough, Etan. Rose.” The sound of shaking hands. “You saved my son.”

Their response was whispered as Lucius walked them out and therefore was indecipherable.

“Alright, Draco. Everyone has left.”

Draco opened one eye and once again was disturbed by how tired his father looked. “You look like shit, Father.”

“Well, you look and sound like my son. Do you want to sit up?”

“I want a shower and a toothbrush.”

“Yes, I’m sure you would. I’ll help you.”

When Draco made it to the point of sitting on the side of the bed, he glanced across the room and spotted the flimsy cot he had forced Hermione to sleep on. As his eyes moved about the room he was assaulted with memory after memory of his hand, his belt, and even his fist hitting her…beating her…raping her. Visions of the girl crawling on the floor, his floor, made him sick to his stomach. He closed his eyes to make it stop, only it didn’t work. His hands grasped his head in anguish as he remembered that first night. He had been so cruel and so rough. He had mocked her and belittled her. And she had been a virgin! Then he remembered the mirror and a splash of bile made it up and burned the back of his throat. The pensieve memories!

“I’m going to be…” Before he could finish his sentence, he began to dry heave.

He felt Lucius grab his shoulders but the ringing in his ears prevented him hearing his father’s words. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and shoved the offered handkerchief away. The images kept coming…

Bending her over the dining room table while pulling her hair.

Banging her head against his bedside table, causing her to bleed.
The horse bit in the barn and her naked body on display in front of Theo and Blaise.

Kicking Jupiter.

Punching her in the pool room, almost drowning her.

Beating her with the belt and then hitting the house elf.

Insulting her.

Raping her.

Humiliating her.

Using Pansy in front of her. Oh, Pansy.

Finding her parents. Oh Salazar. NO!

Beating her Mother.

Beating his Mother.

Killing his mother.

Lucius was not a crier, but when his son fell to the floor before him and started sobbing, it was all he could do to keep himself together.

He dropped to his knees and took his boy’s face in his hands. “Draco...son. Listen to me. It’s not your fault! You were cursed. It’s going to be alright. It’s going to be alright.”

Draco’s vision was blurry through tears as the naïve words left his father’s mouth. “No, Father. It’s not alright. It will never be alright again!”

“Yes. Yes, it will. Come, drink some more potion.” Lucius stood and headed towards the nightstand.

Draco remained sitting on the floor and stared at the wall across from him.

Lucius’ heart broke even more when he looked back and saw the fight had left his son’s eyes. He rushed back and held the vial out. “Here, take this. You need it. It will help.”

“Why? What’s the potion going to do? I killed my mother and I raped and beat the girl I’m in love with.”

Lucius stared for a minute, certain he had misheard. “Draco, what are you talking about? You didn’t kill your mother, the Dark Lord did. You’ve always disliked Miss Granger. You’re confused, son. Let’s get you that shower.”

Draco shook his head. “No, Father. I killed her.” He looked up and into the stunned eyes of the man who would now hate him forever. “I killed Mother.”

Lucius swallowed. “You were cursed, Draco. You were cursed. Come, let’s get you that shower.”

Draco was tired and didn’t have the energy to explain. Besides, a shower would feel good. The minute Lucius led him into his bathroom, however, images once again flooded his brain of Hermione.
Hermione kneeling on the shower floor.

Bathing him.

Being raped by him.

Assaulted by him.


Lucius nodded his head. “Fine, across the hall. You can use the suite across the hall.”

Draco leaned his forehead against the tile as the water pounded his skin. He watched the rivulets disappear into the drain and found he was jealous. If only he could be washed away as well.

When he emerged out of the bathroom, it was to find the elves had already transferred his things from his old suite to his new. They had even moved the furniture so that it was arranged nothing like his prior room. He noticed his father sitting by the blazoning hearth and there was a refreshment tray on the table. He slipped into a pair of sweats and a T-shirt and made his way cautiously over.

Neither said anything for a moment until Lucius broke the silence. “You must be starving. The nutrition charms the healers used do nothing to combat physical hunger.”

“I don’t think I can eat,” he responded simply as he sat on the sofa.

“Some tea perhaps then.”

Draco shrugged noncommittally as he watched his father prepare him a cup. Not wishing to be rude, he took the offering and proceeded to take a sip as his father warily watched him. It tasted good. Really good. He took another swallow and settled back into the cushions as he stared into the fire.

After a few minutes he felt like he could speak. “I’m so sorry, Father.”

“You have nothing for which to apologize, Draco. If anyone here has reason to be sorry, it’s me.” He watched Draco for a minute before adding, “We need to talk, but it does not have to be now if you aren’t ready.”

Draco shook his head minutely. “No, now is as good as any. Time won’t change the past and it won’t make it any easier.”

“Why don’t you tell me what you remember.”

“My last vivid memory is the battle at Hogwarts. I remember being worried about my friends. I remember,” he swallowed and closed his eyes briefly, “I remember Vince dying in the Fiendfyre.”

“Fiendfyre?”

“In the Room of Requirement.” He blew out a puff of air. “Why that stupid bastard thought it would be smart to conjure it, I have no idea. But it ended up killing him. Greg and I would have perished as well if Potter, Weasley, and Hermione hadn’t saved us.”

Lucius wanted to know more, but in the grand scheme of things, they could talk about that another time. “What happened next?”
Draco shot a nervous glance towards his dad before hesitantly answering, “I uh, I shadowed the trio.”

“Why did you do that?” he asked curiously.

Draco looked up at his Father apologetically, “I didn’t want him to win, Father. I’m sorry to let you down. I just can’t support…that creature.” He set down his cup and stared into the hearth. “After what he put us through; after living here and turning our lives upside down. After telling me that if I didn’t kill Dumbledore yours and mother’s lives would be forfeit”.

He propped his elbows on his knees and steepled his hands before rubbing his eyes tiredly.

His voice was pained “After forcing me to … I just didn’t - want - him - to win!” He ran his hands through his hair and then sat straight up. “I wanted Potter to defeat him as was prophesized. I wanted the nightmare to end!”

Draco turned to his father expecting to see disappointment and was shocked to find understanding instead, maybe even pride. He felt emboldened to continue. “I followed them to protect them, Father. To help Potter and to…” he swallowed, “…keep her safe.”

Lucius’ mind was spinning as the pieces started coming together. After a moment heartfelt words left his mouth. “I’m proud of you, Draco. I’ve never been prouder.” He saw the confusion on his son’s face as well as the shock and a huge wash of guilt slammed into him as he realized how foreign the words must have sounded. He was certain he had never said them to Draco before and it pained him to realize it.

“You came to the truth and accepted it long before I did. Not only did you accept it, you tried to do something about it. You tried to help. I’m only sorry I wasn’t there for you. I’m ashamed to admit that, had you come to me, I would have been too afraid to turn against him. I would have tried to stop you.”

Draco was silent. He just admitted to opposing the Dark Lord and his father was proud of him? He began to wonder if he was still dreaming.

“What happened next?”

Draco picked up a lemon cookie as he responded, “I stayed in the shadows while the cease fire was happening.”

Lucius nodded. “Cissa and I were desperate to find you, son. We had come across Severus who was on death’s door, so I stayed with him while Cissa went in search of you. I didn’t see your mother again until the cease fire when he summoned all of us into the forest. When you didn’t come, we were frantic.”

Draco nibbled on the cookie. “When I saw both of you following behind Voldemort and his procession down to the castle courtyard, I was so relieved you were alive, but I thought it was all lost when Hagrid was carrying Potter’s body.”

“Yes, we were thrilled to see you.” He smiled lightly. “Cissa grabbed my hand and squeezed so hard I thought she would break it. I thought the battle was over and we would be going home soon. Cissa, though. She knew Potter was alive. She was the one who lied to the Dark Lord.” Lucius laughed without humor. “She was brave, like you.”

Draco couldn’t control the tears that welled in his eyes and quickly swiped them away. “I thought I was imagining it when I saw a small rise in Harry’s chest and could see he was still breathing. So,
when you and Mother beckoned me to join you… that’s why I stayed on the other side of the courtyard.”

Lucius laughed without humor. “I was angry. I didn’t understand.”

“Then, when Potter revealed himself to be alive, and Longbottom swung at the snake and missed, all hell broke loose. We were all shuffled back into the castle as the curses started flying all around us. I just wanted to stick to my plan; help Harry and keep Granger from doing anything stupid like getting herself killed.” He shook his head. “Only debris was falling all around me and I was separated from them. By the time I broke through it, Weasley was dead and Harry was a blubbering mess. I couldn’t see Hermione, so I ran over to him and told him to keep fighting, you know? I risked too much for him to give up. He was the fucking Chosen One and he needed to do his job.”

Lucius stared at his son, still absorbing the fact that he had opposed the Dark Lord. Everything was going to change now. He listened as Draco continued after a swallow of tea.

“Thankfully, Potter snapped out of it and ran back outside. I followed and hovered behind a fallen giant, blocking curses from hitting him, as well as other Order members, as best I could.”

“Thank Merlin, you weren’t injured or killed.”

Draco grimaced and rolled his eyes, “I could have killed Granger when she ran by me and was heading right between the Dark Lord and Potter. Such a fucking Gryffindor. I knew she would be dead in a flash, so I jumped out and grabbed her arm, flinging her behind me. I was close to Potter, maybe less than ten feet away when I saw the green glow on the end of Voldemort’s wand. The killing curse was coming, so I threw a stunner at Harry to knock him down, praying it would hit him first since I was closer, and the AK had so much further to travel.”

Draco stared into the fire for a moment before continuing. “Everything was happening so fast. A blast hit something behind me and I was thrown to the ground. When I managed to get up,” he let out a heavy sigh, “Harry was dead on the ground.” A look of revulsion crept over his features. “I remember the Dark Lord…he immediately had a creepy, gleeful grin on his face.”

Lucius watched and listened in silence, his happiness and pride warring with the dread of the macabre scene Draco was describing. He realized that Draco wasn’t aware he had actually succeeded and had saved Harry’s Life. He came so very close to telling him. Until he was sure, though - until Lucius was positive the curse was really gone for good, he couldn’t risk sharing that crucial bit of intel. It was not lost on the older Malfoy that both his wife and his son had each saved Harry Potter that day. He had never been more proud to be a Malfoy and more disappointed in himself at the same time.

“I stayed still for a minute and didn’t know which way to go. Death Eaters were Apparating in and grabbing Order members and Disapparating with them before they even knew it was happening. I saw Hermione get up and start crying and as I made my way toward her, Fenrir popped in right between us and grabbed her. She was gone within seconds. I watched you say something to the Dark Lord and then you ran off. Then I saw mother and I noticed the livid look on the Dark Lord’s face as he started making his way towards her. I didn’t know why he was mad at her, but I knew, I just knew he was going to kill her.”

Lucius nodded. “Yes, yes. He had assigned Fenrir, Scabior, and a few others to apprehend Muggleborns and Order members as able and imprison them in the cages back in the forest.” Lucius paused as more of the memory came back to him. “Immediately after Potter fell, “I informed the Dark Lord that I had found Severus and that he was barely alive. I remember he looked really surprised and then he was…happy.” Lucius exhaled. “He said, ‘Alive?’ and then immediately
summoned his personal healer, Lockerby, who arrived instantly and followed me to Severus.”

Draco saw his Father’s lips moving but heard little as his mind was lost in what happened next. “I rushed towards Mother and she was shaking. Her eyes were on Voldemort and she tried to shove me behind her, as though to shield me from the monster. But I was there to protect her! He asked her with fury in his voice why she had lied. Why she had said the boy was alive. She was so afraid, Father. She never could Occlude for anything and the lie was written all over her face when she said she had thought Harry was dead.”

Tears were now freely flowing down Draco’s cheeks. “I saw him draw his wand and I moved in front of her, despite her screams for me to get behind her.” Draco swallowed heavily. “He looked at me and seemed to study me for a minute. He said, ‘This won’t do, Draco. This will not do. I have far too many plans for you.’

“I didn’t know what he was talking about but I knew that I wanted nothing to do with him. I don’t remember exactly what I said, but I know I begged. I begged him to spare her. He just looked at me and seemed to be contemplating. And then he lifted his wand and I didn’t know who he was going to kill first. I remember I didn’t want to feel anything - physical or emotional - and I immediately let my Occlumency shields come up.”

Lucius swiped away his own tears as he listened to what had been his wife’s final moments. “But he chose her. He killed Cissa and spared you.”

Draco shook his head minutely. “No. He cursed me.”

Lucius was silent for a minute and then asked breathlessly, “What?”

“He cursed me.”

Lucius’ hand moved up to cover his mouth in his surprise. He had been so sure it was Bellatrix.

“And then I became the monster,” Draco added under his breath. His brows then crunched in bewilderment. “I remember he told me that Mother was a traitor and not worthy of life. He said she needed to be punished. It’s hard to explain. I remember feeling rage towards her and the strongest sense of loyalty towards him.”

Lucius sighed. “Yes, Healer Etan says that is the nature of the curse. To switch your loyalties and your affections. He guessed, and it appears he did so correctly, that you were Occluding when the curse was cast. Because of that, the curse was limited to a certain extent. You were so deeply self-Occluded that your inner most identity was protected and distanced from what you were doing. He explained that there are layers of consciousness and that the curse caused many of them to become compromised and it allowed those layers to feel the emotions that controlled your behavior. At the same time, the real Draco was buried deep and was oblivious.”

Draco shook his head and silent tears coursed down his cheeks. “It doesn’t matter. I killed Mother, Father. I hated her so much.” His head fell into his hands. “And then, then I went on to terrorize and assault and … rape the girl I cared about more than any other in this world.” He wiped the tears with the back of his hand.

Lucius was lost in his recollection of that awful moment. “When I made it back to the Dark Lord it was to find Cissa dead and you standing close. I remember at the time thinking that you were in denial because you seemed so unaffected by him killing her.” Lucius paused. “I couldn’t believe she was dead. I put up my own shields to conceal my emotions. I didn’t know why she had been killed but I knew I needed to act unaffected in order to survive.” He thought for a moment and then looked
at his son. “I confess to later thinking it was the Black madness that was consuming you and causing
your changed behavior towards the people you used to care about.”

Draco looked up at Lucius. “I was awful to you as well, Father. I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over something you had no control over, Draco.”

“I understand that I had no control, Father, but it doesn’t change that I physically did all of these
things. I constantly wanted to outdo you. I was thrilled to have the Dark Lord’s favor. I wanted to
win Granger away from you because I knew you enjoyed… being with her.” It was not lost on either
man that Draco had an entirely different word in mind.

“When she told me… when I forced her to answer my questions while I was…” Draco’s face became
even more pale. “Anyway, when she told me that you were in love with each other… I had no idea.
I thought you were just…”

Lucius looked uncomfortable. He’d had no clue about his son’s true affections for the little witch. If
he had, who knew? Maybe he would have realized the depths of Draco’s illness. As it were, he was
now sitting with his son as they both realized they loved the same witch…

“Draco, I –” Draco held up his hand to stop his father’s words. After a minute he spoke again. “It’s
not your fault that you fell in love with her, Father. She does that, you know? She creeps up on you
and buries herself into your heart and then doesn’t leave no matter how many eviction notices you
send.”

Lucius chuckled despite himself at the astute comparison.

Draco took a shaky breath. “I was terrible to Pansy. Fuck.” He shook his head. Tears began to well
again. “Greg. Greg was killed by that psycho fuck and I didn’t even go to the funeral.” He rubbed
his eyes. “Jupiter, Mony… Mother’s portrait.”

“None of this is your fault, Draco,” a soft and familiar voice said.

Both men were startled by the words coming from the portrait over the dresser. Draco was off the
sofa and standing before her in a flash as tear muffled cries of apology poured from his lips. “Mother,
I’m so sorry.” He grabbed the frame. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I killed you and I’m sorry I’ve been
ignoring you. I’m…”

“Draco, you did not kill me,” she softly interrupted. “You were merely the instrument that he used.”
She smiled warmly as her hand tried to reach for his and could not move past the edge of the
painting.

He stared into the loving eyes that were almost as magnificent as the real thing had been.

“I told your father that it wasn’t the Black Madness and that you would be back. I thought it was
grief, but I knew you were hiding and that you would eventually come back to us. I never lost faith.
None of this is your fault, son. You are my precious, precious boy and you always will be the center
of my universe.”

It was hours later when an exhausted Lucius found her. When he had not located her in their room or
her mother’s, he had checked the parlor and the library. Too tired to continue the search, he
summoned Tinny to help him.
He couldn’t have been more surprised when Tinny Apparated them to the nursery. He peeked through the door to find she was sound asleep in the oversized reading chair. He leaned against the door frame and watched her as many memories flooded him; Memories of his own childhood, tucked into the lap of his mother as she read book after book. *Babbitty Rabbitty and her Cackling Stump.* He smiled despite himself. How many times had he made her read that story?

His focus was pulled to the left of the room where he spotted the portrait of the woman herself watching over his girl. Willow looked at him and smiled before lifting her index finger to her lips telling him not to wake her.

He crept into the room to find Draco’s baby quilt draped across her lap and pregnancy and motherhood books scattered around her. *Where did she find these? “Baby Magic,” was tucked under “Curse or Charmed, You’re Pregnant. What Now?” The book on her lap, “Dr. Spock’s Guide For Expecting Witches,” slid to the floor with a thud that didn’t even cause her to stir.*

He contemplated leaving her but knew she would wake with a terrible crick and a probable back ache if he didn’t get her to bed. He moved to his haunches and slid his hands under her as he whispered softly, “Hermione, love. It’s late.”

She moaned in rebellion as her eyes fluttered open and she offered him a small smile. “Luc…”

“Shh, I’ve got you.” Her hands entwined around his neck as he easily lifted her and made his way down the long hall to the top of the stairs where he made a right and trekked the distance to what had become their suite.

As he entered the bedroom she asked, “Is everything…alright?”

Lucius wanted to cry. He had so much emotion bottled up inside, but he maintained his stoic persona as he responded, “Draco is awake and he has regained his senses. You are safe, Hermione. My son will never hurt you again.”

Chapter End Notes

** Dialogue taken from Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.**
Chapter Thirty-Seven

Chapter by LissaDream

BETA love – RaynePhoenix2

It had been exactly ten days since she had nearly been beaten to death while strung naked from the ceiling of a bedchamber in Malfoy Manor and everything had changed. *Everything.*

First and foremost, she was no longer a bonded slave. Two days after Draco had awoke, Lucius had informed her that it had been decided that they would not be rebonded for now. He most likely had not expected her violent reaction of relieved hysterics, but he had held her through them to help her calm. When she had finally quieted, he had continued to explain exactly what had happened to Draco. He started with the Fiendfyre altercation in the Room of Requirement and continued through Narcissa’s death.

Hermione had listened, but she had not reacted. She covertly watched as her usually cool and collected wizard described what had happened in the final battle, giving details from not only his perspective, but Narcissa’s and Draco’s as well. She heard every word as he reviewed what was known about the curse, and about how it had impacted Draco as well as how Draco had been self-Occluding to protect himself. Healer Browne had explained to him that most who had been afflicted with the curse in the past went mad because they hated themselves for what they were feeling, saying, and doing and yet they couldn’t stop themselves. Draco’s skill as a self-Occlumens protected him from that facet of the complex spell.

She listened patiently, if not actively. Hemione had been unable to meet Lucius’ eyes as he told her that Draco had harbored a secret crush on her since the Yule Ball in their fourth year. That Narcissa had been privy to Draco’s feelings and had discouraged them, knowing that Lucius would not approve of even a friendship between the two classmates. Lucius explained to her that this was why Draco had continued being aloof and mean to her in school; he hadn’t wanted to upset his parents or go against the grain of what he had been raised to believe since he was a child. He went on to tell her that, despite his mother’s discouragement, and despite his own attempts otherwise, Draco had continued to have feelings for her. While he couldn’t act on his feelings outright, he still did what he could to protect her. She wanted to scoff at Lucius, to tell him that what he was trying to make her believe was ridiculous, but then he gave many second-hand anecdotes that had left Hermione reeling.

The way Nott had made sure she went nowhere near the Room of Requirement the night Dumbledore had died.

The way Draco had blatantly told his parents that he was unsure if it was Harry, Ron, and herself the night they had been taken to Malfoy Manor as prisoners.

The way someone – apparently Draco – had pulled her out of harm’s way during the final battle.

The narratives made her remember other things, as well. Things like catching Draco staring at her across the Great Hall during meals with a sad look on his face. Or the way they would occasionally get paired in class when the teachers had forced cross-house groupings, and that he was usually cordial with her when that happened. How Pansy Parkinson would glare and pout whenever Draco spoke to her, even if his words weren’t kind. The fact that she couldn’t remember him calling her a
Mudblood to her face since before the Yule Ball – until she had been thrown at his feet as his prisoner, that was.

Through her tumbling memories, she continued to listen to Lucius in horror as he told her Draco’s recount of what happened after the battle. That Draco had been cursed by Voldemort and then forced to murder his own mother. Horrifically. She had been strung up from an archway in the courtyard and Draco, who now was under the Curse that made him despise his mother, had been ordered to scourge her. He had been provided with a leather studded flogger and had literally whipped his naked mother until she was broken and bleeding before being instructed to cast an Avada Kedavra on her.

“That…that’s what he did to me…” she whispered in horror and could see Lucius nod in her peripheral vision.

“The healers believe the similarity of the situations is what caused his self-Occlumency to crack. He got confused and his mind was shunted between reality and memory.”

A wave of pity washed over her. She felt her eyes grow wet and chastised herself for feeling sympathy for the man who had single-handedly made her life a literal nightmare for the last few months.

They were silent for a long time before she was able to meet Lucius’ eyes. She was surprised to find him kneeling in front of her, watching her with a guarded expression. A look she didn’t quite understand for a few moments, then she realized he was steeling himself for her reaction. Her words were carefully chosen.

“I …accept what you have told me as fact,” she whispered. “I need time to work out my feelings, though.” He had seemed taken back by her response and she supposed he hadn’t expected her to be so rational. However, having almost a week of peace after so many weeks of torment allowed Hermione to be more like her old self. She had always been nothing if not rational. Lucius truly did not realize that she wasn’t really weak when it came to emotions. It had just been the turn her life had taken that had caused her to be the blubbering girl that she didn’t recognize.

That had been three days ago and, to be honest, she still hadn’t decided how she felt. Draco had been conspicuously absent. On the surface, this gave Hermione great relief. The couple of glimpses she’d had of him made her heart race and her palms sweat with dread.

It had been decided by Snape, Lucius, and herself that she would rebond with Lucius, who would order her to act as though she were bonded to Draco, but only if she felt she could not act the part convincingly. She had assured them she could pretend, but if they were called to a large function, she felt it was best for her and Lucius to take the bonding potion. Because of this, she knew that Draco would never have to lay a hand on her again, but she could not stop her visceral reaction to the sight of him.

Her logical mind knew that Draco was not at fault for how he had treated her. Realistically, he had been as much of a victim as she had been. She knew that her responses to him were most likely a form of a psychological reaction, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It didn’t change the fact that she feared him deeply.

Therefore, when she found herself alone in the Parlor later that week only to have Draco knock and tentatively enter the room when she answered, it didn’t surprise either of them when she immediately leapt to her feet to back away from him.

He held up both hands, showing her that he was wandless. “Granger…Hermione,” he started in a
very gentle voice. “I know…I know you don’t really want to see me, but…” He sighed before shoving his hands through his hair. Slowly he made eye contact with her from across the room. “We need to talk.”

Draco watched her study him for a few moments as she wrung her hands in front of her nervously. He was about to turn and leave when she gave a short, jerky nod and moved further across the room to sit on the edge of a chair. He didn’t even pretend that she would be okay if he sat close to her, instead he chose a chair that was opposite her, with many feet and a coffee table between them.

The silence was heavy and uncomfortable and for a long while they just sat, not looking at each other. Finally, Draco took a slow, deep breath.

“I know that nothing I can say or do will erase what has happened between us.” He paused when she made a disbelieving sound in the back of her throat and forced himself to meet her gaze. Hermione’s eyes were as he always remembered them, large and beautiful in their doe-like state, but instead of filled with the inquisitiveness or excitement of their school-days, they were filled with mistrust and wariness.

“I know that I’ll never be able to say this enough,” his voice broke and he had to suck in another breath to steady himself before he could continue, “but I’m sorry. Hermione. I am truly, profoundly sorry for everything I have said and done. The way I treated you, the things I said…your…your fa-
father.” He gulped and gagged a bit, still hardly believing that her father’s death was on his hands.

“I’m so, so sorry,” he finished lamely.

She didn’t answer right away. When she did her voice was calm, but cool. “I hear your apology, Draco, and rationally I understand that your actions were not your own. I just…I just can’t forgive you. Not yet…maybe not ever. I just…I can’t.”

Draco felt his shoulder slump with defeat. He had known that she wouldn’t forgive him. Not yet. He wasn’t stupid. He knew the things he had done warranted no exoneration. That there was a chance she would never forgive him.

In fact, her words…? They were much, much more than he expected. Much, much more then he could ever deserve.

“That’s fair enough,” he responded somewhat weakly. “I just…I just wish I had really disliked you all those years. If I had – none of this would have happened.” It was as close as he would ever come to admitting his true feelings for her. He paused, feeling broken. He didn’t know what else to say, but there was more he had to tell her. It startled him when Hermione broke the silence.

“Whatever you’re hesitating to say, just say it!” Her tone was sharp and caused him to flinch. He made himself to look at her yet again.

“I received and owl from the Dark Lord this morning.” His voice was forcefully devoid of emotion and he had to move his eyes from hers when she returned his stare dispassionately. “We are to be wed on Saturday at dusk. My father received a letter as well, he is to plan the ceremony and send the Dark Lord a guest list.”

When he returned his stare to her, Hermione had looked away. The tears that had tumbled down her cheeks broke his heart.

“I’m truly sor –”

“Don’t say it,” she whispered fiercely. “Don’t say it again. I’ve heard enough.” The pause was
heavy with grief and frustration. She seemed to be warring with herself about what she wanted to say next, but finally blew a breath out that caused her hair to puff slightly around her.

“I understand that you were cursed, Malfoy,” she continued, her voice strengthening in her conviction. “Logically, I know that you were not in control of yourself – that the curse controlled you. I understand, in my head, that it wasn’t really you who was doing all those things to me.” Her voice caught and the tears that strained her vocal chords made his stomach hurt.

“But I can’t look at you. Not without seeing you sneer at me. I can’t hear the sound of your voice without hearing you tell me to ‘shut up and bend over’.” She let out a short sob that made him shudder as tears sprung to his own eyes.

Draco couldn’t stop himself from wrapping his arms around his middle as he tried to protect himself from what she needed to say. Draco knew he had to let her speak her mind, and he would let her get it off her chest. It didn’t make it hurt any less, though. He let out a slow, shuddering breath as she continued.

“I will never be able to tolerate your hands on me, not without anticipating where the next blow will land. Not without worrying about you reaching for your wand to cast a Crucio on me.” He had to swallow hard to force his meager lunch to stay in his stomach as he remembered coming inside her while he held her under the Crucius. He squeezed his eyes shut tight as she paused and sucked in a deep breath while wiping her face with the back of her hand. “That is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. You know what has transpired between us – could you stand me if roles were reversed?”

He didn’t answer her, didn’t return his eyes to her; he just hunched his shoulders and shook his head.

“Then you understand that I will never…ever…be able to see, hear, or feel anything past that. It will be forever engrained in me. I don’t…I don’t know how we’re supposed to be …” She broke off again to swipe at her tears as she attempted to steady her breath. “Married!”

She spat the word and Draco felt himself shatter internally. He wasn’t sure life could get more awful. He would do anything to take away her pain, to take back what had happened. In that moment Draco vowed he would never do anything to warrant her fear again; he would do everything in his power to earn her trust. If not her love, at least her respect. They were going to have a child together…a son. They would have to at least be cordial. It would take time, but they had time. He would use it to try and be everything she could ever want. However, even as he was thinking these things, she broke him all over again.

“I love Lucius,” she told him plainly. “I’ve fallen in love with your father, Malfoy. Don’t take that away from me – it’s the only good I have in my life. If you even remotely want to make up for the things that have happened between us, you will not force me to give him up just because we are obliged to marry.”

He froze, his insides turning to ice. Stupid. How stupid could he be to have forgotten that piece of information? He dropped his elbows to his knees and his face landed in his palms. He rubbed his forehead before tangling his own hands into his hair and give a short tug of frustration. He would never win her. He had to come to terms with that immediately. His father already had her heart, and he was just the bastard that had hurt her over and over and over again. She feared him. The thought made him physically ill.

“I won’t take that away from you – from either of you.” He looked up to see his mother watching him with sad eyes. She gave him an encouraging nod and he took what little strength he could from her support.
Hermione made a tick of sound that seemed to be a cross between surprise and doubt. He stayed silent, allowing his words to sink in. He needed her to realize he wasn’t going to ever intentionally hurt her ever again. Her next words cut him to the quick.

“Can you please leave, now? Are we finished?”

“I – uh,” he broke himself off awkwardly. He needed one more thing from her. “Granger – can I please ask one more thing?”

He saw her knuckles whiten as she grasped bunches of her skirt in both hands but took her silence as acquiescence. “The…baby? Father says you’ve been ill?”

Draco noticed her shoulders relax infinitesimally. “It’s just a bit of pregnancy sickness,” she responded guardedly. “The baby is fine. I’m fine as well.”

“That’s…good,” he said after a few more seconds of uncomfortable stillness. He cleared his throat and pushed himself to stand. “Ah…er. Okay, then. I’m…I’m going to see Pansy. To explain what’s been happening…to apologize for how I treated her…”

He trailed off when he realized that not only was she not going to respond, but that she likely didn’t care what his plans were for the day. “Please let Tinny know what you need for Saturday.”

Hermione’s face was still turned away from him, but she gave a stiff nod of understanding. Draco left without looking back.

Hermione continued to understand that her anxiety at this point was ridiculous, but it didn’t seem to matter as Tinny pinned the veil into her updo of sculpted curls. She had been sick a half dozen times so far that day and she knew it wasn’t all because of the pregnancy. Nerves. Yes, nerves were a huge part of it. Another issue was her internal conflict.

She believed what she had been told about Draco. She truly did. Hermione believed that he’d had a crush on her while they were in school. She believed that he had fallen for her from afar. How could she not believe it? Master Mind Healers had confirmed the loyalty Curse and, knowing what she did about Occlumency now, she comprehended what had happened with his self-Occlusion. The only way he could have had such an obsessive hate for her while under the curse was if he’d held an obsessive love for her before it. Because of this fact, she knew deep down inside that she had nothing to fear from Draco Malfoy anymore. He would never purposely hurt her again.

That didn’t mean she wasn’t still afraid of him.

That didn’t stop her from flinching when he moved to touch her.

That didn’t stop her from dreaming of dangling from the ceiling while he tortured her.

That didn’t mean she wanted to marry the man. In fact, marrying him was the last thing she wanted to do.

She knew that he had no desire to be here today, either. Only his reasons were embarrassment and heartache and guilt while hers were because she feared him and loved another man. Because she loved his father. They were only here for appearances. It had to be done because the Order wasn’t quite ready to strike yet. It had to be done because Voldemort commanded it to be so.

Hermione was terrified of what tonight would bring. Would they have to consummate? She didn’t think she could be with him again. Now that the bond was gone – now that they were pretending instead of living it – there was no maddening anxiety to quiet. She couldn’t imagine this Draco – the
real Draco – being able to even perform. It would be completely traumatic for both of them.

She closed her eyes tightly and counted slowly to ten, trying to calm her racing heart. She pushed the revolting thoughts aside. If it was required – to seal the bond or whatever – she would endure. She had no choice. She would close her eyes and pretend it was Lucius. She didn’t know what he would do, however, and she hoped she wouldn’t have to help him through it. That would just be the ultimate betrayal of self.

“All dones, Good Witch!” Tinny proclaimed a few minutes later before spinning Hermione in the chair to reface the mirror

A stranger stared back at Hermione. Her hair was piled artfully on top of her head, ringlets left to cascade down her back and around her face and shoulders. A small tiara was nestled in the coiffed curls to which the small blusher veil was attached. Her face was done up in soft shades of pink that highlighted her bone structure and brow line, making her look more mature and softer at the same time. Her eyes were done in warm browns and gold while her lips were creamy pink in color. She had diamond studs in her ears. She let her gaze slip past the tanzanite collar that she despised (she knew she would have to wear today for appearances sake) to the dress. It was very simple, but very elegant, and a pale blush color. The top was boatneck in design with long sleeves and all lace. It cupped her breasts and nipped in at her waist which was still almost completely flat. The very slight convex shape was not visible to those who didn’t know what they were looking for. There was a wide ribbon in cream colored silk that tied over her hips before the material changed into a flowy, chiffon skirt that spilled to the floor.

She stood shakily and pressed a hand to her tummy, which was filled with butterflies. How she wished she could be anywhere but here today. The knock on her door pulled her attention. She answered and was surprised to find Snape on the other side.

“My apologies, Miss Granger,” he stated calmly. “I’m afraid that Lucius was unable to bring himself to escort you to the ballroom. I was asked to stand in his stead.”

Oddly, Hermione didn’t find herself disappointed. It was something, at least. Lucius was always too stoic, too hard to read. Him not wanting to be her attendant on her wedding day to another man showed some feeling at least. She didn’t blame him. She quite figured he was going to be a nightmare when he was forced to marry Trelawney, even though he was doing his best to push the ceremony off in hopes that the Order would be ready before that fateful date. The thought of him taking that woman to his bed – their bed – made her see red, and she was sure that he found the idea very unpalatable.

“That’s perfectly acceptable, Headmaster,” she answered kindly, opening her door fully. “Are we to go now? I haven’t a clue of the time, as Tinny just finished with me.”

Snape studied her for just a moment before giving a slight nod. “It is time. Are you…alright?”

Hermione gave him a tight smile. “I will be fine,” she said firmly. “I’m certainly better now than I would have been two weeks ago.”

“That makes perfect sense.” He held his arm out for her. “Shall we?”

Hermione took a deep breath before slipping her hand through the crook of his elbow. “Let’s get this over with,” she muttered and was amused when he chuckled.

The ballroom wasn’t decorated outside of its normal opulence. There was a small alter at what passed for the head of the room. There were only about fifteen people in attendance (the same people
who had attended the engagement dinner, minus Pansy who had sent her regrets) but Voldemort, Ginny, and Lucius were the only people she took note of before meeting Draco’s eyes. He looked very pale but gave her a leering sneer.

She almost recoiled before she realized he was play acting. They both had parts to play today. His was that of an obsessive abuser, hers was that of a terrified pregnant witch.

Her part really wasn’t that much of a stretch, she hoped he wouldn’t give them away.

Hermione tried to catch Lucius’ gaze around his clingy date, but he was avoiding her stare. She couldn’t blame him. This had to be as hard on him as it was on her, and for her it was almost unbearable. She tried not to let her nerves get to her, but a slight trembling overtook her body.

Snape’s opposite hand came and settled over hers in the crook of his arm and he gave her fingers a slight squeeze. It helped ground her some, and she allowed him to lead her up the makeshift aisle.

There was no offering up of the bride – everyone knew that she had no choice. The Ministry official cleared his throat and started droning. Hermione heard nothing, and only started slightly when Draco took both of her sweaty palms in his cool, dry hands. She heard nothing until Draco spoke.

“I, Draco Lucius Malfoy, take Hermione Jean Granger to be my lawfully wedded wife until such a time the Dark Lord sees fit for the union to be absolved or until her death.” His voice was cool and void of any emotion. Not only was there no affection or love as there should be during a bonding ceremony, there was also no malice or hate. The words were just simply…spoken.

The official’s words for her to repeat barely even registered as she spoke them. “I, Hermione Jean Granger, take Draco Lucius Malfoy to be my lawfully wedded husband until such time as the Dark Lord sees fit for the union to be absolved or until my death.”

The words were cruel and deliberately phrased thus to increase her fear and anxiety. She knew this but, much to her chagrin, knowing that Draco didn’t truly feel this way allowed her to repeat them without tears clouding her voice.

“Rings?”

Draco released her hands to reach into the pocket of his dress robes. She was surprised when he opened his right hand to see two wedding bands. One was thicker and silver in color. Whether it was made of silver, white gold, or platinum, she had no idea. The other was a simple band of the same material, only it was encrusted in crystals…or diamonds. She was shocked, and for the first time that day, she met Draco’s eyes.

While his face was set hard with his lips pulled down into a frown and his brow wrinkled in what mirrored distaste, his eyes were soft. Hermione recognized the gesture for what it was – another apology.

With shaking hands, she picked up the larger of the two bands and took his left hand in hers to slide it onto his ring finger. So quickly, she almost wondered if she imagined it, he grasped her fingers in firm reassurance before taking her left hand in both of his. He removed the gaudy silver-plated ring he had bequeathed her during their engagement dinner and slid the delicate wedding band into its place.

The silence in the hall was deafening. The sound of the official clearing his throat made both the bride and groom jump. “You are officially bonded in matrimony,” the man said with little pomp and circumstance. “You may kiss your witch.”
She gave a slight gasp of horror. *Kiss him? Kiss him!* Why in the world – how foolish of her! It had never even crossed her mind that she would have to kiss Draco Malfoy! Draco obviously felt the same way but was able to control his response enough to make a face of disgust.

Voldemort actually laughed at their reactions, which caused a twittering from the few other people who were in the room. Most notably Bellatrix and the Lestrange brothers.

“Let’s just get this the fuck over with, yeah Granger?” Draco said finally before he grabbed her chin with surprisingly light fingers. She allowed her face to be tilted up but kept her eyes wide open as his mouth descended on her own.

She wanted to laugh – or maybe cry – when their gazes clashed, and she realized he was just as panicked as she. His warm, full mouth landed on hers for the count of two and a swirl of magic sealed their bond before he jerked forcibly away from her.

“I present to you Mr. and Mrs. Draco Malfoy.” It was a simple statement from the Ministry official. Hermione could tell that the man obviously realized this wasn’t a true wedding, he was playing a part just like everyone else.

Lucius avoided her through the evening, playing his part of the devoted fiancé to Sybill. It was upsetting even if it was understandable. It was unfair of her to need him. She realized that, but it didn’t change the fact that she did.

She and Draco suffered through the evening in silent understanding. He had chosen a role of indifference, as if he was above the proceedings. He paid her little attention, instead choosing to entertain guests and act the gracious and condescending host. When questioned about her lack of response and her quiet demeanor, Draco explained that he’d had more than enough of her histrionics for a lifetime and had ordered her quiet compliance for the day.

Their roles had been agreed up ahead of time, so she knew to keep her eyes down and her mouth closed. It was much, much less exhausting then their past interactions when in front of a crowd. So much so, that it was almost easy.

She wasn’t sure who was more relieved when the night drew to a close. Voldemort had left just before dessert was served, and that had been enough for a collective sigh to flit through the room. Bellatrix and the Lestrange brothers left with Dolohov in tow shortly thereafter, to Hermione’s relief. Dolohov’s continued knowing glances still gave her the absolute creeps.

She made small talk with Ginny and Daphne Greengrass before Blaise escorted the later home around ten o’clock.

Then it was just Lucius and Sybill, Snape and Ginny, and Draco and herself. She was pleased when Sybill begged her leave a few minutes later. The witch was tipsy and had become a bit handsy with her (obviously) put off husband-to-be. It would have been funny – actually, it was funny, but would have been hysterical – if her intended had been anyone other than Lucius.

Lucius returned from escorting Sybill to the floo, a look of complete relief on his face, to find the Snape’s preparing to return to Hogwarts. It was then that the three Malfoys were left alone for the first time since before Draco had collapsed almost two full weeks ago. The silence was painful, and no one seemed able to look at anyone else.

Finally, Draco stood. He approached her carefully while Lucius watched them with wary eyes. Hermione was frozen, unable to do anything, but her respirations increased almost alarmingly. “Hey,” he said softly as he cautiously reached out and cupped one side of her face, trying to be
She tried not to flinch, she really did, but the movement was involuntary. He hastily withdrew. “I’m sorry.” They said the words together, and both were startled when Lucius pushed himself to his feet with a small growl.

“If you’ll excuse me.” He gave a slight nod at them and Hermione squeaked in an obviously terrified manor. She didn’t want to be left alone with Draco! The sound caused Lucius to spin around, his eyes wild with fierce protectiveness. It also caused Draco to speak.

“Father, please wait there!” he exclaimed before turning his attention back to Hermione. “It’s okay, Granger…Hermione!” The younger of the two Malfoy men buried his face in one hand in an obvious gesture of frustrated defeat. After a moment of silence, he looked up and took in the expressions of the two people he currently held most dear in his life. His father and his…wife.

“Please come,” he held his hand out to Hermione who hesitated for a long moment while she stared at the proffered limb. Slowly, she put her hand in his. He helped her to her feet before leading her to where his father stood.

Silently, he took one of Lucius’ hands in his free one before deliberately joining his father’s hand with Hermione’s. “I promise you both that as soon as I am able to, I will dissolve this marriage. It is a farce that is not wanted by any of us involved. You two are free to be whatever you desire to be. I will not stand between you.

Hermione was looking at Draco, completely stunned, when she felt Lucius’ fingers lace and tighten with hers. That movement forced her eyes to his face. Lucius was watching Draco, however, searching his expression for something. Whether or not he found what he was looking for Hermione wasn’t sure, but for the first time all day, his shoulders relaxed.

“I am very happy to have you back, Draco,” Lucius murmured as Draco took a step back from them, his hands falling to his sides.

Hermione heard Draco swallow hard before he hastily stepped around them and left the room with no more words. He didn’t look back, not wanting to see his wife and his father with their hands entwined.
Chapter Thirty-Eight

Chapter Notes

AN: We realize the last few chapters were particularly emotional. I wish we could say this chapter is different, but it’s not. We thank you for sharing your thoughts and we relish the comments and reviews.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

BETA love – RaynePheonix2

As Hermione watched the planning happening around her, she couldn’t help but feel this was the way it should have been all along. Perhaps the war would be over by now if the responsibility had been shared amongst a tight group of comrades rather than controlled by a puppeteer. A puppeteer who pulled the strings of all the players on separate stages from each other. They were all part of the same production, but no one knew what the other acts were about.

It’s not that Dumbledore was a bad man in Hermione’s opinion. On the contrary, he was a good man who had done great things. But he was a leader who had kept too many secrets and had failed to share needed information with not only Harry, but other members of the Order as well. It was ridiculous that a group of adults hadn’t been tasked with hunting Horcruxes and it was beyond negligent that the resistance at Hogwarts on that fateful day was spear headed by children. It was doomed to fail, and it was a miracle there were any survivors at all.

She felt a swell of enormous hope as she looked around at the familiar and unfamiliar faces that were now the Order of the Phoenix, faces that had aged and matured beyond their years in a short amount of time. They all shared an expression of readiness and determination. Their plan was in place and their players were on the chess board.

Hermione couldn’t stop the suffocating sadness that Ron was not here. He would have excelled in this moment; putting together the strategy and aligning the proper pieces where they needed to be. Her eyes immediately shot to Bill, Charlie and Fred who had a matching fierceness about them. She thought of George – bonded to that awful Carrow woman, and Neville who was supposedly in a coma. They, the captives, would be the next focus. Once Voldemort and his inner circle were destroyed.

“Any questions?” Charlie asked as he glanced about the room. No one said anything. This plan had been hashed and rehashed so many times and with so many variables that everyone was very clear on what their role would be. Remus Lupin was standing next to Snape. It was obvious that all animosity they had shared was now behind them or at least buried for another day.

Hermione was shocked to learn that Severus had been slowly poisoning his hated Master with Muggle arsenic in small doses that had been weakening the man-thing for months. It had started after the Hogwarts battle when Voldemort felt himself most powerful and invincible. The despot had his food and drink regularly tested for nefarious potions and elixirs, but it never occurred to his over
inflated ego that Muggle tactics could be used against him. Because of the poison, the megalomaniac had been growing more and more frail. He had thought, as had his personal healer, that it was the destruction of all but one of his Horcruxes that was affecting him. Because of this, Nagini remained close and pampered by his side just as before. Severus had, of course, agreed with the hypothesis and brewed ‘special’ strengthening potions for the Dark Lord. Little did the bastard know that the very thing he was consuming to cure him was ailing him.

Harry and Hermione exchanged glances as Severus handed out the twenty-two Protean Charmed coins to those who would be involved on Saturday’s mission. There were a few, Ginny included (much to the redhead’s frustration) who would be safe housed with Andromeda and Teddy while everything went down. The twins Ginny was carrying were wreaking havoc on her magic and Severus refused to allow her to participate. Hermione felt badly for her friend and understood her aggravation, but she also understood Snape’s concern and agreed that the safety of Ginny and her unborn children took precedent. With Bill, Charlie, and Fred each backing up Severus, Ginny didn’t stand a chance with that fight.

Lucius had been silenced of any such notions on Hermione’s behalf by a single stern look from the bushy haired witch and not another word was said.

All eyes remained on Snape as he continued. “Twenty minutes after the Dark Lord drinks the final lethal dose that will eventually kill him - if Potter doesn’t do it first - Lucius will summon you to the Manor via the charmed coins you now hold in your hand. They are not only a means of messaging you to come but are also portkeys that will deliver you into the Ballroom directly. They are timed to activate fifteen seconds after the message is delivered, so you must be ready. The Dark Lord will be very vulnerable and easier to defeat as the poison consumes him. Potter and I will focus on him while you all focus on your assigned Death Eaters. Remember, the snake must be killed.

Lupin cleared his throat and with a resigned look on his face added, “Don’t forget, killing curses on the Death Eaters we discussed. It’s the only way to shatter the bonds between them and their captives. If they are captured instead, Magical Law Enforcement will have to follow protocol and it could be several days before all the red tape is removed allowing for the forced consumption of the bond severing potion.” He slowly looked around the room. “It could be too late for some of them by then.”

There were mumblings as everyone reaffirmed their understanding of the plan. It was obvious that some did not find the order to kill nearly as troublesome as others.

Hermione glanced up at Lucius to see the strain evident on his face. He had struggled greatly with this plan because he didn’t want his home vulnerable. In order for the portkeys to work, however, the wards would have to be compromised. There was no other way.

Lucius noticed Hermione’s concerned stare and offered her a small nod in confirmation that he was still in agreement. Adding to the man’s distress was that this was to occur in two days’ time, on his wedding day. If all went according to plan, however, Voldemort would be dead, and his loyal Death Eaters would be surrounded and captured long before any vows were made.

Of course, there were a few Order supporters who would be on the guest list who were like Lucius, turned but undetected; Theo and Theodros Nott, as well as Thorfinn Rowle, the Veela Queen, Ravana, and the Vampire Father, Bonificicio. These players would be strategically placed about the ballroom when everything went down. If everything went as planned, it should be quick and effective.

At the end of the meeting, the air was electric with excitement about the Order making its final stand. Win or lose, this was it. Their final play. There was also a shadow of melancholy as it was
understood without saying, that some – if not all – might not survive.

Hermione made her way around the room to hug her friends and offered words of encouragement. It was getting late and she and Lucius needed to get back to the Manor. It was amazing how easily she tired, the pregnancy was really starting to exhaust her, and she was only three months into it.

When she got to Ginny and Harry, she pulled them both into a fierce hug. The three held each other, their silence saying far more than words ever could.

When she made her way back to Lucius and Snape, she threw her arms around Severus’ waist, her eyes full of unshed tears. “You’re one of the best men I’ve ever known, Professor. Thank you.”

Severus pat her back awkwardly, uncomfortable with the display, especially in a room full of people. “By all means, thank me by blubering all over my robes.”

Hermione snickered. This was his way and she would not wish him any different. She did not miss the slight flicker of appreciation and warmth in his eyes as she pulled away.

It was after midnight and Lucius was sitting at his desk contemplating calling it a day when Draco walked in with a happy Jupiter on his heels. Lucius had hardly seen his son since his recovery, as Draco spent most of his time with Pansy or away from the Manor. He did notice that the young man was back to his old routine of visiting Mony every evening and bringing the pony an apple. It was such a relief to have his sane son back and he hoped that in time Draco’s self-hatred would ease. He was being so very hard on himself. Although, truth be told, Lucius knew he would feel the same if it had been him.

“Father, I’ve noticed that you and Hermione have been gone a lot from the Manor lately. I hope you aren’t leaving because of me.”

Lucius shook his head as he reassured his son, “We’ve been spending some time at Hogwarts. You know how close the girls are.”

It was like looking in a mirror when Lucius saw the knowing and not-to-be-deceived gaze of his son. “I hope you realize, Father, that I am on your side. I would do anything to help you and Granger… err Hermione.”

Lucius contemplated what had been said as well as what was implied. Did Draco suspect Lucius was actively plotting against the Dark Lord? While he knew of his son’s hatred for Voldemort and his desire to see him destroyed, Lucius did not want Draco involved in the upcoming mission. Draco was still weak and his occlumency abilities had not rebounded entirely. It was for his own sake, as well as the mission’s, that Draco be kept in the dark. The Order understood that Draco was not to be harmed and merely incapacitated – if needed. Everyone in the room knew that the younger Malfoy was on their side. Harry had been as adamant as Lucius on that point. Lucius would die to protect his son just as he would die to protect Hermione and his unborn grandson.

“Thank you, Draco. I can only…imagine how hard all of this has been for you. It pains me greatly to know that you harbor feelings for Hermione that are not reciprocated. I want you to know that I would, that I will…step aside if there is a chance she could ever feel the same for you that you feel for her. Who knows what the future will bring? I love you both and would forego my happiness to procure your own.”

The words were not placating candy, they were truth. Lucius would give anything for Draco to not
be suffering. It was his hope that, after Saturday, they would all be free from the clutches of the Dark Lord. Lucius knew that he would either be dead or behind bars when this was all over. Dead if the Dark Lord was victorious. If the Order prevailed, he would face his crimes in front of the Wizengemot and Hermione would be free to live her life. Draco would hopefully be absolved of all his crimes given his youth, the coercion he dealt with, and the control the curse held over him. Draco was as much a victim of this war as anyone else, and more so than many. Lucius would live out his days in Azkaban in relief if he knew his son was happy, Hermione was free, and his grandchild was safe. Perhaps, in time, Hermione would grow to trust Draco and to love him. They would be raising a son together, after all. This selflessness was new for Lucius. It was genuinely how he felt, though.

Draco pondered his Father’s words before responding, “The Dark Lord gives us little choice in these matters, Father. But I promise that if anything ever changes and we have our free will returned to us, I will divorce her. I only want her happiness, and she loves you, Father. If it were possible, you two should be together.”

In an uncharacteristic move, Lucius stepped around his desk and pulled his son into a fierce hug. “I always left the soft words to your mother, but I love you, Draco, and I am very proud of the man you have become.” When Draco’s reciprocating hold was as tight as his own, Lucius could barely contain the swell of emotion. The two men broke apart, avoiding each other’s glistening eyes.

Just then, Bilby entered the room and enquired, “Master Draco, sir, the orange beastly, where is Bilby to put him?”

Lucius looked at Dracoquestioningly.

Before Draco could respond, a high-pitched squeal, followed by thundering steps as someone ran down the hall, grabbed their attention.

Hermione’s unmistakable voice was shrieking, “Crookshanks!! Ohh, Crooks.” Lucius quickly stepped into the hall to see the witch on her knees hugging the largest, ugliest orange cat he had ever seen. Jupiter pounced into the mix and proceeded to smother Hermione’s face and the cat’s head in slobbery kisses. The cat was purring so loud the air practically vibrated.

When Lucius looked from the spectacle to Draco, the younger Malfoy shrugged and then kneeled in front of Hermione. His voice was soft. “I remembered you had a cat back at Hogwarts. I had seen him patrol with you on your prefect rounds. He used to come to the dungeons and hunt mice.” He reached forward and stroked the cat’s tail. “I figured you had left him there or at the Weasley’s.” His eyes shot up to find hers welling and looking at him for the first time without fear. They even had a touch of warmth. His heart began to flutter. “I found him chasing garden gnomes in the Weasleys yard.”

Huge tears rolled down her cheeks as her focus moved back to her familiar.

“Anyway, I figured you would like him back.”

A soft “Thank you,” could be heard through her sniffles and Draco felt like Christmas had come early. Making her happy was all he wanted at this point.

He stood and was surprised to see Lucius had moisture in his eyes as well. “That was very…kind, Draco.”

Shaking it off Draco muttered dismissively, “Ok, good, that’s done.” Feeling his own emotions stirring, he mumbled as he walked away, “It’s entirely too sappy in here right now. I’m going to bed.”
Lucius watched Draco leave and then glanced back down at the girl who had stolen both of their hearts.

“Crooks, are you hungry? Let’s see what’s in the kitchen.” Hermione wiped her eyes with her sleeve and stood. She smiled up at Lucius and practically skipped down the hall with a prancing cat and bounding dog in tow.

Lucius rubbed his forehead and walked back into his study. Once again, his mind wandered to Saturday. It was only two days away and the prophesy kept playing over and over again in his mind:

> A girl of tainted blood and a virgin no more shall spawn a sacrifice for love. Within her lies the power to end it all.

Lucius and Severus had discussed what it could mean at length. Hermione held no credence to any of it, but Lucius wasn’t so sure. A girl of tainted blood and a virgin no more sounded an awful lot like Hermione. Of course, it could be any number of females, from the present or from many lifetimes from now. It could also be just as Hermione claimed, mad ramblings of an alcoholic wanna-be Seer. Still, the words *spawn a sacrifice for love* sounded rather ominous. He did not miss the implication it could be referring to her unborn child. He would do everything he could to prevent any such ‘sacrifice’ from occurring. He loved his witch but did not forget for one minute that she was a Gryffindor and self-preservation was not always high on her list of priorities.

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When Saturday rolled around, Hermione was a bundle of nerves as she dressed in the Mistress suite. She was too distracted to pay much notice as to how Tinny had dressed her. When she reminded herself that she needed to be calm and focused, she closed her eyes and took twelve slow, deep breaths. Opening them again, she finally really looked at herself.

Tinny was an artist. The elf would put any muggle hair and makeup designer to shame. Her makeup was subtle, and her hair was twisted into an intricate updo. The dress she wore was elegant chiffon in a gorgeous aubergine color. The neckline was sweetheart, and the fabric was tight around her waist before blossoming out into a full, floor length skirt. Diamond drop earrings were delicate and just enough jewelry. Her tanzanite collar had been charmed to match the shade of the dress. Hermione noticed her diamond wedding band shone beautifully as her hand fell against her skirt. It was a shame that something so lovely represented something that she hated so much.

A soft knock on her door was followed by Draco’s entry. The past few weeks had made Draco’s presence slightly more tolerable. She no longer flinched every time he moved or spoke to her. However, in fairness, he made a point to say very little around her at all. She knew he was miserable. To have killed his mother in such a way…it was unconscionable. She felt pity for him. She wanted to forgive him, even if she knew she would never forget. Somehow, she just couldn’t, though. He had been very creative and relentless with his physical and verbal abuse of her. That had to speak something about the kind of person he was. The curse made him hate her, but did it influence his violence as well? Rose said it did, but Hermione just wasn’t sure. Maybe someday she would get to a place where she could forgive him, for their son’s sake… Maybe.

“You look beautiful,” he said quietly.

“Thank you,” she responded just above a whisper.

“Are you sure you don’t need the potion?”
They had discussed this at length the night before at dinner. Hermione had assured both men she could act the part of the bonded slave without difficulty. The thought of ever being bound again, even to Lucius, made her ill.

She reassured him, “I’ll be fine. I’ll be very tuned to what you say to me and will do as directed.”

Draco sighed. “I’ll do my best to talk to you as little as possible. Just stay next to me and play along.” He shuffled his feet. “I apologize in advance for the things I say and the way I act tonight.”

Hermione shrugged. “I’m used to it.”

The words filled Draco with more pain than the witch could ever realize. He nodded lightly. “Let’s head down, shall we?”

Hermione simply nodded and followed Draco into the hallway, but her mind was hours ahead, envisioning the different outcomes of the evening. Would she be free at the end of it all? Would she even be alive? Would Lucius end up married to Trelawney?

She stroked her collar and hoped Lucius remembered in all the excitement he was supposed to remove it from her when he initiated the Protean Charmed coins. She would need her magic to protect herself as well as the others. One of Hermione’s strongest wandless spells was her Protego or shield charm. It had been decided that she should keep the spell cast upon herself while also doing her best to keep Harry shielded as much as possible. Any other spells she cast to assist the other Order members would be gravy, but that collar needed to be off in order for her to do her part.

When they entered the ballroom, it was decorated magnificently. Flowers in blush colors and whites were in abundance and buffet tables were laid out with crystal stemware and a large variety of various alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. The house elves manning them wore white tunics with the large letter ‘M’ in elegant script on the front. Other tables were laden with fine foods and a large, three tier cake displayed on the center table to the right grabbed the attention of all who entered.

The entire room was beautiful, yet there was something off putting about it – sterile almost. It felt as though someone had seen a picture and simply said, “Recreate this.” There was nothing personal about it. Of course, there was nothing personal about this farce of a wedding either. It was Hermione’s understanding that Lucius had hired a service to set everything up.

Hermione watched as guests began to arrive. She stayed to Draco’s right as he put on the Malfoy charm and played a proper host to all who entered. He was dismissive to her as though bored, but to Hermione’s relief, he was sticking to his word and saying very little to her or about her.

Hermione watched through her eyelashes as Theo and Millicent arrived alongside Blaise and Daphne. The Lestranges flooed in next and were given their customary wide berth by the other guests. Ravana and Bonificio arrived with their small entourage of six. It was a thing of much gossip for the heads of the long feuding groups to arrive together. It was to accommodate the vampire that the ceremony was happening now, after dusk, instead of the early afternoon as most would have preferred.

Hermione couldn’t help but to find herself curious about them. Ravana was stunning with her willowy, tall figure and long, silky platinum hair. If it wasn’t for the fact that the Malfoys were pureblood, she would question that they had Veela blood as well. Ravana’s high cheekbones and silver eyes accented a face many supermodels would kill for. The men in the room, as well as several women, were enamored with her. She, however, seemed bored by all the attention. It was something she was obviously accustomed to.
Where Ravana was light, Bonificio was dark. He was tall with black hair and dark eyes, yet his lips were blood red and his skin pasty white. He had the face and build of a man in his thirties, however it was well known he was over seven hundred years old. Despite what he was, he was dressed impeccably and there was something alluring about him. Vampires were known for their charm and skill at seduction and Hermione felt this was a creature she could easily be seduced by in a vulnerable state.

When Pansy arrived, Hermione sensed the relief in Draco. He did not hesitate to approach her and, while Hermione followed, she gave them a bit of distance.

“Hi, Pans. Thanks for coming,” Draco said quietly as he leaned forward and gave her a small kiss on the cheek.

For her part, Pansy seemed slightly uncomfortable and shot a glance at Hermione before looking back up at him, “Of course, Draco. I’m here for you.”

Lucius had told Hermione that Draco had been spending a lot of time with Pansy. It seemed that she was someone Draco felt he could confide in and Lucius was very relieved she was there for Draco. Hermione had decided that Pansy had to be completely in love with the boy to have put up with his treatment of her all those months.

“You look lovely,” Draco told her without any hint of falseness.

“Thanks.” Where Pansy had looked like a goth marshmallow at the graduation party, tonight she really did look beautiful. Her gown was elegant in a steel grey silk and it accentuated her thin frame beautifully.

Hermione was stunned when the Slytherin witch whispered, “Granger, you look…nice.”

Hermione couldn’t help but glance up at Draco, anticipating a biting response due to habit. Instead he just looked away as though he hadn’t heard the compliment.

Hermione turned her gaze to Pansy and softly responded, “Thank you. You look beautiful. Your dress is really pretty.”

Pansy offered Hermione a half smile in return before she turned on the signature Slytherin bored expression and glanced about the room.

The room continued to fill and when Lucius walked over to greet them, Hermione thought she was going to swoon. He looked stunning in his formal robes. Lucius Malfoy was a gorgeous package that she wanted nothing more than to unwrap. Her mouth went dry when she imagined that the night could be a failure and Sybill Trelawney could end up with that pleasure. Where the vision would have made her laugh weeks ago, now it made her want to cry. It would only be another thirty minutes or so before the potential future Mrs. Lucius Malfoy would be making her entrance. Hermione could only imagine what kind of entrance it would be and found the thought amusing despite herself.

“Father, watch the Mudblood for me while Pansy and I mingle for a bit.” With that, Draco took Pansy’s hand and led her towards Blaise and Theo, leaving Hermione and Lucius a few moments alone.

“You are a vision, Hermione. I wish it were our wedding tonight.”

Hermione glanced up to see him looking about the room with his typical haughty sneer. He was so incredibly good at that. She wanted to leap into his arms and kiss that sneer right off his face. Even if
there weren’t a room full of people, Hermione wasn’t sure how her affections would be received. Ever since Draco had awoken, Lucius had been sexually distant towards her. He held her when they slept and told her he loved her, but he hadn’t initiated sex and had claimed exhaustion the one time she tried. She hoped he just needed time but a piece of her worried that this was about Draco.

“You look very handsome yourself. Professor Trelawney is one lucky witch.”

“Don’t say that,” Lucius responded sadly. “It won’t come to that. It can’t come to that.” He swallowed the final drop from his glass. “Here, take this.”

Hermione stared in confusion as Lucius handed her his empty glass with a sneer. She assumed he was just playing their usual charade and forcing her to deal with his dirty dish. When she took it from him, however, it had something on the bottom of it. She froze for a second when she could feel it was a coin.

“You once asked me for a wand and portkey to Paris. You don’t need the wand with your wandless abilities, and I can’t sneak it to you without being seen. But the coin is a portkey. It will take you to Ile Saint-Louis in front of a small watch repair. The owner is a man named Reggie. He is holding enough Galleons for you to run away and hide. It’s enough money to support you for many lifetimes if you aren’t reckless.”

Hermione stared straight ahead as her heart began to pound. Breathlessly she choked out, “You want to send me away?”

“Of course not. That’s for you to use if things go awry. If anything goes wrong, I don’t want you hurt. You and the baby must escape.”

“Lucius, I don’t want…” She was unable to finish her sentence because in that moment, Voldemort arrived, and Lucius walked away from her. Draco appeared instantly and was at her side again.

Her head was spinning. She was free! She could activate the portkey right then and there and disappear. She wasn’t about to leave, though. She would not abandon the Order or Harry. She would not leave Lucius. She would see this through. It was tempting, though. Now that she was supposedly bonded to Draco, Lucius would no longer take the fall. Draco would. She knew better, though. Lucius would confess. He would protect his son at all cost. In truth, despite everything, she did not wish ill will towards Draco. He could live his life, just hopefully far away from hers. She chanced a glance at her husband who was now greeting Cormac McLaggen. She couldn’t help the shiver of revulsion. Ignoring their exchange, she kept her head down while sneaking glances all around her.

There was tension about the room as the Dark Lord entered the large gathering with robes that looked like they were swallowing him. Nagini slithered behind him and everyone gave the massive python a very wide berth. He was led to a special, throne-like chair at the side of the room where Dolohov, Severus, and the Lestranges had congregated. Hermione had not even seen Snape arrive.

She felt her palms grow sweaty and her mouth was as dry as the desert when she saw Severus hand a goblet to his Master

This was it.

The unsuspecting Lord was about to drink his death. The arsenic in that glass was enough to kill a grown man within an hour, but Riddle would go down faster because of his weakened state from constant smaller doses over several months. Just as the snake-man moved the glass towards his mouth, he met her eye and froze his motion. She didn’t mean to be caught staring and quickly looked
down. She watched through her lashes as he glanced about the room before looking down at his cup as though in thought. He snapped his fingers and one of the serving elves arrived at his side instantly. Dread washed over her as he handed the cup to the elf and ordered the poor soul to drink all of it.

She watched Severus step forward and say something, but Voldemort merely waved the Headmaster off and kept his eyes on the elf. Hermione saw movement in the corner of her eye as Theo and Thorfinn whispered something to each other. The elf let out a small gasp and patted his chest as though he had indigestion. Voldemort turned an accusing glare at Snape and much to Snape’s credit he didn’t even flinch.

The second the elf collapsed, Voldemort was out of his chair, his wand turned on Severus. “You!”

Before Severus could even respond, all hell broke loose.

Bellatrix had her wand on Snape but went down instantly from a curse to the back. Her dead body was crumpled on the floor, her eyes open and staring without seeing. Hermione was stunned the witch was brought down so quickly. It was what the resistance had hoped for: the element of surprise playing in their favor. She could not tell who had cast the curse because there was panicked shuffling and movement as people struggled to get out of the way, but Gregory Goyle senior seemed to have a very satisfied look on his face.

The collapse of his favorite pet distracted Voldemort for a split second, which was just enough time for Snape to grasp his wand and drop and roll behind a chair.

There were frightened yells as many guests started to run.

Lucius must have activated the portkeys because resistance members suddenly appeared to loud gasps of surprise. Lupin quickly jumped into the fray as Charlie, Bill, and Dean popped in right behind him.

Hermione scanned the room for Lucius but before she could spot him, Draco had grabbed her hand and pulled her out a hidden pocket door she hadn’t realized was there. They were in a smaller ballroom she had never seen before and Draco’s hands were at her collar, releasing it.

“I don’t know what’s going on in there, but you need to be able to defend yourself and our child.”

Hermione swallowed, grateful for Draco’s help. She tossed the glass she was still holding aside and tucked the coin into the bra cup of her dress. After a second’s thought, she threw caution to the wind and hoped she wouldn’t regret saying, “It’s the Order. They are here to end this once and for all. Lucius is helping.”

Draco’s eyes grew wide as saucers. Hermione didn’t wait for his response, instead she ran back into the larger ballroom to find curses flying causing glassware to shatter and tables to splinter to pieces. She almost tripped over a dead Walden MacNair as she ran for cover, her eyes darting around looking for Lucius, looking for Harry.

The minute she crouched behind a sideways table, she felt someone behind her. “Dammit, Granger. Do you have absolutely no sense of self-preservation?!”

She ignored Draco as she searched with panicked eyes for the men she loved. “I have to find Harry. I need to protect him.”

“What? Granger, what the fuck?! Potter’s dead!”

“No, he survived. I have to –”
Before she could finish her sentence, Draco stammered, “Merlin’s balls. There he is!” He pointed across the room and Hermione was on her feet before she even thought about moving. She could feel Draco behind her as the spells were flying all around them and bodies were collapsing. She tried to contain her panic as she made her way to her best friend who had his wand pointed at Voldemort.

It was the first time Hermione had ever heard Voldemort sound anything less than composed.

“Harry Potter! How is it you are still alive??”

“Fate won’t let me die until I destroy you, Riddle!”

Hermione cast her wandless Protego on Harry just in time to deflect a red curse from Rodolphus’ wand.

“NO!” the creature man bellowed. “Potter’s mine! Nobody touches him!”

Hermione cast another Protego at Harry before throwing a Confringo at Rodolphus who was attempting to dodge a curse from Charlie’s wand. Her curse was so strong it sent the wizard flying through the air where he slammed into his brother, Rabastan, who was a good thirty feet away. Several surprised glances landed on her after such a powerful show of wandless magic.

Rabastan tried to push his unconscious brother off him but wasn’t quick enough to prevent the Incarcerous cast from Lucius, who Hermione now spotted with great relief. Hermione screeched in horror when he was stuck down just as he threw her a small smile.

“Lucius!” she cried out and was only prevented from running to him by the strong grip of Draco.

“You’re going to get yourself killed!” he growled. “It was a stunner, he should be okay.”

Hermione’s eyes were wild as they scanned the room to find many Order members still fighting. Lupin was battling Corban Yaxley and Dean was fighting someone she didn’t recognize. She saw a denim clad body with long, dark hair covered in blood and laying still on the floor. Obviously, it was an Order member, but Hermione couldn’t tell who it was without seeing her face. She was shocked to see Pansy casting Incarcerous spells on fallen, but still breathing, Death Eaters as she stood beside Theo, who was throwing hexes left and right.

Ravana was holding her own quite impressively as she struck down dazed wizards who had gotten too close to her. Hermione did a double take when Bonificio turned himself into a bat and flew about the room, adding chaos as he shat droppings on the faces of Death Eaters from over their heads. It was the perfect distraction for resistance fighters to seal their victories in their one-on-one battles. Crude, but effective.

Other Order members were Disapparating the restrained Death Eaters out before Apparating back in to apprehend more. The Order was successfully doing to the Death Eaters what they had done to the Order during the Hogwarts battle. Hermione’s gaze fell back on Harry who was throwing hexes at Voldemort, but the evil bastard was merely laughing as he deflected them.

“I have to help Harry!” she said more to herself than anyone as she started to move forward.

“No! I’ll help Potter. You protect our son, Granger.” Hermione turned to Draco and met his eyes, which were fierce with their conviction. “Protect our child,” he said before he added, “please.”

She watched as her husband darted forward and cast an impressive shield on Harry while he made his way to his Father’s side before dodging a hex from Alecto Carrow. The witch didn’t even see the stunner that hit her from behind.
“That’s for George, you gnarly bitch,” Fred scowled as he kept his wand on her.

Thorfinn Rowle stepped up beside Fred and cast an Avada Kedavra at the fallen Carrow. “That’s for making me fuck you as a reward.”

Hermione was frozen for a moment as she felt overwhelmed and confused. She needed to help Harry, but she also wanted to get to Lucius, and she had to protect her unborn child. She would have to make a choice. Suddenly it seemed obvious, her child would have no chance at a happy life if that evil bastard wasn’t brought down. She had to help Harry finish this once and for all. Victory was the only option.

She cast yet another Protego on Harry and was about to dash forward when a voice whispered too close for comfort, “You smell sooo delicious.” She would recognize the smell and voice of Fenrir Greyback anywhere.

She spun on her heels to find him leering at her lasciviously. She made a face of disgust, which made him laugh. “Don’t be like that, kitty cat! I just want a little taste. I was very disappointed when I killed that little bitch who bit me only to have her dead body morph into someone else.”

He made to grab her arm and, without thinking about it, she cast a Relashio followed by a Stupefy. He instantly fell to the ground, unconscious. Unable to resist, she kicked him hard in the face before turning back to see Harry crouching behind a different chair as he continued to battle Voldemort.

She made a quick scan of her periphery before bolting to Harry’s side. She cast another Protego around Harry and then, throwing caution to the wind, she took a deep breath before focusing all her inner power on her target. The curse she threw manifested as a fireball the size of a small boulder. She heard Harry gasp in surprise as it flew at a lightning pace towards Voldemort himself. The despot was so focused on Harry he didn’t even see her curse coming before it was too late. His own shield crumbled under the force and the fireball hit his shoulder as he ducked. He was knocked to the ground and suddenly the room was dead still, all eyes on the heretofore untouchable wizard as he lay with smoldering robes.

Voldemort struggled from the ground, his eyes blazing with rage. The look of surprise when he realized it was Hermione who had cast the magnificent display of magic would have been funny if the circumstances weren’t so dire.

“Kill her!” he screamed.

Two things happened at once. First, Severus suddenly appeared behind Voldemort, a basilisk fang in his hand. The snake had been encased in a bubble protection charm since the start of the fight and the minute Hermione’s spell hit the Dark Lord, his protection spell on the snake evaporated. Severus had obviously been waiting for this moment and stabbed the snake to its instant death.

TheDark Lord was still reeling, his shoulder now nothing but burnt flesh. His maddened and unbelieving eyes shot back towards his dead Horcrux as Harry cast the killing curse that struck the evil lord dead on the spot.

Hermione stared stunned at the fallen body of the monster she had, until this moment, feared indestructible. She glanced up at Harry to find his expression matched her surprise. When he turned his green eyes to hers, she let out a squeal of joy and leapt at her friend to hug him.

What she did not realize, however, was that the minute the Dark Lord had yelled for her death, Dolohov had taken aim. His signature cutting curse was headed her way and it was not until she heard Draco yell, “NO!” followed by the thud of a fallen body that she began to realize what had
She stood frozen for a second as her mind raced to catch up as she stared at Draco laying before her with blood pouring out of his chest and torso. She could not explain the sudden rush of dread she felt for this man.

“Draco,” she shrieked without conscious thought. She swallowed heavily as she came to her knees with wide eyes as her hands pressed over his chest, seemingly of their own accord, to try and stop the gushing blood. “Draco…” Her eyes took in the blood rapidly pooling around him, her dress now saturated at her knees. Her focus moved back to his face to find him staring up at her serenely. “Draco…why did you…?”

He looked so peaceful as he rasped, “I had to protect you. I…” he swallowed, “…I love you.”

Hermione’s eyes suddenly welled with tears that instantly spilled over as she watched the man she had once hated more than anyone in the world lay dying before her.

“Just breathe… Just hang on…” She glanced to her left and then her right before yelling a bit maniacally, “I need some help here!”

She looked back down as an unexpected sob escaped from her chest. “Keep your eyes on me. Just breathe.” He nodded slightly and took a breath that made him cough. “Stay with me, Draco. Don’t die, okay?”

The corners of his mouth attempted a weak smile, but she could see his lips turning blue and his skin growing more and more pale. She could hear the crackles with each faint breath as his lungs filled with blood.

Suddenly Severus was hovering over Draco from the other side, his hands moving over the bleeding wounds as he chanted a healing spell of some kind.

“You’re going to be okay. Severus is here. He’ll…”

Draco never took his eyes off hers. His voice was weak and barely above a whisper. She couldn’t understand him. “Don’t talk. Keep your eyes on me and breathe.”

His forehead creased with the effort to speak louder and she realized he wasn’t going to stop. She leaned forward and turned her head so that her ear was just over his mouth. She could barely understand him through his wheezes. “Take…care…my so… Tell…him…”

Silence.

Hermione pulled back to see his eyes had closed. She stared at him. “Draco.”

Still silence.

She swallowed as she gently shook his shoulder. “Draco,” she said in a louder, more urgent voice. When he didn’t respond, she looked up at Severus to see tears dripping down his cheeks. He was no longer chanting.

She stared back down at Draco. “No!” she cried as unwelcome and unexpected grief continued to confuse her.

The room was silent, and then there was a wail of anguish as Pansy sprinted from a few feet away and fell to Hermione’s side before she lifted Draco’s head. She brushed his hair back, which made
him look like a young boy sleeping.

Pansy’s words were choked through sobs. “Oh, Draco… don’t leave me! We promised to be there for each other. You can’t leave me!” She fell forward and rested her forehead on his as her tears grew silent, but her body wracked with its grief.

Suddenly, Hermione felt like she was intruding and pushed herself up to stand. Harry wrapped a supportive arm around her, and she rested her head on his shoulder as a numbness washed over her. She stared down at the dead body of her husband; a man, who until this moment, she thought she would never forgive. A man who gave his life to protect her and their unborn son.

Lucius. She needed Lucius. Her eyes scanned the room to where he still lay unmoving from the stunner that had hit him what seemed like hours ago but had only been minutes. Hermione moved quickly to his side, tripping over Dolohov’s now dead body. She was barely aware of Lupin giving soft orders to the still standing members of the resistance as he took control of the macabre scene.

When she got to Lucius’ side, she found that he was warm and had a normal pulse. Draco had been right – Lucius would be fine. Tears overcame her once again. This time it was not grief for herself, or grief for a life taken too young, but overwhelming despair for this man who did not know he had lost his only child. This man whom she would have to explain had lost his son in a valiant sacrifice. A sacrifice for love.
Hermione woke around five in the morning to find Lucius awake and sitting in front of the hearth with Jupiter at his feet. Crookshanks was curled up behind her knees and stretched languorously when he felt his mistress stir. Having only slept a couple hours, Hermione groggily slid out of bed, surprised to see Lucius still dressed in his betrothal robes from the night before. She pulled on her robe and walked over to him. The dark circles under red eyes that greeted her tore at her heart as the flashes of vivid memories from the night before made her feel ill.

It was hard to believe everything that had happened was real. It seemed like something from a dream, and yet, something from a nightmare as well.

Lucius’ eyes had fluttered open right after she had dashed to his side. Her tear laden lashes must have spelled defeat because he had simply said, “Use the Portkey. Go!”

Hermione had shaken her head as more tears fell, unable to find the necessary words. How could she say them? How could she tell him that Draco was gone?

Lucius had pushed himself up to a seating position and looked about the room, his frown slowly turning into a beaming smile as he saw Charlie and Lupin walking around and a very dead Voldemort not twenty feet away.

When he had looked back at her though, something had clicked. She saw the panic in his eyes. “What is it?” he had asked with an urgent voice.

“I’m so sorry, Lucius. I’m so –”

Her words were interrupted when Severus had appeared at their side as well. “Lucius, there was nothing to be done. I tried…but it struck his chest deeply. There was just…”

A panicked look overtook Lucius’ face as he pushed himself to stand and called out, “Draco!” not letting his friend finish speaking.

Hermione and Severus had looked at each other, her eyes conveying that she had not told Lucius yet. Severus had sighed in understanding and they both stood to see Lucius frozen, his focus glued to the vision of his dead son being cradled by a sobbing Pansy.

He had not cried or wailed or made any sort of display. He had merely walked over to his son and knelt beside him, taking Draco’s hand and holding it for two hours until the authorities finally took Draco’s body away. He had then answered some questions and spoken to a few people, including a very upset Trelawney, before leaving the authorities to their investigation and taking Hermione upstairs.

Focusing back on the present, she felt sick for the grief he was going through and nestled close to him on the sofa, resting her head on his shoulder. “You were right about Draco all along, Lucius. He wasn’t the monster I thought he was. He died to save me and his son. I’m sorry I didn’t –”

Lucius wrapped his arm around her, not letting her finish. “We need to talk,” he said with obvious
exhaustion and a hint of resignation in his voice.

“Lucius, you need to rest. We can talk later. Let me have Bilby bring you some chamomile tea. We can talk after you’ve had a proper sleep.”

Lucius rubbed his eyes with his left hand as his right arm maintained its tight hold of her. “No. We need to talk now, before the Aurors come for me. I’m sure it won’t be long.”

“They can ask their questions when you’ve slept and there is no reason for you to have to leave the Manor!”

“Hermione, I am a Death Eater. Their interrogation will cover years of my service to the Dark Lord and I’m certain I will be arrested.”

Hermione scoffed. “First off, call him Tom Riddle; a proper Muggle name for the half-blood he is. He is not and never was a Lord!” Her voice rose in frustration. “And second, you have more than made up for any mistakes from your past. Your assistance recruiting Death Eaters as well as Ravana and Bonificio were key to our victory last night. It’s because of your help that that monster was destroyed, and his regime was left in shambles.”

“Be that as it may, I am guilty of… many things. I may have helped bring him down, but I also helped him achieve power upon his return. Suffice to say, I will be in Azkaban for many years, I’m quite certain.”

Hermione stared up at him. Why had she not really thought about any of this? She knew Lucius as a good man; a man who protected her and loved her. A man who turned his back on the brainwashed rhetoric he had been spouting his entire life. He had changed. He helped the resistance. He deserved to be free!

The more she thought about it, however, the more she realized how correct he was. A sense of desperation clawed at her chest at the thought of losing him. She immediately climbed onto his lap and wrapped her arms around him. “I don’t want to lose you, especially now that we are finally free!”

Her whispered words tickled the sensitive skin on his neck. Her tight hold of him was a cocoon he wished he could hide in forever. He closed his eyes, relishing this moment – forcing it to memory.

After a second, he pulled her arms from around his neck so that he could take them into his hands. “Hermione…listen to me.”

He smiled sadly and Hermione felt a tightening in her chest. She could tell that whatever he was about to say would break her heart.

Lucius swallowed and forced the words out. “I love you, kitten. You entered my life in a whirlwind and turned it upside down. You enabled me to be the man I always wanted to be, I just didn’t know it.

“Draco said that you ‘nestle your way into a man’s heart and don’t leave despite how many evictions notices are sent.’” Lucius chuckled. “He was so right. I fought it, you know. I resisted falling in love with you. I was a fool. I was too thickheaded to realize you had been burrowing your way in there like a determined Hufflepuff since that very first night and I never stood a chance.”

Hermione’s eyes glistened as she waited for the ‘but’ that she knew was coming.

“But,” he added quietly causing her eyes to close in resignation, “it’s time for you to get away from
me. You’ve been trapped in this house as a bonded victim for months. I have been your lover, but I have also been your protector in a very hostile and volatile environment. That’s a very seductive thing for a young woman and it played no small part in your attachment to me, I’m sure. Some distance will help you clear your –”

“Lucius, please don’t think that –”

“Let me finish, love. This isn’t easy.”

When she didn’t say anything, he continued. “Regardless of whether I end up in Azkaban or not, your place is not here, Hermione. Your friends need you and you need them. Your mother will require your help getting reestablished in her new life as a single woman. She has a lot of grief she still has to work through as well, and you should be there for each other. In short, you need separation from me so that you can move on with your life. Once you get away, I think you will find your feelings for me are not so cut and dry.”

“You’re ending things, aren’t you? You’re pushing me away.”

“Hermione, I love you and it’s because of how much I care about your happiness and well-being that I am encouraging you to move on from me. It is highly unlikely that I will be around anyway, and I don’t want you waiting for me as I rot in prison. I am prepared to lie in the bed I have made for myself. You, however, have a bright and wonderful future ahead of you.”

He splayed a hand caressingly across her torso. “You are carrying my grandson in your womb – the Malfoy heir.” The feeling of his hand felt very intimate and made her blood boil even as her heart felt raw. “He is the only living connection to Draco and he will never want for anything. Financially, you and he have the security of the Malfoy vaults to support you for the rest of your lives. I already contacted my solicitor this morning and notified Gringotts. You will have to sign some parchments and have your wand keyed to the vaults, but my solicitor will help you with all of that if I am unable. In short, you are Hermione Malfoy and this Manor and its entitlements are ultimately yours should anything happen to me. You will have unrestricted access to the property and its contents in my absence. The elves will remain and will keep things in order. Your father’s grave can be moved if you do not wish for it to remain here.”

“What if you are wrong, Lucius. What if you do not go to Azkaban?”

He smiled indulgently. Her innocence still amazed him sometimes, especially in light of everything she had been through. “In the unlikely event that I am not imprisoned, I will still reside here and continue to run the estate and live my life. I will go to work every day and try to pay my debt to society.” He swallowed heavily. “I will try to be a man my son would be proud o –” His voice suddenly broke and a sob escaped him. He turned his head and wiped his eyes, his composure returning almost as quickly as it had left him.

Hermione’s eyes welled instantly. She couldn’t bear to see him hurting. She swallowed down her own ping of loss for her unborn son’s father. A father who had not been a monster after all, but really a victim of the worst kind.

Lucius’ eyes were back on hers. His thumb swiped the tear that had dropped on her right cheek. He grabbed her hands and kissed her right palm and then the other. “I will be your biggest supporter in all things and will always be here for you. You will forever have a home here should you desire it. First, however, you need to get out there and start… your… life.”

Hermione knew that what he said was the truth. She knew she had emotional and mental wounds and scars that ran as deep as her physical ones. She would likely need counseling to work through it
all. Her feelings for Draco were very complicated and confusing before he died to save her. She didn’t even know where to begin with dissecting them now.

The one thing she was sure of, however, was that she loved Lucius. This she was certain of. He was implying she had some sort of Stockholm Syndrome, which just wasn’t true.

But she was coming to realize that Lucius had his own crosses to bear and she was acutely aware that the very words he said to her could be turned right back around and be applied to him as well. They had come to love each under extraordinary circumstances and, as the rubble and dust were cleared, it was very possible his feelings for her could change.

The thought left her stomach on the floor. She did not want to leave him, she did not want to lose him, but he was right. They needed to let each other go, at least for a while. He had the death of his son to work through. Hermione knew he was still numb and had hardly scratched the surface of his grief.

“Lucius, I will do as you are asking…for both of us. You need time for yourself as much as I do. I want to make something crystal clear, though. I love you with all of my heart. Our relationship may have been born from something grotesque and unnatural – and it may have been forged under unusual circumstances – but that doesn’t make it any less real. My heart doesn’t have an asterisk next to it clarifying the circumstances under which it was stolen. It was taken by you and is yours, no matter the reasons or the means that it got there.”

Lucius took her face in his hands and brushed his fingers lightly over the tears she hadn’t even realized she had let fall. “I don’t deserve you, Hermione and I fear you will agree with me much sooner than you realize.”

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**Two weeks later – mid November**

So much had happened since then. With the death of Voldemort and the capturing of most of his Death Eaters (not all had been at the wedding), Imperiused Ministry workers were freed from their mental bonds. Other Ministry workers who had willingly been in Voldemort’s pocket were quickly apprehended when the previously Imperiused started talking and names were revealed. The betrayal ran deep, and every department had been infiltrated if not at the top, then close. Even the new Minister himself, Pius Thicknesse, had been a supporter and a puppet of Tom Riddle.

Captives had been apprehended as well. A hysterical Lizzie Williams was reunited with her family when Thorfinn Rowle was arrested despite her speaking out on his behalf. The minute Alecto Carrow was killed, George had been freed of his bond and promptly Apparated from her poorly warded estate to the Burrow. Neville was currently in St. Mungo’s being treated by newly consulted Mind Healers, Etan and Rose Browne, who were making huge headway in not only treating Neville, but his parents as well.

Hermione had still been at the Manor when the Aurors had arrived for Lucius. It went just as he had predicted. Not only was he taken away, but he had not been home since. He was considered a flight risk and would have to stand trial for his crimes before he would be released – if he were released.

Severus Snape was the only Death Eater who was not charged. The testimony of Harry as well as numerous others, on top of the pensieve memories, were more than enough evidence to absolve him of any charges. It was also well known within the Order that as soon as he had been healthy enough after the Hogwarts battle, Snape had gone to the only person he knew was still alive and who might
have ties to the Order of the Phoenix – Andromeda Tonks. She in turn connected him with Remus Lupin.

Snape had been quick to assist with reforming the Order of the Phoenix and providing it the intelligence it needed to succeed. Hermione would not be surprised if Severus Snape ended up a war hero. He already was in her book.

Ginny was still living with Severus and made it perfectly clear to all that she was eternally Mrs. Severus Snape and would be at her husband’s side in all things. Hermione couldn’t help but feel envious of her redheaded friend. Lucius should be free as well, and they should be together! Snape wasn’t pushing Ginny away as Lucius had done to Hermione, either.

It was Sybill Trelawney who seemed to be the only one slightly put out by Tom Riddle’s demise. She had relished being taken seriously and had been seduced by his belief in her. As much as Hermione thought Trelawney was a fraud, she didn’t think the woman was hateful or believed in any of the Pureblood rhetoric. She was just a lonely drunk who finally had someone take an interest in her. Even Hermione could understand the allure of such a thing. Trelawney had been a mess when she arrived at the Manor in her lacey white gown, expecting to be married within minutes, and instead finding a Ballroom full of injured and dead witches and wizards. To her credit, she rolled up her sleeves and assisted where she could. When Lucius had regained consciousness, he had politely informed her the wedding was off. This news had not taken Sybill by surprise, but it was rather obvious she was disappointed.

The Death Eaters who had aided the resistance were fortunate insofar as they were being afforded swift and timely hearings. This was evidenced by Hermione standing outside of chamber three of the Wizengamot just shy of two weeks from Lucius’ arrest date. She was a bit of an emotional wreck because the man she loved was currently on the stand. To add to her misery, she was not only being called to testify for the defense, but for the prosecution as well.

Her hands cradled her now protruding baby belly as the flutters in her stomach threatened to force up the meager amount of tea she had managed to keep down that morning.

“You look rather green, ‘Mione. Are you okay?” Harry asked with no small amount of concern on his face.

Hermione’s heart was pounding. She had not seen Lucius since the day he was arrested, and she couldn’t stand that she would have to testify for the prosecution. She wrung her hands nervously as she continued to pace. “I don’t know, Harry. I can’t bear the thought of him being sent to Azkaban. He doesn’t deserve that.”

Harry didn’t say anything. It’s not that he felt Lucius should be locked up for good, but he felt some sort of punishment was in order. He had made the mistake of letting his opinion be known once before and it had led to a monstrous row between them. While Harry appreciated what Lucius had done in the final weeks of the war, he didn’t think it made up for the many years’ worth of crimes he had committed, not the least of which was putting that diary in Ginny’s cauldron of books all those years ago.

He had also accused Lucius of Draco’s death; which Hermione had almost literally combusted over in her anger. Harry had touted the reasons for Draco’s downfall falling directly on his upbringing. When Hermione had come back swinging and screaming of all the things Lucius had endured with his own childhood, she had brought Harry up short.

She had screamed at him about how heartbroken Lucius was over the loss of his son before breaking down and telling Harry everything she knew of Lucius’ past from not only Lucius, but Willow and
Narcissa’s portraits as well. Hermione had told Harry about how Abraxas had been a bigger monster than Lucius could ever be. How Lucius was raised on nonexistent affection and cruelty from his father and had only turned out as well as he had because the lessons from his soft-hearted mother had been more than enough to make him a better man than Abraxas Malfoy.

She told him how Abraxas had been a first-generation Death Eater and, after he murdered Willow, he had brought Lucius into the fold. Yes, Lucius had wanted to be there…but he’d gone through a tremendous growth in character since his fall from grace after what happened at the Department of Mysteries during their fifth year. Not to mention his incredible change of long-held beliefs after Narcissa had been executed and Hermione had found her way into his life.

Her anger had softened when she had turned her attention to discussing what had happened to Draco. Telling Harry that, yes, Draco’s Mark had been forced upon him, but not by Lucius. Lucius had been in Azkaban when Draco had been given his assignment to assassinate Dumbledore and had been held down while Voldemort had Marked him against his will and his mother’s wishes. She had concluded that the only two people responsible for Draco’s death were Voldemort and Dolohov.

Coming back to herself, Hermione rolled her eyes. She knew what her best friend was thinking. “Lucius saved my life many times over, Harry,” she reminded him. “He protected me from a cursed and crazed Draco who might have killed me many times over.”

Harry sighed. “Just tell the truth, that’s all you can do. Leave the rest to the Wizengamot.”

She didn’t have to long to wait and felt her knees weaken when the door opened, and the court clerk announced. “Mrs. Malfoy, we are ready for you.”

His hearing lasted an entire day and the Wizengamot deliberated for two additional days before his sentence was determined.

“I don’t understand why you are being so difficult about this, Lucius?” Hermione asked with a lost look on her face as they stood in his cell under the Ministry.

Lucius paced and ran his hands through his hair. “Not this way. I wanted my freedom, but not like this.” He stopped and stared at her with determined and tired eyes. “You do not need this burden Hermione. They should just let me do the twenty years in Azkaban.”

“You don’t deserve prison, Lucius! Twenty years probation under house arrest is so much better than what I feared! What you feared!”

Lucius shook his head adamantly. “No, not if it means you have to give up your future and basically be imprisoned with me at the Manor as my guardian and keeper!”

“I will not be imprisoned, I am able to come and go as I please. I am merely being asked to share a home with you.” Hermione watched him pace. Why didn’t he understand? “You are not a burden, Lucius. I am not giving up my future. I will do as you said. I will live my life. The Manor is huge. We don’t have to see each other any more than we choose!” She stared at him as he continued his agitated pacing. “Besides, it’s not like we have a choice. You can only be released under house arrest if a family member will agree to live with you, you can’t live alone. Like it or not, I am your only living relative!”

Lucius let out an angry growl. “Yes, my daughter-in-law. Not my wife. Am I to be tormented living under the same roof as you and not be allowed to touch you? To spend time with you? No! This is a
Hermione was getting tired of his unreasonable display. She rested her hands on her hips. “Lucius you are being a drama queen. Might I remind you that you are the one who ended things with me. This was your choice, not mine!”

He froze and shot her a contemptuous glare. After a minute, he straightened his back and shoulders and pulled himself up into the refined and formal man that he presented to the public. “Fine. I will have the east wing modified for you. You will have your own set of suites and guest suites. Your own study as well. We will use the house elves to make sure we do not enter the common areas at the same time. The parlor is yours, I have no need of it.” He paused, “When my grandson comes… we will make other arrangements.”

Hermione shook her head and walked towards him. “You are a ridiculous man sometimes, Lucius. But fine, we will do it your way if you will stop your complaining.” She shook her head in bewilderment as her soft brown eyes met his determined and hard ones. “We will see each other as little as possible, no matter how much it breaks both of our hearts.”

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**Six weeks later – January 2nd**

Hermione arrived for dinner at Hogwarts at precisely six o’clock. Ginny met her at the gates, both of them bundled in their winter robes so that they could enjoy the fresh air of their arm-in-arm stroll up to the castle.

“Godric, Ginny! You’re huge!” Hermione teased. Hermione was about five months pregnant and was definitely showing. Ginny, however, was already starting to waddle despite only being a week ahead in her pregnancy. She had not seen Ginny in a few weeks – not since Draco’s funeral at the Malfoy plot on the Manor grounds.

“I know, don’t remind me. The other students give me such a wide berth in the corridors. It’s like they are afraid I’m going to blow any minute.”

Hermione laughed. “I imagine it has more to do with fear of your husband and his wrath should anyone touch you or get in your way.”

Ginny shrugged, “Yeah, there’s that I suppose.” She smiled villainously. “He’s so easy to rile these days. You would think that with the war over he would relax and chill a bit, but he’s the same intimidating bastard he has always been.”

“Ginny!”

“Hey, he’s my intimidating bastard, so I can say that!” She sighed and a dreamy look came over her face. “And he’s so sexy when he gets ornery and grumpy.”

“Ginny, I think maybe you are the one who should be in therapy, not me!”

“Well, unless he’s upset with me, of course. That’s a whole different thing. But that’s rare, really.”

Hermione shook her head in disbelief. “A teasing Snape I can handle, but pissy Snape is a whole other quidditch match.”

Ginny grinned. “He comes in all grouchy and sits at his desk, scattering parchments and cursing
dunderheads left and right.” Ginny tossed Hermione a conspiratorial glance. “I just unbutton a couple buttons from the top of my blouse so he can sneak a peak at my boobs, which are the size of pumpkins these days, and ask him what’s bothering him. A little sway to my hips, as I walk around his desk, followed by a kiss to his cheek usually seals the deal.” She snapped her fingers. “Bam, I’m bent over his desk in submissive bliss within seconds.”

Hermione had to admit that was kind of hot, only she imagined an entirely different wizard altogether.

They opened the main doors and walked into the warmth of the castle and Hermione instantly felt herself relax. Just the smell of the entrance foyer made her feel like she was home. They headed up the stairs towards the Headmaster’s quarters. “So… spill, Hermione. How are things going? How is Lucius?”

Hermione made a face. “Well, its much better than it was six weeks ago. We don’t walk around on eggshells trying to avoid each other anymore. My heart still feels like it’s going to pound out my chest when I see him, though.”

They turned to walk down another corridor. “His assigned probation officer comes around once a week to check on him. I have to be there for their sessions as well. They are forcing Lucius into counseling. It’s part of the rehabilitation piece of his probation.

“As much as he hummed and hawed about it at first, he now admits that it’s helping him. He doesn’t talk to me about it, of course. But he talks to his probation officer in front of me, so I hear it that way. I think he wants me to know how it’s going but doesn’t want to sit down and spend one on one time with me. I guess he’s right, I don’t really trust myself to be alone with him. Anyway, he says the therapy is helping him with the guilt and loss he feels. He is kicking himself for not consulting Etan and Rose much earlier, you see. He also harbors some guilt over Narcissa, although for what he didn’t say. Maybe he doesn’t want to talk to me about his relationship with her. I’m not sure.”

“What about you? Have you started therapy yet?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, just two weeks ago. We really just started talking about the war during the last session. Prior to that, she asked me tons of questions about my childhood and growing up the best friend of Harry Potter. We seem to be systematically working our way through my life.”

“Well, I’m sure it will help in the long run. It’s definitively helped me,” the redhead added. “Dealing with the death of Mom, Dad, Percy, and Ron hasn’t been easy and I was suppressing too many feelings. I am working through them, though, and am also facing my guilt over breaking Harry’s heart.”

Hermione wrapped her arms around Ginny’s shoulders and pulled her into a hug. “Harry understands, Ginny. He forgave you quite a while ago and I think it’s time you forgave yourself as well. You thought he was dead for Merlin’s sake. We all did! Not even Snape knew he was alive right away.”

When they walked into the Headmaster’s apartment, Snape stood and greeted Hermione formally. “Mrs. Malfoy, it’s…nice to see you again.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Headmaster. I drive you batty and you’ve dreaded this all day. I’m sure you have a wonderful repertoire of insults you are itching to try out on me tonight.”

Snape couldn’t help the twitch of his mouth as he tried not to smile. With that, Hermione’s mouth
broke into a wide toothy grin and she threw her arms around his middle. “I’ve missed you, you blast ended skrewt.”

“Hmm, I find I’ve enjoyed our separation. The histrionics of one pregnant witch is all I can take.”

“Hey!” Ginny playfully scolded.

The floo roared to life in that moment and a smiling Minerva McGonagall came bounding through.

“Hermione!” She practically sing-songed as she pulled her favorite former pupil into a bone-crushing hug.

“What are you doing here, woman? You know I can’t bear the sight of you right now.” Snape snapped at the new arrival.

“Oh pish, Severus. Your wife invited me to join you this evening. You’ll just have to tolerate three lionesses at your table tonight.”

Hermione didn’t miss the assessing glance Severus threw at Ginny with a hint of something to come. The furious blush on Ginny’s cheeks gave Hermione an idea of just what that something might be.

Ginny elbowed Hermione lightly and whispered, “See what I mean? Very easy to rile. He’s going to be delicious tonight!”

Hermione looked doubtful. Ginny was playing with fire as far as she was concerned.

“So why is the Headmaster upset with you, Minerva?” Hermione asked as she cut her eyes to see the man in question rolling his eyes.

“He keeps asking me to be Headmistress and I keep refusing. He’s very good at it, you know.”

“Here, here.” Dumbledore’s portrait cheered from Hermione’s right.

“Professor Dumbledore!” Hermione greeted with a warm smile.

“What, no greeting for me?” Phineas Black crooned from another portrait in the corner.

“Hello, Phineas. Sorry, I didn’t notice you over there. I hope the current Headmaster isn’t letting you grow too bored. I know you enjoyed playing spy all those months ago.”

“Phineas wouldn’t let me grow bored if his very existence harbored on it. He’s a terrible pain in the –”

“Why don’t we all sit down,” Ginny interrupted. Hermione and Minerva exchanged surprised glances at Snape’s lack of reaction to being corralled by his young wife.

The evening progressed with discussions of the revamped curriculum in the school as well as new socials that were being held two Saturdays a month between the four houses. Hufflepuff and Gryffindor had had one just before the holidays and Slytherin and Ravenclaw would be having one upon the student’s return.

Hogwarts was reopening the doors to Muggleborns and were requiring all pure and half-bloods to take a new and improved Muggle studies curriculum while all Muggle-borns would be required to take a class on wizarding etiquette and traditions. Starting in fourth year, their classes would be combined, and they would be assigned projects that would require them to problem solve together.
“Perhaps, Hermione, you could be impressed upon to take up a teaching role as the new Muggle Studies professor?” Minerva asked.

Hermione looked at Snape to find he wasn’t scowling and harbored no surprise at this suggestion. It was clear this was not the first time he was hearing this.

She cocked a brow at the onyx-eyed man who in this moment was giving nothing away. “You are on board with this? Seeing me? Daily? In staff meetings? In the halls? At meals?”

With each accented question, Snape seemed to cringe a little more and Hermione couldn’t help but laugh. “Hmm, for the sheer opportunity to get on your last nerve, I just might take this position.”

After a moment of silence, Hermione looked at Severus seriously. “Why? Why would you want me in this role, Severus?”

Snape assessed her for a minute. “It would be very good for Pureblood children to be brought to heel by a confident and powerful Muggleborn such as yourself, Hermione. No one tested as highly as you on that MPS scale other than Riddle. You are proof that the notion of Pureblood magical supremacy is absolute hogwash.” He seemed to give her a conspiratorial smirk. “I would expect occasional demonstrations of that wickedly powerful magic of yours to remind the little scoundrels of that fact.

“In short, there is still a tremendous amount of prejudice against Muggle-borns in our society. The masses may not have supported Voldemort’s ways, but that does not mean they didn’t support his propaganda. Young minds are where we begin with turning the tide, so to speak. We have no control over the tripe that is spouted in their homes, but we can certainly teach them the truth here at Hogwarts.”

Hermione had not expected this. Not in a million years. “Let me think about it, Headmaster.” She looked at McGonagall. “It’s a lot to consider.”

Minerva patted Hermione’s knee. “Yes, it is, my dear.” She pushed herself up. “Well, it’s late and I must get to bed. I will bid you each a good night.”

Hermione stood to hug the deputy headmistress and watched her floo away before turning to her hosts. “I need to get back to the Manor. It’s late and, even though he doesn’t really talk to me, he waits up for me when I go out.”

Severus’ eyes dimmed just a bit. “Yes, there is no punishment inflicted on that man that is greater than the penance he has placed on himself.”

Hermione nodded sadly.

“Use the floo, Hermione. It’s too cold to venture outside and Apparate,” Snape added.

Hermione smiled at them both. “Thank you. Thank you for a lovely evening.” She looked up at Severus. “I’ll let you know about the job. I’m flattered to have been considered, much less offered the position.”

Snape nodded formally and Hermione smirked in return. “There you go again. You can’t help it can you?”

“Okay, off you go,” Ginny said as she hurriedly walked Hermione towards the floo.
four months later – may 2nd

“Ahh, you’re as good as Ron at this. I wish you could have played him,” Hermione pronounced as her last viable player on the chess board collapsed with a sword penetrating his chest.

Lucius beamed with his victory. “Draco could never beat me. Severus has only defeated me twice.”

“Hmpf. Well, I shall resist the torture of ever playing you again, then.” Hermione teased.

Hermione watched the long and graceful fingers of the man she still loved as he put away the chess set. She sipped her sparkling water and held her breath as another cramp hit her lower back.

It had taken time, but she and Lucius had managed to become friends. They would spend a couple hours over the course of a week together doing various things. It wasn’t easy and there were constant struggles to stop herself from reaching out and touching him or merely jumping into his arms. Merlin knew she wanted to, but he had not made any inclination of feeling the same way. He was still very reserved and formal with her most of the time, but the therapy had helped him finally forgive himself and realize he was worthy of her friendship. She wanted more but did not mention it. She would take what she could get, she didn’t want to push him. Not yet.

Her therapist kept telling her that she needed to give everything more time and that she should get out more. She was already volunteering five days a week; two days at the war orphanage and three at the ‘Outreach for Literacy’ clinic at a Muggle library in London. What more did her therapist want from her?

She loved both projects. The orphanage was full to capacity due to the many deaths from both sides of the war. She loved spending time with the children whether it was to read to them, or help them with arts and crafts, or just simply listen to what they had to say. She had been amazed by some of the words that came out of their mouths. Children were much more aware and insightful than adults gave them credit for sometimes. Then there were the quiet ones; the ones she liked to coax out of their shells. The good news was that the children were being placed in good homes and it wouldn’t be long until the orphanage was no longer needed.

The Muggle literacy program was enjoyable as well. She loved helping children and adults alike learn to read and write and she liked being around Muggles. She would not abandon that piece of her heritage and genetic makeup.

Of course, her therapist was mainly referring to her getting out socially. Hermione just didn’t feel like going out to pubs and dating and doing the things that young women her age normally did. Besides, what was she going to do? Go out bar hopping? One look at her huge belly made others her age very uncomfortable. If they knew her story, it was even worse. She was one of those ‘bonded Death Eater slaves’, which she would hear whispered or read on the lips of those around her. They would look at her with pity and step away as though she were contagious.

And the support groups? Those were even worse. There was the ‘Survivors Guilt’ group on Mondays and the ‘Rape Abuse Network’ (or RAN as it was commonly called) that met on
Tuesdays. Then there was ‘Feels for Heals’, (a group about getting in touch with your true feelings and embracing them) that met on Saturdays in Diagon Park.

It’s not that the groups weren’t helpful, because they were in the beginning, but after a few weeks it had grown tiresome and she didn’t feel the need to talk through it all ad nauseum or hear others do the same. She already had a therapist. It was nice to see Luna and Lavender and some of the other familiar faces who attended some of the meetings, however. Even George had come to a few.

Besides seeing her mother regularly, she had been spending a lot of time with Harry. He was her rock and she loved helping him remodel and decorate Grimmauld Place. It was a project they enjoyed that pulled their thoughts away from the war. It felt good to take something dark and cold and make it bright and warm. They ate dinner together most nights and were practically glued at the hip when he wasn’t at Auror training and she wasn’t volunteering.

However, things were changing in their relationship, as well. Just a couple weeks prior Harry had guilty informed her that he had a date. Hermione had scolded him for being silly but, underneath it all, she did feel a touch of betrayal. Wasn’t her friendship and the friendship of others they socialized with enough? George and Fred? Lupin and Teddy? Did he really need a girlfriend when he had her? No, theirs wasn’t a ‘friends with benefits’ relationship or anything like that, but that piece of her, that sexual creature that she had become, was gone. She just didn’t have those impulses anymore. Why couldn’t Harry feel the same?

It was then that she realized that maybe her therapist was right. Maybe she did need to make more of an effort to socialize and make friends, even if she didn’t feel like going on dates. Maybe she was becoming frigid and closed off. No part of her should secretly want to hold Harry back from having a girlfriend. She knew she was becoming far too dependent on him, it was just that dating was simply not in the cards for her. She knew who she wanted, and he was sitting right in front of her – refusing to let her touch him.

When she flinched with another cramp and sucked in a sharp breath, Lucius paused in his motions to look at her. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I think it’s the Braxton Hicks contractions again. This time I’m not rushing to St. Mungo’s. I can’t bear the humiliation of being told it’s false labor again.”

Lucius watched her. “Why don’t you walk. It’s light outside. We can stroll around the south garden if you like. Everything is blooming magnificently.”

Tinny had just popped in. “Yous go and walks, good witch. Wills makes you feel better.”

Hermione shrugged and her lips twitched upwards. “You know I can’t say no when you both gang up on me!”

Lucius smiled and held his hand out to assist her to stand. Her palm settled into his easily and a familiar blush crept over her. At least he had the decency to pretend he didn’t notice.

When she took her first step, a gush of warm water dripped down her legs. “Umm, Lucius?”

Lucius paced in the labor and delivery waiting room at St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. Harry and Severus sat and watched, both fully aware that they could say nothing to calm the wizard. It was a relief he had been granted this temporary leave from his house arrest to be here. It would have been much worse had he been left on his own at the Manor.
Severus knew all too well what Lucius was going through. His twin daughters had been born two weeks early and he had been beside himself with worry as he waited for them to be delivered. Finally, he demanded entry into the delivery room despite the scandalous stares from the staff. Fuck them and their prehistoric sensitivities. Husbands had been allowed in Muggle delivery rooms with their wives for decades. It was time the wizarding world took a shot of reality. It was nothing he had never seen before. He knew his wife’s anatomy as well as the back of his hand. However, he had never seen anything as amazing as the birth of his girls, whom he had called squid one and squid two until they had been named, much to Ginny’s chagrin. He would vehemently deny it if anyone claimed he had cried that night. Vehemently.

“What is taking so long?” Lucius demanded. “She has been in there for hours.”

“Relax, Grandpa.” Ginny said as she entered the waiting room, having just come from Hermione’s side. “Come meet your grandson.”

Lucius dashed down the hall and suddenly froze. He felt overcome with a flush of guilt. This should be Draco. This should be him rushing in to meet his son.

Then words came to him in his son’s voice as though Draco were speaking to Lucius from right next to him. Take my place, Father. Love him as your own…for me. Be the father that I can’t.

When he pushed open the door it was to find the woman he loved more than life itself sweaty, and with a massive birds nest for a head, all he could think was that he had never seen her look more beautiful. She was radiant with flushed cheeks and a look of total and complete happiness on her face. The healers were rushing around and straightening this, that, and the other – including a crib that was set up right next to Hermione.

“Lucius,” she said quietly. “Come meet your grandson, Scorpius Draco Malfoy.”

Lucius quietly padded over and was unable to contain the rush of emotion when he met his grandson’s eyes for the first time. Familiar eyes. Draco’s eyes. And Hermione had given him the middle name Draco. It was a kindness he would have never even asked for.

“What do you want to hold him?” Hermione asked gently.

Lucius swallowed and nodded as he reached out for the small bundle, cradling his head as the memory of how to hold an infant came flooding back like it was yesterday.

Suddenly tears welled in his eyes. “Thank you, Hermione. Thank you,” he whispered in a barely controlled voice.

He slowly sat in the chair that Hermione wandlessly transfigured from a water pitcher. He looked down at Scorpious and studied his small features. From his perfect little nose to his pink lips to the little fingers that already had fingernails. He kept his eyes on his grandson as he said, “Hermione, please don’t hate me for saying this, but I’m so happy this little boy is Draco’s.” He looked up as another tear fell down his cheek. “You have given me back a part of my son and I will forever be in your debt.”

Hermione couldn’t help her own tears from falling as she watched Lucius cradle what was now the center of her world. She had not known it was possible to have so much love for another being until she held that little boy in her arms.

There was a commotion as Jane Granger was led into the room accompanied by Healer Jacobs who was dressed in Muggle attire. “Am I too late? Did we miss the delivery…?” She paused when she
saw the baby in Lucius’ arms and leaned over to get a closer look at her grandson. She smiled and was overcome with her own emotion as well. “Look at him. He looks just like Draco’s baby pictures.”

Lucius beamed up at Jane. “He does, doesn’t he?”

Hermione looked at her mother questioningly. “How do you know what Draco looked like as a baby?”

Jane shrugged. “Narcissa’s portrait, of course. She has shown me all his baby albums.”

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One Month Later – June 6th

Hermione had just put Scorpius down for his nap when Lucius came into the nursery. Narcissa and Willow’s portraits both watched from their newest mountings, right over top of the crib.

“Hermione, are you hungry? Bilby has prepared a delicious lunch.”

Hermione looked back over her shoulder. “Yeah, starved actually. I just wanted to get him fed and then put down for a nap.”

She waved her hand at the colorful mobile over his bed and it began to spin slowly while playing a simple lullaby.

Hermione followed Lucius out of the room and paused when he did.

“Jupiter? Come on boy.” Lucius said into the room. Hermione looked back to see the white dog laying beside the crib. She could swear the dog’s eyes were pleading when it let out a small cry. Lucius considered for a moment. “Alright then. Watch over him if you insist.” Jupiter immediately put his head down on his paws and nestled in. There was no question he and Lucius spoke a language Hermione didn’t understand.

Lucius and Hermione walked in their usual comfortable silence towards the solarium where they were enjoying their lunches these days.

When they sat down, Hermione tucked into her Vichyssoise soup. After a few swallows, she noticed Lucius wasn’t eating and was instead watching her.

“Are you alright?” she asked.

He contemplated his words. The words he needed to say versus the ones he wanted to.

“I’m fine, Hermione. But I want to talk to you.” I’m not fine! I’m miserable and I miss you.

He watched as Hermione put down her spoon and nodded for him to continue.

“I think you should start dating.” I love you and can’t bear the thought of you being with anyone but me.

He didn’t miss the look of surprise that crossed Hermione’s face. Lucius sipped his water and continued. “I know that men are interested in you, Hermione and I know that you receive offers on a regular basis.” They don’t deserve you, but you deserve so much more than me.
If Lucius was using Legilimency, he would know that her therapist and her friends had been saying these very words to her for months, but hearing Lucius say them made her ill.

He watched as her lips parted in surprise and it took a moment for her to reply. “Lucius, if you haven’t noticed, I’ve just had a baby. Dating is the farthest thing from my mind.”

“Of course, and I understand that completely. But Scorpius is well taken care of here at the Manor. Bilby, Tinny, and Janky dote on him constantly. You need to get out more with your friends, friends other than just Harry. You are young and beautiful, and the world is your oyster. Don’t you want a husband? A family?” I dote on him constantly and you don’t need to go anywhere. I’m your family.

“I thought you and Scorpius were my family?”

_Good girl._

“Of course, we are. You know you will both always be my family. What I mean is… don’t you want more? A husband? More children?” Say no!

Hermione was crushed. She had hoped he still wanted her but was only concealing his feelings. It only took seconds before her grief and disappointment took a back seat to the anger that was bubbling inside of her. He was being ridiculous! How could he think she had designs on being married to anyone anytime soon?! She thought he loved her. Why was he pushing her further away?

“Lucius, I’m hardly old enough to be concerned about getting married! Besides, I’ve done that once and I have no desire to do it again anytime soon! Why are you pushing this?”

Lucius was no fool. He might be a master at hiding his regard, but Hermione was not. He knew she was still in love with him and had not really tried to move on. “Well. It’s your life, love. I only want your happiness.” He took a swallow of soup. “I do feel the need to tell you that I am seeing someone.” It’s a lie. Don’t believe a word I say.

Hermione’s mouth went dry. She forced a smile and hoped it looked natural. He had moved on? What she wanted to say was the complete opposite of what came out of her mouth. “You are? I hadn’t realized you had been entertaining anyone other than Malfoy Enterprises employees and clients.” Oh God. Please be a lie. Please don’t have already moved on from me!

Lucius put his napkin on the table. “Her name is Britt Brennan. She’s a fashion designer who is developing a couture clothing line for Malfoy’s Department Stores.” He looked over her shoulder, his occlusion disguising his pain with the lie. “She has been here…a great deal the past few months and we have become…close.”

Hermione was struggling to stay composed. A fashion designer? Probably wealthy and sophisticated and a Pure-blood and beautiful!

She hated the way her insecurities taunted her so quickly and easily. “I didn’t realize,” she said simply. She tried not to sound hurt, angry, or betrayed. It really hadn’t occurred to her that he would move on. She tried to save face. “I’m thrilled for you, Lucius. You deserve to be happy.” How could you? I thought you loved me.

She thought she was only doing what he asked so that she could come back to him. She thought they both understood their love was real and not a product of dependence and fear. Him falling in love with another witch wasn’t supposed to happen!

“Thank you, Hermione.” Unable to resist, he took her hand. He could see the battle behind her chocolate eyes. “I do love you, kitten, you know that. But I’m not the right man for you and I need to
move on with my life as well.”

You are the right man for me. You’re the only man for me!

“I understand, Lucius.” No, I don’t!

“I only want your happiness.” But it was supposed to be with me!

“I’ll start dating when I’m ready, though. I just want to focus on my son and prepare for my new job in the Autumn.” She placed her napkin on the table. “Dating seems so trivial in the grand scheme of things right now.”

Lucius did not miss the subtle reproach. She was angry. He sipped his water once more before he caved and took it all back.

There was a strained silence. Hermione’s eyes did not meet his when she stood and said, “Well, if you’ll excuse me, I have a few errands to run.”

Lucius stood and smiled cordially, “Of course, I’ll be in my study if you need anything.”

Hermione paused for a moment before she left. It felt so final. They were truly finished. Maybe I never meant as much to him as I thought I did.

Lucius noticed her hesitation and had to resist the urge to pull her into his arms.

You mean more to me than you’ll ever know.

He watched her leave before immediately walking to his office and pouring himself a firewhisky. He tried to ignore the eyes of his wife watching him severely from the portrait to his right.

“Honestly, Lucius. Was that necessary? Why must you be such a bastard?”

Lucius swirled the ice in his glass. “She deserves more than me. A man who can leave his home without an MLE escort. A man her own age. A man who has never hurt her.” He took a large swallow. “She hasn’t tried, Cissa. She hasn’t really tried to move on from me.” He swallowed the rest down whole and poured another. “I knew if she lived in the Manor this would happen.”

Narcissa’s portrait scoffed. “Oh Lucius, men hurt the women they love all the time.”

“You know what I mean,” he barked.

He walked behind his desk unaware of another set of grey eyes that were watching from another portrait in the corner.

However, it was the portrait to the left of his desk that spoke up next. The portrait that had recently become quite verbose after years of silence. “Why must you think so poorly of yourself, son? You are a good man and that witch loves you! All you are doing is forcing her away from where she wants to be and breaking her heart in the process. Not to mention your own. She has become a part of this Manor and a part of this family. You should be raising Scorpius at her side, as you know Draco would want you to. How do you think Draco would feel if he knew you were pushing her away and making her unhappy?” Willow looked at Narcissa and then added. “You owe it to Draco be with her.”

In an uncharacteristic display of anger, Lucius growled and threw his glass into the hearth where it shattered causing the flames to ignite. “Why are you both tormenting me so? Don’t you see that I’m trying to help her? I’m trying to give her a fresh start at a happy life? The life she should have had all
Along?

August 28th – Two and half months later

Hermione floo’d back to the Manor the moment the staff meeting was over. The students would be arriving the next week for start of term. Hermione had never realized how much was involved with teaching. Preparing her course syllabus’, decorating her classroom, and arguing with the Headmaster at every turn was proving exhausting. If he wanted her to teach the class, he was going to have to give in on a few things. One of them being mandatory field trips to Muggle museums and libraries as well as a meal in a Muggle restaurant and a trip to the movie theater. How were they supposed to understand Muggles if they weren’t exposed to them and Muggle culture? How were they supposed to see the value in non-magical beings if they couldn’t see first hand the amazing things Muggles accomplished without magic? Next year she was hoping to take her advanced classes to the United States to tour the NASA facilities. Muggles had landed on the moon for Godric’s sake!

As she was walking down the corridor, she heard faint laughter coming from Lucius’ study. Wanting to say hello, she knocked and then entered. She froze when her eyes landed on a very beautiful redhead sitting on the corner of Lucius’ desk as he was peppering her neck with lavish kisses.

The couple froze when they noticed her. Lucius cleared his throat as he stepped back from the buxom beauty. “Ahh, Hermione. I’m glad you stopped by. Come, I’ve been wanting to introduce the two of you for months.”

Hermione tentatively stepped forward, trying to conceal her shock. She had known he was dating someone, he had told her. But seeing it was something entirely different.

“Britt, my daughter in law, Hermione. Hermione this is Britt Brennan.”

Hermione and Britt smiled and said their hello’s.

“Would you like to join us for a drink?” Lucius asked.

Hermione did not miss the flicker of surprise on Lucius’ face when she answered yes.

“An Elven wine, Lucius. Thank you,” she added with a beaming smile.

Fine. So, Lucius really was seeing someone. Hermione had begun to doubt it as she had never seen Lucius entertaining any females. As hard as this was, she would set her own feelings aside and be supportive of the man who was now officially no more than her father-in-law. He really had moved on.

“So, Britt, I’m afraid I know so little about you. You’re a fashion designer, correct? That must be exciting!”

Britt looked from Hermione to Lucius as she responded, “Uhh, yes. I design couture lines for some of the fashion houses in Paris and Milan.”

Hermione smiled warmly. “That must be very glamorous and exciting. Does your work cross over into the Muggle industry as well? I only ask because I am teaching a Muggle studies course at Hogwarts and it would be wonderful if you could come talk to the class about the differences in Muggle and Wizarding fashion.”
Britt paused and then responded, “Uh, sure! Yes, I’d be happy to.” Hermione didn’t miss the subtle questioning look at Lucius on the witch’s face before she responded.

Hermione beamed at her. “Wonderful. I’ll get your contact information from Lucius and be in touch.” Hermione sipped the wine Lucius handed her and offered him a small thank you.

When Hermione focused back on Lucius, she felt something was off. He looked… haughty. Why? She knew that look was a façade. A mask he wore. What was he hiding?

Before she could stop herself, she developed a façade of her own and looked at her watch. “Oh goodness, is that the time?” She set her glass down and smiled at them both. “I had not realized it was already after eight. I have a nine o’clock dinner date and am going to be late if I don’t hurry.” She looked at Britt. “It was lovely meeting you and I trust I’ll be seeing much more of you in the future.”

Hermione did not miss the flash of surprise on Lucius’ face, no matter how brief it had been. It was a lie, of course. She had been on two dates over the summer and that was it. Lucius knew about neither of them, but even though this was a lie, at least he would no longer be under the false assumption that she wasn’t dating at all.

Lucius smiled, too brightly in Hermione’s opinion. “A date? And whom may I ask is the lucky young man?”

Hermione thought quickly. “No one you know, Lucius. He works at the Ministry with Harry. It’s only our third date, but… I like him. We’ll see.”

Lucius swallowed. “Oh, your third date? Well, that sounds promising.”

Hermione winked. “Here’s hoping.”

Lucius’ heart was pounding as he watched her flounce out of the room.

“Well, on that note…my work here is done?” Britt asked with a cocked brow.

Lucius nodded. “Yes, yes. Thank you for that. It needed to be done.”

December 31st, 1999

New Year’s Eve Party at Grimmauld Place

Hermione smiled at her date, Jonathan, as he told her the latest anecdote about his two-year-old niece, Alison.

After the night that Hermione met Britt, Hermione had realized she really did need to move on. She had been saying the words, but not taking the actions. So, within a week she went on her first date. A week later she went on another. The first few were simply so that she could say she had tried.

Then she met Jonathan. A Muggle studies professor in the Wizarding department of Oxford University. He was not only a handsome American Muggleborn, he was an intellectual who was wickedly funny. He loved children, particularly his nieces and nephews, and could not wait to start a family of his own. He was kind and he doted on Hermione. Apparently, he had taken notice of her the very first time he laid eyes on her at a conference back in September and had asked her out
within a matter of days. They had been dating for almost three months now.

She loved watching his face as he talked about the kids playing with their toy brooms on Christmas morning. His dark hair and blue eyes contrasted beautifully against his soft, pale skin. He was tall and fit and had even persuaded Hermione to take up jogging. Although, she usually joined him towards the end of his runs. Two miles was her limit.

She had decided that tonight was the night she was going to sleep with him. He had encouraged, but not pushed, for her to stay with him on many occasions. She didn’t love him, but she really liked him, and she was attracted to him. She was curious what sex would be like with someone other than Lucius. She knew it would be vastly different from her experiences with Draco. Although, sometimes she wondered what sex would have been like with Draco if he had not been cursed. Would he have been gentle and generous?

Over the last year and a half, Hermione had learned to remember Draco differently. Her therapist had helped her with this. She truly understood how profoundly he had loved her for the curse to have made him into such a beast. The abuse was somehow easier for her to remember when she looked at it in the context of what it was; the absolute opposite of how the true Draco really wanted to treat her. It helped her remember him as the man he should have been to her, instead of the abusive brute. She wanted to talk to his portrait, she had things she needed to say.

While she would never forget, she would offer him forgiveness. If he had lived, however, she knew she would have never been able to be more than his friend – and even that would have taken a lot of time. She still had nightmares that he starred in. She hoped that his portrait would awaken, so that they could talk. She knew Lucius was desperately hoping for the same. No one knew why the portrait had remained sleeping. Lucius’ had even had two artists who specialized in charmed paintings over to look at it. It couldn’t be explained.

“Hermione, you need more champagne,” Harry announced as he rushed over with a bubbling over bottle that had just been uncorked. He topped off both of their glasses and then made his way around the room filling other stemware before the countdown to the new millennium began. It was hard to believe it would be the year 2000.

As the countdown began, Hermione looked around at the familiar faces. George and Fred were dating a set of Spanish twins, Lupin and Charlie were without dates but were all smiles in the spirit of the occasion. Bill and Fleur were laughing and kissing. Even Harry looked very happy as he beamed at his brunette date who most were surprised to see him with.

Ginny and Severus were back at the Manor celebrating with Lucius. Lucius had invited her and Jonathan to join them, but Hermione didn’t feel comfortable being on a date in front of Lucius. It just felt wrong. It was something she would have to get over if things progressed with Jonathan or any other wizard, though. She was going to be living at the Manor for another eighteen and a half years, after all.

Her attention was pulled back to her surroundings when the countdown became more frenzied.

Five
Four
Three
Two
Jonathan pulled Hermione in for a deep kiss that felt nice but not earth shattering. It was the way all of his kisses felt. Sweet and warm, but no fire. She hoped that with more intimacy, that might change.

He trailed kisses along her neck and whispered, “Come home with me. Please.” While Hermione had decided that tonight was the night, she had not told Jonathan yet.

“Oh, all right.” She answered simply.

His eyes were wide and his smile broad when he pulled back, afraid he had misunderstood her.

Jonathan had Hermione back at his flat and in his bedroom within fifteen minutes. Her heart was pounding with the realization that she was about to have sex.

Sex for the first time in a year and a half.

Sex with someone other than Lucius.

Hermione could tell Jonathan was as nervous as she was. He knew her history. She had told him the whole story after they had been dating for a couple months. He even knew her complicated feelings for Lucius. She had been completely honest.

Jonathan kissed her tenderly as he slowly unzipped her dress. “Is this okay?” His movements were hesitant, as though he was afraid that if he moved with any urgency, he would scare her off. What he didn’t understand was that the opposite was true. She wasn’t a porcelain doll and while she wanted to be respected, she also wanted to be taken. She wanted passion…she wanted to feel.

Feel the way she hadn’t felt since the last time Lucius had taken her – before Draco had woke.

Feel the way Lucius had made her feel.

“Yes, you won’t hurt me,” she responded. Hermione began to kiss him with more urgency and made quick work of unbuttoning his shirt, hoping he would take the hint. Jonathan was a quick study and had her naked and laying on his bed in seconds.

She felt a warm flush come over her as she watched his eyes take in her naked form for the first time. He unzipped his trousers and had them off quickly. Hermione’s eyes scanned to his erect cock and tried not to make comparisons to the only other two she had ever seen.

Jonathan kissed up her body as he climbed onto the bed. Hermione closed her eyes and tried to relax. His hands were soft, but they moved all wrong as they stroked her thighs, her waist, and her breasts. There was no deep chuckle or teasing of her nipples, just suckling and a little slobbering. His mouth trailed up her chest to her neck and, finally, her lips as his fingers stroked her right nipple while another set of fingers began to stroke between her legs. It felt nice and she began to gyrate her hips when his digits focused on her clit, clumsily flicking it and rubbing it.

She kept telling herself it felt amazing and mewled as she pumped her hips and tried to become lost in the moment. She ran her hands down his chest and tenderly grasped his weeping cock. A cock that felt all wrong. Too thick. Too short. She began to pump him the way Lucius had taught her, causing Jonathan to groan. His voice was wrong, though. It wasn’t carnal. It wasn’t deep.

It wasn’t Lucius.
Hermione closed her eyes and felt regret as she realized what a mistake she was making. She began to pump her hand faster as she began to moan louder.

“Shit Hermione, slow down. I’m gonna co….” Hot ejaculate shot onto her belly and hand as she growled out her fake orgasm.

Jonathan collapsed on her, catching his breath. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I couldn’t help it…”

“Sshh,” Hermione whispered as she kissed his temple.

After a minute, he rolled off her and onto his back. He sighed heavily before moving to his side to face her.

“You faked your orgasm, didn’t you?” His voice wasn’t accusatory or angry. It was almost sympathetic.

Hermione’s nose began to tingle with the threat of tears. She felt so guilty. “I’m sorry.”

He nodded lightly and let out another sigh. “You know we could have stopped. I would never…”

“I know. I just didn’t want to leave you… you know.” She felt ashamed.

He watched her for a minute. “Spoon with me?” he asked.

Hermione smiled softly and rolled over, pressing her back to his front as he wrapped her in his arms. “I feel like I pressured you into something you weren’t ready for.”

Hermione took his hand in hers and kissed it. “No, you really didn’t. If I didn’t want to be here, I wouldn’t be here.” She thought for a moment. “I really, really like you Jonathan. I just…I can’t get –”

“Over Lucius,” he finished for her.

Hermione felt her nose prick again. “I have to get over him. I have to! He’s gotten over me and moved on.”

“It takes time Hermione. I’ve been there. I didn’t date for a year after Clarisse broke it off with me.”

“But it’s been a year and a half…longer actually.”

“You still see him, though. He’s still in your life.”

“That will never change. He is Scorpius’ grandfather.” She sniffled. “I guess it’s just going to take more time.”

“You realize I’m crazy about you, Hermione. I’ll give you all the time in the world. You know that, don’t you?”

The words only made her feel guiltier. This was a good man. A really good man. If he had entered her life before she was captured, she would have easily fallen in love with him.

“Jonathan, I…you know you are special to me and you know I care about you…but…”

“You don’t want to date me anymore, do you?”

“It’s not that I don’t want to spend time with you. It’s just I don’t want to string you along while I
work through all… this. You deserve so much better.”

“So, what do you want?”

“I want your friendship and I want you to not wait for me.” Tears began to roll down her cheeks.

“You’re brilliant and witty and perfect, Jonathan. I’m sorry. I feel like I’ve strung you along for all these months and now…”

Jonathan pushed away and rolled her onto her back so that he was looking down at her. “Hey, none of that! I’m a big boy and knew exactly what I was getting into. You are worth it.” He wiped her tears and she snuggled her head into his chest.

It was four-thirty in the morning and the latest she had ever been out. Hermione hung her outer robe on the rack beside the informal family floo in the den and slipped her heels off. She padded down the hall quietly, not wanting to disturb the elves or Lucius. She had just noticed light coming from under Lucius’ study when the door opened.

Her eyes were wide, and she knew she looked guilty – like a teenager getting caught coming in after curfew. She suddenly regretted not having taken the time to fix her hair and her makeup. She was certain she looked like she had just had sex.

They seemed frozen in time for a moment as they looked at each other. Her eyes must have given everything away, because understanding suddenly came over his face. He sighed and then asked, “Are you alright?”

Unable to help it, and not wanting his pity, the tears fell down her cheeks like a dam had broken.

He stepped towards her to pull her into his arms, but she dodged him and ran down the hall, up the back stairs, and into her suite where she closed and warded the door before collapsing onto her bed, sobbing.

March 13th, 2001

The party for the Longbottom’s was an event that would surely make the history books. Neville had been healed and back to himself within two months of being rescued and treated by Etan and Rose Browne. That was a miracle in itself, but the emergence of Frank and Alice Longbottom, both having regained their senses, if not their complete memories, was a thing of incredulity. It had been deemed impossible and once again, the Browne’s mind healing genius had amazed everyone. They had even cured Gilderoy Lockhart, who was sentenced to five years house arrest for his own Obliviation crimes and was living with his sister.

Hermione toasted, socialized, hugged, and smiled along with everyone else. Her thoughts were not on Lucius or on dating or on what she should or shouldn’t be doing. After the Jonathan incident, which was now over a year ago, she had realized she needed to simply do what made her happy and to stop trying to do what everyone else felt she needed to do – including her therapist.

It had taken time, but she had gotten there. She doted on her son and loved her friends and enjoyed her hobbies. While she didn’t have the freedom to volunteer anymore, she made donations to the causes she cared about. Being a teacher and a mother took most of her time.
Scorpius adored Harry and now accompanied Hermione on many of her visits to Grimmauld Place and to her other friends. Fred and George provided endless entertainment for the almost two-year-old, and visits with Ginny’s twin girls were frequent.

Lucius positively adored Scorpius and spoiled him absolutely rotten. The child had every toy imaginable, including a few Muggle ones, like a toy dump truck and an inchworm. Of course, the ultimate had been introducing the toddler to Mony. It was love at first sight. Scorpius, according to Lucius, was so very much like Draco it was occasionally painful. Sometimes Hermione wondered if Lucius thought Scorpius was Draco. His reincarnated soul. It was a lovely thought, even if Hermione didn’t believe in such things.

It was early evening when she made her way home with the sleeping little boy in her arms. Lucius was waiting for them and she filled him in on the party as they made their way to Scorpius’ room where she had him changed and in his crib in moments. Jupiter padded in and took his usual spot beside the crib and settled in for a night of sleep.

Hermione and Lucius peeked back into the room as they turned out the light to see Narcissa and Willow’s portraits watching over the sleeping babe. Hermione looked up at Lucius and smiled. When he smiled back, her insides turned to the same goo they always did. She still loved this man and knew that she would for eternity, but she had accepted that they would never be what they were before.

“Are you hungry?”

“Not really,” she responded.

“Join me for a drink?”

Hermione looked up at him, surprised by the invitation. Their time together was usually at meals and with Scorpius. And they hadn’t shared a drink, just the two of them, in over two years.

She sat in one of the wingback chairs and sipped the brandy Lucius handed her. Neither said anything for a few minutes. Hermione simply watched the flames in the hearth come to life as Lucius manipulated them with the poker.

His voice was just above a whisper. “I can’t do this anymore, Hermione. I…”

Hermione looked up at him and noticed the hand holding his drink was trembling.

He put down his glass on the mantle and closed his eyes. When he opened them, they looked haunted and his face took on a tiredness she hadn’t noticed before. Had he been Occluding?

“I can’t…pretend anymore, Hermione. I can’t act as if my entire world doesn’t shift its axis when you look at me.” His shoulders sagged as though they had been carrying the weight of a dragon. “I can’t stand lying in my bed at night and wishing you were in my arms.” He fidgeted with a small globe on the mantle. “I tried, I really tried to be strong, Hermione. You deserve better.

“You deserve a man who isn’t tainted with such a past. A man who has never hurt you – physically or emotionally.” His voice became louder and full of conviction. “You have every right to tell me no. I meant what I said before, you need to move on from me. Your attachment to me wasn’t healthy and your love for me was due to the circumstances we found ourselves in. I know that. Yet, I can’t seem to stop myself from proclaiming my love for you right now… Even though I know I have no right.” He took a breath and exhaled slowly.

His eyes finally moved back to hers to find them full of tears. “Tell me, do you harbor any of those
same feelings for me? So much time has passed. You are in your right to say no and I will never mention it again. I will take whatever friendship you have to offer and relish it. I will be no more or less than you want me to be.”

Hermione sat stunned for a solid minute. While she was quiet, Lucius fidgeted uncharacteristically. He looked away and walked over to the sidebar, fully expecting her rejection, before letting another minute pass. He walked back over, “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have –”

When Hermione stood, he stopped speaking abruptly. She approached him as she tried to move past her shock. She had not expected these words to come out of his mouth.

Looking up at him with serious and contemplative eyes, she whispered, “What about...” She swallowed. “What about…Britt? I mean you haven’t mentioned her, but I assumed you were still seeing her…or maybe someone else?”

Lucius’ brow crinkled. “Britt?” He laughed without humor. “Hermione, I was never involved with Britt. That was all a ruse.” He closed his eyes. “It was a deceit of the cruelest kind, but it was meant to help you move on.” His face darkened. “Just another mistake and something I’m ashamed of.” He shrugged. “Another reason for you to reject me now.”

Hermione felt light headed. “I need to sit.”

Lucius held his hand out, but she sat without taking it. Her mind spun.

All this time.

She thought he had moved on.

She thought he was over her.

It was a lot to take in, but there was a flutter of sheer joy that was bubbling beneath the surface of her countenance and it was bursting to come out. Her hands came up to her face as her eyes danced up to see his warm and pleading ones studying her as though life itself depended on her response. A feeling of complete and utter happiness that was drowned in absolute relief washed over her.

Her voice was shaky. “Lucius, you stupid, stupid man. Of course, I still love you. I never stopped! I thought you didn’t want me anymore.”

Their eyes remained glued to each other. Hers still in shock and his in disbelief. “Could you really not see it?” they said in unison. After a shimmer of a pause they both laughed, and Hermione leapt out of the chair and into his arms.

Hermione was crying and Lucius stroked her hair as he whispered, “I couldn’t dare to hope. And I knew that if you did, or do, still have feelings for me, then it’s because you haven’t really gotten away from me.”

She pulled back and looked up at him. “I tried Lucius, I tried!”

His expression was a mix of hopefulness, but his eyes were guarded as if he dared not believe her.

“Lucius, I have faithfully gone to therapy for two and a half years. I have worked through my grief for my father, my friends, and my stolen innocence. I have forgiven Draco, even if I will never forget what he did to me. I have battled the waves of depression that still come over me sometimes and have managed to come out a little bit stronger each time. I have dated other men. In other words – I have done everything you said that you wanted me to and everything my therapist wanted me to do.
And through it all, *I never* stopped loving you. I never stopped wanting you. It was *you* who didn’t want *me* anymore.”

“My feelings never changed for you, Hermione. Not for a second.” He closed his eyes. “Last New Year’s when you came home, and I knew you had been… well…” He opened them and Hermione could see the pain. “It was like my insides had been ripped out of my body and trampled on. I wanted to rush up to your room and ravish you. Remind you of why you shouldn’t be with anyone but me!”

“I lay in my bed every night and wish you were beside me, Lucius. I dream about your touch and sometimes can almost remember what it felt like to have you inside me. You are the only man I want, and I had resolved myself to accepting what you could give, even if it was just being a wonderful Grandfather to my son.”

“You didn’t really ever get away from me, though! You didn’t date enough. You never lived under your own roof. You haven’t really had a chance to move on.” He cradled her face in his hands. “Salazar forgive me, I find I’m too selfish to stop myself regardless.”

Hermione pushed herself up on her toes and pressed her lips against his. Her psyche purred as it all came back.

Fire.

Heat.

Desire.

Their lips moved against each other and Hermione felt she would explode as it all came rushing back. The intensity and the ache that felt like it would devour her. He was the only man who could make her feel this way.

“Lucius, I need you,” she rasped in a ravenous voice as she moved quickly to unbutton his buttons.

He stopped her frenetic movement with gentle hands to her hips and pulled his lips away from hers before kissing her temple. “I want to do this right, kitten. I want to court you properly. I want to take you on dates to the library, to the pool, to the ballroom and to the stables. I want us to start over.”

Hermione shook her head, as exasperated as she was touched. “Lucius, that’s so silly.”

When she saw the crestfallen look on his face, she reconsidered and then cradled his face in return. “Oh love, I just want you however I can have you. Of course, you can court me. I will try to control myself and not pounce on you during the first date.” She grinned when his eyes darkened with the thought. “I wouldn’t want you to think I’m easy, after all.”

Lucius laughed at her joke and pulled her back into a tight embrace. They held each other for several long minutes, neither saying a word. They didn’t notice the two elves peeking in from the doorway.

“December wedding?” Tinny asked Bilby.

Bilby shook his head. “Theys wont makes it that long. June be more like it.”
Epilogue

Chapter by LissaDream

Chapter Notes

AN: Well ladies and gents – this is it. We want to take a moment to give you are continued love and thanks for all the support during this dark and twisted tale. We are looking forward to your end thoughts and reactions. We ask that you remember that reviews are our reward for all our hard work. They are also HUGE motivators…feed our muse! Please! You will be rewarded with faster writing (hopefully)!

Right now, we are tentatively planning on posting the first chapter of Master Mine: A Lesson in Love next Saturday…we are struggling to switch gears, though, and may need a little longer. Please be patient!

All our undying love and thanks, Lissa & Snow

BETA love – RaynePheonix2 & sab81790

“Mm,” Hermione sighed deeply as the long, warm fingers of her husband tightened on inside of her thighs. She spread her legs wider, allowing Lucius to delve his tongue a little deeper into her pussy. “Fuck, Lucius,” she moaned, reaching to tangle her hands in his hair.

Lucius grinned into his wife’s glistening folds before sucking her inner lips into his mouth, tongueing them and making her twitch against his face as he slowly made his way to her clit. When he flicked his tongue across the bundle of nerves, she bucked into him and his fingers flexed against her thighs in order to pin her to the bed. He chuckled against her and blew hot air across the sensitive nub before latching on and drawing it into his mouth completely to suck her into insanity.

“Nnnnn uhn!” Hermione fell into the abyss of her orgasm mere moments later, her body bowing as her head thrashed from side to side as she voiced her pleasure. Her nails scraped against Lucius head almost painfully, causing him to growl and nip her gently before he moved his mouth in a hot, wet line up her body. He only detoured to suck the pink tips of her breasts into his mouth briefly, first one, then the other, before claiming her mouth in an intense kiss that curled her toes.

Hermione wrapped her arms around Lucius and pulled him down, so their chests were flush together while simultaneously locking him to her with her legs. She tilted her pelvis and he entered her easily with no external guidance. After all, it was a dance they had all but perfected over the last eighteen-plus years.

“Fuck, princess,” he hissed against her lips before trailing tender nips along her jaw and burying his face into her neck.

She hummed her agreement before gasping, “You feel so good, Lucius…!” She trailed off on gasp and rolled her hips to meet his steady thrusts. “Oh, gods!” Her second orgasm was building quickly.
He knew just how to angle himself to hit that sweet spot over and over. Hermione clawed at his back as she bowed into him and found his muscles tight with effort and his skin slick with sweat.

Lucius burrowed his arms under his wife’s back and grasped her shoulders. Without warning, he jerked her up with him as he rose to his knees. They barely missed a beat with the movement, and Hermione wrapped her arms around his shoulders for leverage as he upped his pace, pistoning up into her with fervor.

“Come with me,” he demanded of her and Hermione chuckled lightly before gasping and adjusting her legs to help with the movement. She was very close.

“Almost!” she panted before finding his lips with hers for another hot snog.

Lucius knew he had her when she let out a whiney mewl against his lips before ripping her mouth away. “Yes, yes, Lucius. Now!” She cried out his name twice more as her pussy contracted around him.

Lucius had been gritting his teeth against his own orgasm and the moment her inner muscles started contracting around his length, he let go with a growl of satisfied completion and pounded through their orgasms. Her mouth found his again, and he slid his hands up from her shoulders into the hair at the base of her head, holding her in place while they kissed until their hearts calmed a few minutes later.

He felt her kiss change, going from heated and hard to a loving slow before she smiled against his lips. “Happy Christmas,” she told him before pressing a couple more, light kisses to the corner of his mouth, which was also stretching into a smile.

“Happy Christmas, wife,” he answered her.

“A lovely way to start the day!” she teased, pulling back.

He chuckled low as their stares met in the dim, very early morning light. Even through the darkness, he could see her beautiful eyes glimmer with happiness.

“The children will be awake soon,” he told her. He knew his own eyes must glow with their sated joy as well. Whenever she looked at him that way, it was hard not to respond. She had given him more happiness in their twenty years together then he had ever known during the first forty of his life.

“That they will, love,” she responded. “And the Potters, Weasleys, Lupins, and Snapes will all be here by lunchtime. I suppose we’d best get on the move.”

Lucius watched in complete admiration as his curvy little witch slid from the bed. Her wild curls were in utter disarray and tangled deliciously from sleep and their morning romp. She paused at the door to the bathroom and turned her face over one shoulder. She smirked when she caught him watching her, his head cocked in deep appreciation of her full arse. “Aren’t you going to join me?” she murmured before purposely biting his lower lip and fluttering her lashes at him.

Sixty-three-years-old was young for a wizard, and Lucius was decidedly the prime of his life. He felt his cock twitch with interest and growled low in his throat as he leapt from the bed to chase his now giggling wife into the shower.

Twenty-year-old Scorpius Malfoy reached groggily for the tempus alarm he had set on his wand the night before. With a swish, the green numbers 4:45 am glowed bright until a flick made them
He’d had a very difficult night the night before. The man he called Uncle Severus had truly put him through a ringer of questions, even if his Auntie Ginny had pleasantly chastised the man and done her best to keep Scorpius feeling comfortable.

Asking for his witch’s hand in marriage had basically been a proverbial nightmare, but when one’s hopeful future father-in-law was Severus Tobias Snape, spy and hero of Wizarding War Two and Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry…well…he hadn’t expected anything less.

He had one conversation left to have. Tiredly, he rolled over and forced himself into a sitting position on the side of the bed. *Shower first,* he yawned.

Twenty minutes later, Tinny was placing a small tea service on his end table in front of the fire and Scorpius murmured his thanks to the ancient little elf.

“Yous most welcomes, my lovely laddy,” she murmured, smiling her elvish smile widely before popping out of existence.

Scorpius sat down heavily on his favored davenport before dropping a dollop of honey in his steaming cup and raising the Earl Grey to his lips. He took a deep sip and let out a hum of contentment as the flavor of bergamot and black tea rolled over his taste buds.

“That’s one thing I still miss to this day,” came a very familiar voice. Scorpius smirked and looked up at the portrait above his hearth.

“What’s that?” he asked the portrait of his young father.


“I was kidding, dad.” The current Malfoy heir’s head rose, and sterling silver eyes met painted grey. “Happy Christmas, by the way.”

“Happy Christmas, son,” Draco answered with a sad smile. “Tinny told me you wanted to talk.”

“I do.”

“Is this about the Snape girl?”

His dad’s intuition didn’t surprise Scorpius. He talked to Draco’s portrait almost as much as he talked to Lucius. “It is.”

“Did you get the rings from your mother?” Draco’s grin spread wide and white teeth flashed on the portrait as Scorpius nodded. “Good…did you ask Severus?”

“Oh yes,” Scorpius answered quickly and then chuckled when his dad guffawed.

As they continued their conversation, Draco watched his son with warm eyes. His portrait had taken almost a year to awaken, but he had watched over the boy carefully since he had opened his eyes to find his six-month-old son in his father’s loving arms.

The years had been good to Lucius Malfoy, and Draco’s portrait couldn’t help but be grateful for the woman who had made it so. Lucius could have lived a long, lonely life if it weren’t for Hermione
Hermione Granger – the mother of his son.

The girl who had never once even considered to reveal to their child the conditions of his conception. The witch who had only ever talked about the good Draco had done. The woman who had nurtured and loved a child – his child – *their* child – that had been born from terrible circumstances with all the poise and grace of a true Malfoy wife. Yes, Hermione had raised a true and splendid Malfoy Heir.

And Draco Malfoy would love her until he knew no more for all she had given him in his death.

Draco’s portrait cautiously made its way into the lovely landscape that Hermione kept in her dressing room. He rarely used this frame, preferring to give the newest Lady Malfoy her privacy in such an intimate area of the house, but he wanted to speak with her discretely this morning.

He peeked around the edge of the frame just long enough to ascertain she was decently covered before presenting himself fully and immediately clearing his throat to garner her attention.

“Merlin!” she huffed. He watched in amusement as her hand came up to clutch at her chest. “Draco! You startled me,” she scolded.

“My apologies,” he said with what he hoped was a roguish grin and chuckle. “I just – I needed to see you; to talk to you.”

Hermione’s face instantly softened, and a sweet smile curled her lips as the excitement nearly radiated off Draco’s portrait. She knew why he had come.

That night – almost eighteen years ago – where Lucius had finally taken her back in his arms and allowed their hearts to come together, was the night that Draco had woken. Or so they had thought. Later, he would clarify that it was the night he had decided to let them all know he had woken.

An exasperated, “Finally! I was trying to figure out a way back from the dead just so I could knock your stubborn heads together!” had absolutely torn their world asunder.

Immediately, there had been heavy emotion. Lucius had raced to pull Scorpius out of bed to finally meet his father; Hermione had stood there in tears – thanking Draco over and over again for his sacrifice so that she and Scorpius could live.

It had taken a little time and many long conversations, but Draco and Hermione began to find solace in their companionship. While in life she had not been privy to the real man behind the curse until it was much too late, in death she had been allowed to get to know who he had truly been. She had never been so grateful for magic. Even just getting to know the likeness and imprint that was Draco Malfoy was better than never being able to tell him how she had come to forgive (if not forget) him for the things that had been out of his control.

Through the years, Draco had become a confidant for her. He also doted on his son, and Hermione was grateful that Scorpius had a piece of his biological father to know and love.

“How are you taking the news?” she asked knowingly.

She felt her nose tingle with tears when his beautifully painted face crumpled a bit. His eyes took on a far-away look. “I wish I was there, Hermione. More than watching his first steps or having him call me dad for the first time – more than when I observed him getting his letter to Hogwarts – more than
ever.”

Hermione instantly crossed the small chamber and laid her hand over his painted form, trying to comfort with touch when there was no touch to be had. “You know how much we all wish that, as well,” she murmured as she tried to keep her voice strong.

Draco’s eyes closed and he raised his hand as if to reach and touch her face. “I do, I know Hermione. I am … so happy for Scorpius … that he has found a true love makes me so happy. And I’m so grateful for the man he’s become. You and father have done a remarkable job, love.”

“You were here and helped every step of the way, Draco,” she whispered, her tone was still slightly strangled due to the tightness in her throat.

“Hermione, my love,” Lucius called as he entered the dressing room while tying a cravat at his throat. He paused when he found his wife and his son’s portrait conversing, but then smiled warmly and moved to join them. “Scorpius has told you the good news then?”

“He has, father,” Draco answered with a warm smile. He turned his attention back to Hermione and gave a small nod. She brushed the painting lightly one more time with her fingertips before pulling away and taking Lucius’ hand in her own. “Now we just need to pray the girl says yes!”

The three laughed together – all of them believing that she would.

“Mum!” Eleven-year-old Cressida Narcissa twittered excitedly as she ran into the Ladies Parlor, now known more appropriately as the Piano Parlor. A large Christmas tree was to the right of the fireplace, decorated with a myriad of handmade ornaments from the children over the years. The portraits were full of excited ancestors, all smiling as the baby of the Malfoy family – and the first girl to live past her first birthday in over ten generations – dashed to her mother, who was quietly playing hymns on the piano, for a quick Christmas kiss before moving to her father.

Lucius did not even try to uphold his normally aloof demeanor. His daughter, with her white-blond curls and slightly protruding front teeth, was his heart and soul. The hug she bestowed on him turned into a full blown snuggle as he pulled the petite girl into his lap. Cressida tucked her head under Lucius’ chin and the two held each other tight as Scorpius entered the room moments later.

“Morning, Mum,” Scorpius murmured, bending to press a dignified kiss to his mother’s head as she continued to play Silent Night. “Morning, Papa.” The twenty-year old gave Lucius a smile which was returned from the man who had raised him as his own. “Morning dad, grandmother. Happy Christmas.”

All four Malfoys in the parlor turned to see Narcissa and Draco crowded together into one portrait with large smiles on their painted faces. “Good morning, Scorpius,” they answered together.

“Happy Christmas Hermione…Father,” Draco continued.

The greetings were returned just as a large whoop came from the grand staircase just outside the double doors of the piano room. “Come on, Nicky!” Fifteen-year-old David Gene Malfoy’s voice could be heard loud and clear as he yelled to his younger brother.

“I’m coming!” Nicholas Lucius Malfoy called in a sing-songy tone. “Hold your hippogriffs!” the thirteen-year old teased.

“But…presents, Nicky! You’re too slow.” Two sets of feet could be heard thundering down the stairs and Lucius snorted indelicately as Hermione turned from the piano to greet her teenaged boys.
“Here comes trouble!” Willow called from her portrait, her eyes shining with happiness.

“Double trouble!” Scorpius agreed as his brothers burst into the room, pausing in confused surprise when everyone was laughing as they entered.

“I don’t want to go!” Severus growled, batting his wife’s hands away from his hair with annoyance.

“Severus,” Ginny admonished lovingly, knowing exactly why her husband of almost twenty-one years was so growly. “You have already made the girls very uncomfortable this morning with your surliness and Senna is now suspicious of what the day is going to hold. You’re going to give away her surprise!”

“Serves her right, taking up with a bloody Malfoy!” Snape snapped, spinning away from his fussing wife to rummage in his dresser drawer for a leather tie.

“That’s not true – you adore that boy!” Ginny sighed and pointed for her grumpy husband to take a seat. “You’re being impossible!”

“You’re going to regret saying that tonight, witch!” Severus muttered darkly as he took the aforementioned chair and handed Ginning the leather to tie his hair back with.

“Maybe that was the point, sir.” Ginny winked at him in the mirror before gently using her fingers to tie back his long, black hair that was starting to be streaked with greys and silvers. He shivered as her fingertips lightly stroked the back of his neck and met her honey gaze with black eyes.

“I just…worry,” he sighed, and his eyes dropped away from hers.

Ginny’s heart clenched in her chest as she rounded in front of Severus and used her hands to tilt his chin up and catch his eyes again. “Darling, if you and I – and Hermione and Lucius for that matter – can make something of our lives and marriages, then Senna will have nothing to worry about in her own match.” She brushed a thumb over his pale cheek, tracing the high cheek bone before letting it drop to his thin lips.

Severus wrapped a hand around her slender wrist and pulled her hand away, only to redirect it back to his lips so he could place a sweet kiss to the middle of her palm.

“I love you, Ginevra,” he whispered before reaching up to wrap longer fingers around the back of her neck and pull her down into a heated kiss.

“I love you, too.” She murmured into his shoulder a few minutes later as they hugged tightly. “Always.”

“Love?” Harry Potter called. “We’re ready to floo over – you coming soon?”

“I’m coming!” His wife’s voice could be heard from above the stairs. “Go ahead and start sending the kids through! I just need to put my earrings in!”

“Oldest first!” Fourteen-year-old James Sirius pushed his way in front of his two younger siblings and grabbed a handful of floo powder from the kitchen mantel at Grimmauld Place. A Grimmauld place that was almost unrecognizable thanks to the boy’s mother’s impeccable taste.

“Lily-love, you next,” Harry grinned at his eleven-year-old daughter.
“Yes!” Lily Luna giggled as she pushed around her thirteen-year-old brother Albus Severus. “I’m so excited to see Cressida!”

“You just saw her four days ago!” Albus rolled his eyes at his baby sister’s antics.

“You be nice to your sister!” His mother admonished as she stepped down the stairs into the kitchen just as her youngest child and only daughter disappeared while shouting.

“Malfoy Manor!”

“Yes, mum!” Albus agreed quickly before sneaking a look at his dad. He rolled his eyes again at the look of complete adoration on his father’s face as he looked at her before scooping a handful of floo powder and disappearing after the same shout.

“You are beautiful, Pans,” Harry murmured and reached for his wife’s hand. Pansy Potter nèe Parkinson took his hand in one of hers and reached out her free hand to smooth some unruly locks out of his face.

“Thank you, Harry,” she answered primly before allowing her face to melt into a goofy grin. Fifteen years with this man had made the tortures of her unrequited childhood love so worth it.

Hermione couldn’t have been any happier as she watched her godchildren and nieces and nephews (even if they were only called thus in spirit) open gifts while adults drank and conversed and made merry after they finished their grand luncheon buffet.

She caught eyes with Ginny across the Parlor, grinning when the redhead rolled her eyes and looked at her husband pointedly. Hermione shifted her gaze to find Severus standing at the window, staring across the gardens to where the stable could just barely be made out in the distance. She knew how hard a time Severus was having at the thought of “giving away” his little girl.

Hermione turned her attention back to Ginny and shrugged as if to say “They grow up? What can we do?” Ginny nodded her agreement, but Hermione couldn’t help but notice her friend’s worry.

She leaned against Lucius where he was deep in discussion with Remus and Charlie, smiling when her husband wrapped an arm snugly about her waist. She let her mind wander as she took in sights that, once upon a time, she thought she'd never get to see as she had expected her life to be very, very short.

Granted, the picture didn’t match what her adolescent mind had conjured all those years ago, but it was a wonderful and happy scene, nonetheless.

The gathering at Malfoy Manor was chaos, as it had been every year for the last twenty. In addition to the Snapes, Potters, and Hermione’s mum and her husband of eighteen years, Healer Barnaby Jacobs; the Weasleys and Lupins attended every year, as well.

Hermione watched Bill and Fleur laughing with Fred and George and their wives. George and Angelina married in June of 2002 in a shotgun wedding ceremony (their first born, Frederick George, was born in December of that same year). Fred had married an American girl by the name of Lexie Poppinstock, who Hermione and Harry would have had their seventh year with if not for the war. Together, the three Weasley boys had seven children. Victoire, Dominique, and Louis belonged to Bill, Molly and Willa had been born to Fred, and – in addition to Freddy – George and Angelina had a daughter named Roxanne.
Weasleys Wizard Wheezes had grown exponentially, and with investment backing by Malfoy Enterprises and Poppinstock Magometers (Lexie’s father’s company), it had expanded to over twenty locations in the British Isles, Europe, and some of the larger cities on the East Coast of the United States.

Next, she focused on the two men her husband was conversing with, talking politics. For all their years of sneaking around and being worried that their relationship wouldn’t be accepted, Remus Lupin and Charlie Weasley had announced their elopement about four years prior and were stunned when no one in the family had been all that surprised. In fact – shouts of “Finally!” had probably been heard in Paris with the timid Christmastime announcement. Teddy had laughed uproariously and gave his fathers a resounding round of I told you so’s.

Hermione couldn’t help the goofy smile as she thought about their history. Here they were – all thirty-four of them (along with a couple of overwhelmed significant others of the older children this year) with their mis-matched, hodge-podge histories and bloodlines – gathered at Malfoy Manor to celebrate Lucius’ first Christmas as a truly free man.

She wondered how Scorpius was fairing with the youngest of the two Snape girls. He had taken her for a horseback ride (something both young adults adored) after stopping to say hello to Mony, whom Scorpius was very close with.

Scorpius had told her that he planned on asking Senna to marry him on the grounds under the willows by the lake. It was a beautiful setting for a proposal. The crystals in the trees glittered in the watery December sunlight and the ice had been cleared for skating later in the afternoon and was shiny and smooth.

Hermione hoped the girl said yes, though she couldn’t see her refusing. Senna and Scorpius had been inseparable for years. They were incredibly close. In fact, Hermione felt that Senna and Scorpius could be her and Harry – if there had ever been a romantic inclination between the two of them.

Hermione knew that Severus was happy for his daughter, too – he adored Scorpius, and had always talked very highly of him. She had, in fact, overheard him telling Sorrel (Senna’s older twin) that she would have to find a young man as good as Scorpius if she ever wanted his blessing in marriage.

Sorrel had laughed, teasing her father about how he disliked all her boyfriends and she was destined to be a spinster, which had caused Severus to chuckle as well.

She was startled out of her thoughts when Lucius’ warm lips pressed to her forehead. “Mm,” she hummed, leaning into him.

“All the teens are anxious to get down to the lake,” he told her quietly, his gaze slicing across the room to take in Severus’ tight stance at the window. “He’s still in a dead panic, isn’t he?” Lucius nodded at their friend.

“A shadow of horror clouded Lucius’ expression and Hermione had to bite back a laugh. Lucius’ relationship with their daughter reminded her very much of her own with her father when she was young.

Just then, two young adults came crashing into the room. Hermione’s heart leapt when she took in identical, ecstatic grins and flushed-with-cold-and-happiness cheeks.
“She said ‘yes’!” Scorpius crowed as he pulled Senna in behind him. The lovely Senna Snape laughed delightedly as the tugging of her arm turned into him grasping her waist and spinning her in a circle before dipping her deeply for a kiss.

The entire group of holiday makers paused for only a split second before everyone knew exactly what had happened and the room turned deafening in a cacophony of shrieks of delights and calls of congratulations.

As thrilled as Hermione was for her oldest son, her concern for Severus was deep. She turned her attention to the man only to see him watching Senna’s face carefully. He only had eyes for his daughter in this moment, even as Ginny entwined her fingers with her husband’s. He must have seen what he had hoped to see, because for the first time all day his entire body relaxed, and a small smile tilted the corners of his lips up. Lucius wrapped his arms around Hermione from behind and whispered his happiness in her ear as her own smile split her face.

Hermione felt a pull and her vision moved to Draco’s portrait. He was watching her, and when their eyes met, he looked from her to their son and back again. The smile on his face was evidence enough of his sheer joy. She felt a tug of loss for a moment. If only he were alive to truly share in this joyous occasion as they had discussed this morning.

Thinking back on what they had all endured those many years ago was mindboggling. The losses were huge and painful but, ultimately, she could regret nothing that lead her to where she was in this moment. Her life had turned out so much better than she could have possibly imagined – truly a world fit for life and love.

~*Finite Incantatum*~

**AN**: SURPRISE! A little fun ditty for you all! Lots of love!

9 March 2019:

Wrap up Cast Meeting on WNF – Script Handout for MM2

Lissa was brimming with excitement as she addressed the cast who were leisurely socializing amongst themselves. The story outline for Master Mine: A Lesson in Love had been handed to the applicable players.

“Okay everyone. Listen! A World Not Fit to Live In is officially completed! Thanks to you all for your hard work!” she announced drawing the attention of the room. There was a brief round of applause and hoots while people grinned and congratulated each other. Just as the din died down, the click-clack of heels could be heard coming quickly down the hall.

“I’m here, I’m here!” the familiar voice in an oh-so-very different tone pleaded. “Sorry, sorry for being late!” He glanced about the room as though searching for someone and, upon finding him, strode purposefully in his typical dramatic flair and added in exasperation, “It took her forever to get my latte macchiato double shot espresso with an extra splash of vanilla right.” He looked at Snow
and Lissa, certain they understood *exactly* how stressful it had been. “You would think the little witch had never heard of such a thing,” he added with a shrug. The nose-less and hairless Tom Riddle – with his skinny jeans and vintage Spice Girls t-shirt – collapsed exhaustedly into the empty chair next to Snape. Snape’s slight rolling of his eyes and not so subtle movement away from the late arrival said it all.

“Hi, Sev,” Tom purred as he sipped his cup and glanced up at the onyx-haired man with obvious affection.

“Hello, Tom,” Severus responded resignedly.

“You look really handsome today. Is that a new black cloak? I think I count more buttons.”

Lucius’ hand shot up to conceal his chuckle. It was a poorly kept secret that Riddle had the major hots for Severus Snape.

Snow and Lissa would never get used to the fact that Tom Riddle, the performer, was actually quite different than his fiction persona. He was very skinny, very effeminate and very gay. In actuality, the authors were tremendously fond of him.

“If we can stay on topic, we can get through the afternoon much faster,” Lissa suggested.

“Yes, I’m sure some of you have thoughts about WNF now that the ending has been revealed.” Snow added. “And, I know you have questions about Book two of Master Mine.

Draco shifted in his seat, a satisfied grin on his face as the beautiful blonde’s, Lizzie and Lexie, flanked either side of him like groupies. “I just want to thank the writers for giving me the dramatic ending I deserved in the story.”

“Yes, yes,” squealed an enthusiastic Lizzie from his left. “The way you played your death was masterful. There wasn’t a dry-eyed reader out there.”

Draco straightened his shoulders in obvious pleasure at the praise. “Well, the part truly called to me, you know. Such a tormented soul. A *great* man was struck by a brutal curse making him a monster when he was *really* a victim and a hero. A noble self-sacrificing death was fitting for the *actual* hero of the story.”
“Well, your stock certainly went back up, that’s for sure,” Hermione interjected with a roll of her eyes from her seat next to Rose.

“Yes, all those reviewers who were screaming for your death through most of the story are regretting it now,” added Lexie as she gazed at Draco with star struck adoration.

Draco sighed. “Yes, that was unpleasant. But once SnowBabe and LissaLove explained the trajectory of my character... well, who am I to intervene with the greatness that is their muse.” He winked at the authors.

Snow and Lissa looked at each other agreeing through silent conversation that they had created a monster of an entirely different kind.

Snow glanced from Lucius to Hermione. “So, how do you two feel about the ending? Were you happy with your character’s development as the story progressed?”

A brief flash of petulance crossed Lucius’ face. “Well... I didn’t particularly like spending most of the battle scene stunned unconscious. I mean... I feel I came across rather weak.”

Draco scuffed, “Yes, but you got the girl.”

Severus bristled, “He always gets the girl.”

Tom’s sad eyes looked up at Snape and then at Lucius. “Well, he does have fabulous hair. I mean you can’t deny it.” He looked back at Snape. “But you exude power and masculinity, Sev. I think you’ve been shaking the wrong tree if you know what I mean.”

Severus paid no mind to his admirer’s words as he was too busy admiring the two newest, arrivals.

“Sorry, we got stuck in traffic,” Raynephoenix2 explained as she walked in the door accompanied by a new face...and another redhead.
Lissa didn’t miss the admiring stare and had to contain her jealousy as Rayne introduced Sab71920 to the cast. “Everyone, this is our new BETA. She and I are both going to act as BETA’s going forward.”

Severus stood and stalked over to the beautiful redheads. “It’s a pleasure to meet you,” he crooned as he held his hand out to Sab while his eyes glanced up and down appreciatively.

“Wait! I know you! You were one of the women who snuck into the Manor to kill me that night!” Draco exclaimed.

“Oh…well,” Sab stammered, a significant blush creeping over her skin, “we, that is, I... never really intended to... ya know... actually kill...”

“Oh love, don’t fret the small stuff. I dream of killing him all the time,” Hermione chimed in.

“Is that an American southern accent I detect, Sab?” Severus asked with darkening eyes as he eased in closer.

Snow knew she needed to run interference before either Tom or Lissa clobbered the poor girl to her death in a jealous fit of rage.

“Please, everyone. Can we just get through this meeting? Rayne and Sab, you want to come sit with Lissa and I? Severus – take your seat.”

Lissa pointedly ignored Severus. “Hermione? Anything to add?”

“No, not really. I’m a little disappointed not to get a break between WNF and MM. I mean, the constant sex in WNF was tiring enough, but it’s just going to be that much more so in MM.”

Snow and Lissa both looked at Hermione like she was an enigma.

Hermione slouched back in her chair. “I mean, I’m going to have to start casting anti-inflammatory charms on my nether regions before long.”
Severus and Lucius grinned conspiratorially at each other.

Sab leaned over to Rayne and whispered, “Did she really just complain about having regular sex with Lucius, Draco, and Severus?”

Rayne responded below her breath, “She has no idea how lucky she is. She’s kind of a whiner.”

“Anything else on WNF?” Lissa asked as she met the eyes of the various players about the room.

Etan smiled appreciatively. “Yes, I just want to say I appreciate the writers finding parts for the OC’s. I know I speak for Rose, Britt and Jonathan as well.”

“Yes, but once again, I was written into the story as a harlot and someone to be loathed.” Britt complained.

“Well, if the shoe fits,” Severus muttered loud enough for everyone to hear.

Britt shot Snape a look of sheer loathing causing him to grin in return. Neither Lissa or Snow understood why there was so much animosity between those two.

“Well, I guess we can move onto Master Mine Book Two then,” Snow suggested.

“So, here’s the thing. We feel like Master Mine would get a lot more reads if we could figure out ways to plug it in the public eye,” Lissa chimed.

Snow nodded. “Yes, while we are writing, we need you peeps to work on some advertising to promote the story. Think about what you like about the books, what makes it special. We need some punch lines to really draw the eye as potential readers scan down the que of stories on the various websites.”

“Ok…so WHY do readers enjoy this story?” Lissa asked.
The cast exchanged lost looks amongst themselves.

“Nothing? No ideas?” she continued.

“Well, it’s sexy,” Clarise said shyly.

The rest of the cast looked at her, as though in thought.

“It speaks to some who might be in Hermione’s character’s shoes. Unfulfilled sex life? Going nowhere relationships? I mean, how many women out there live this life daily?” added Britt.

There were some nods from the females.

“Well, the witches are hot, and the story is full of sex. Lots of blow jobs, which I happen to appreciate. I think male readers like that,” Draco said.

Snow nodded as thoughtfully, “Hmm, I don’t imagine that many of our readers are male, but you might be right, Draco.”

Lucius sighed heavily, clearly bored and answered condescendingly to all in the room. “It’s simple. The men in the story are sexy, Dominant beasts and the readers simply can’t get enough of us.” He threw a smirk towards Severus who merely stared back with a deadpan expression.

Lucius continued as he assessed his fresh manicure, “You simply need some testimonials from a few readers.”

“Testimonials?”

“Yes.”

“For a book?”
“Yes.”

Lissa shook her head, not understanding. “Just what exactly are these testimonials claiming? That the story was a good read? Captivating? I mean – the reviews are pretty good, we could display some of them, I guess?”

Lucius looked at her like she was an idiot. “Hmph, well not if you want anyone to actually read it.” He thought for a moment. “No, you need something more eye grabbing than normal reviews and comments. Something that will make potential readers realize their lives could actually change for the better just from reading.” Suddenly his eyes lit up. “How about… ‘My orgasms used to be mildly enjoyable… and then I read Master Mine. Now I’m like a freight train without brakes. My boyfriend is so happy! He doesn’t even mind wearing the long, platinum-blond wig!’” Lucius could barely contain his smirk.

“You’ve got to be joking,” scowled Severus. He crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair as he considered the statement. “Perhaps your idea has merit…” he agreed begrudgingly after a moment of silence. “Although, clearly, a black wig would be more fitting.”

There was peppered laughing throughout the room while Snow buried her face in her hands in exasperation and Rayne and Sab whispered while tittering.

“Forget it,” Lissa waved it off as people continued to laugh and talk off topic. “Snow and I will just keep advertising on Facebook and Tumblr. Please keep sharing with your friends. You people are hopeless when it comes to this stuff.”

“Hey –” Draco started, but then broke into laughter again. Snow rolled her eyes when she noticed that even Hermione’s hand was clasped over her mouth as she leaned into Rose who was snorting indelicately.

“Everyone better show up on time tomorrow for rehearsal,” Snow called over the din as she started packing her bag.

Lissa pulled her phone out of her bra to check her messages. “Ten a.m. – be there or be fired.”

“Wait! Wait, wait, wait. Lissa,” Lucius voice took on a serious and seductive timbre. “Is that where you’ve been keeping your phone so we can’t find it?” He raised his eyebrows and shot a suggestive look at Snape. “Do you actually think that’s a deterrent?”
The laughter only grew worse as Lissa’s cheeks blazed hot pink.

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